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# *Intra-EU Sustainable Careers:*

## *A qualitative study and interpretation of the transnational career sustainability of intra-EU migrants in Germany, Ireland, and Spain*

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*I, Blanca Suarez-Bilbao, as the author of this thesis,*
*hereby declare that, except when duly acknowledged,*
*this thesis is entirely my own work*
*and has not been submitted for any degree or qualification*
*in any other University or Country*

# Dedication

*To Mike, for being my partner and ally in all the adventures life has presented me with in the last twenty-eight years, including my PhD journey;*

*To Mandi, por darme unas alas fuertes, para poder volar lejos y alto;*

*To Eilis, for the inspiration and encouragement to embark on this alternative career path.*

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The forty-two participants in this study who shared with me their own intra-EU career experiences. A very personal process, punctuated by deep reflection, some laughs, and a few emotional moments. It was a privilege to be allowed to share their lives as intra-EU transnationals.

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# Abstract

This dissertation explores the career sustainability of forty-two European Union (EU) citizens living and working in another EU country. It examines how sustainable careers can be pursued, achieved, and maintained in a transnational context over time. The countries of focus are Ireland, Germany, and Spain, considered both as home and host countries for the study participants.

Adopting a social constructionist philosophical paradigm, this predominantly inductive study analyses the participants' intra-EU mobility experiences, viewing them both from their own migration realities and from the broader perspective of intra-EU geographical labour mobility as a phenomenon. The research employs a whole-life perspective (Litano & Major, 2016; Hirschi et al., 2020) to analyse the transnational career sustainability of intra-EU migrants.

The analysis integrates literature from international human resource management (IHRM), expatriation, and career studies, alongside interdisciplinary literature on migration and transnationalism. This approach aims to provide a deeper understanding of how participants construct and interpret their career experiences within a dynamic transnational context. The findings contribute to existing research on international careers and the sustainable career construct from a transnational perspective. Transnationalism is defined as "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992, p.1), operationalised here as transnational living, where participants maintain "sustained and similarly significant attachments, interactions and presences in two or more societies separated by national borders" (Carling, Erdal & Talleraas, 2021, p.2).

In this dissertation, the constituent components of transnational living—social integration, social organisation, complementarity, rhythm, and balance—are detailed in Chapter Four (section 4.4, pp. 81-85), empirically explored in Chapter Six (section 6.3, pp. 124-145), and further discussed in Chapter Eight. Theoretically, this work establishes the case for applying the conceptualisation of transnational living—originating from the migration field—within the international business domain. The discussion chapter integrates the five dimensions of transnational living with the levers of a sustainable career to present a structuring mechanism

of a transnational sustainable career (section 8.2.3, p. 208-214), which has been empirically validated in this PhD research undertaking.

By integrating the concepts of transnational living and sustainable careers, this dissertation presents an organising framework for studying the sustainability of transnational careers, offering a novel perspective on dynamic inter-country career movements. The study reveals that the three indicators of a sustainable career—happiness, health, and productivity—intersect with and are influenced by the complementarity dimension of transnational living. These complementarities, which can be professional, relational, or related to general well-being in the host country, vary across different career and life stages, highlighting the temporal nature of both sustainable careers and transnational living.

Empirically, this PhD dissertation provides a snapshot of intra-EU migrants' career experiences and their continuous associations and engagement with their home and host countries over time and space. In a world characterised by globalisation and mobility, this study describes how and discusses why internationally mobile individuals maintain ties with their home countries while residing in a host country, normalising the experience of living with a "foot in both camps." The study contributes to the international career and mobility literature by introducing the concept of "transnational living," which holds potential value for management and international HRM scholars. While this study looked specifically at the geographical setting of the EU, there may be other examples of particular settings facilitating transnational living (e.g. Australia to New Zealand). The main contribution of this study is the provision of an overarching framework of contemporary transnational sustainable careers which can be used to investigate the rise of transnational living as a phenomenon, beyond the EU, and transnational living as a contemporary means of adjustment.

# Table of Contents

# List of Figures

# List of Tables

# List of Abbreviations

AE = Assigned Expatriate

ALS = Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis

COR = Conservation of Resources Theory

CPI = Corruption Perception Index

DAIA-CSS = Dual Aspect Importance and Achievement Career Success Scale

EU = European Union

FTE = Full-time Employment

FDI= Foreign Direct Investment

HCL= Host Country Language

HCLP = Host Country Language Proficiency

HR = Human Resources

HRM = Human Resource Management

IHRM = International Human Resource Management

IMISCOE = International Migration Research Network

IPA = Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

JD-R = Job Demands-Resources

L&D = Learning and Development

MCC = Mass Career Customisation

MNC = Multinational Corporation

MS = Multiple Sclerosis

OL = Own Language

OSC = Objective Career Success

PTE = Part-time Employment

POV = Point of View

RTA = Reflexive Thematic Analysis

SCS = Subjective Career Success

SIE = Self-Initiated Expatriate

SME = Small Medium Enterprise

USA = United States [of America]

VL = Very Limited

# Chapter One – Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction

This dissertation is a micro-level, qualitative study of the career mobility of European citizens within the European Union (EU). The study adopts a social constructionist, interpretivist paradigm, which assumes subjective, co-created knowledge (Cunliffe, 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2022). Focusing on three different nationalities – German, Irish, and Spanish – living, as foreigners, in Ireland, Spain, and Germany respectively, this study examines how enacting a career in two different EU countries may or may not contribute to overall career sustainability. The European Commission defines intra-EU mobility as "the action of EU nationals undertaking their right to free movement by moving from one EU Member State to another" (Fries-Tersch, Jones and Siöland, 2021, p. 13). The participants in this study are qualified EU nationals living/working in an EU country other than their home country. Given the particularities of intra-EU mobility, my research aims are twofold: (1) to understand why, how, and in which ways EU citizens living and working within the EU may live transnational lives; and (2) to explore if and how the dimensions and indicators of a sustainable career are reflected in international careers.

Career sustainability is affected by temporal, personal, and contextual factors (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020) within a broader transnational social field that includes both home and host countries. The work is contextualized through its detailed examination of how various factors at multiple levels (individual, regional/national, supra-national [EU], and temporal) influence the career sustainability of European citizens living and working within the European Union (EU). The individual context refers to elements such as stage of life or career, ideology, culture, and social status, acknowledging that these personal dimensions shape and are shaped by the participants' career experiences. The work examines the national and regional contexts in which participants' careers unfold, highlighting how these broader settings impact career decisions in a transnational setting. The dissertation considers the specific home and host country economic and socio-political landscapes shaped by institutions, governments, local and regional authorities, business associations, trade unions, and community organizations. These actors direct social processes affecting intra-EU migrants' transnational living and, consequently, their career-related decisions and the sustainability of their international careers.

Individual motivations for migration have moved beyond the traditional economic and work-related push and pull factors, increasingly including socio-political considerations (Urbański, 2022). In particular highly qualified and/or skilled individuals tend to move internationally for personal reasons, including lifestyle improvements (Inkson *et al.*, 2012;

O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2020; Andresen *et al.*, 2022). Indeed, it's increasingly commonplace for individuals to seek to augment their economic, social, and human capital by accessing knowledge, networks, and further opportunities perhaps not available or not as attractive in their home countries (de Haas *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the pursuit of an international career can lead to the acquisition of career competencies (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2014) which have been shown to contribute to expatriates' objective and subjective career success (Mello, Suutari and Dickmann, 2022).

This study takes a 'whole-life' perspective of career development (Litano and Major, 2016; Hirschi *et al.*, 2020), in considering both work and nonwork-related experiences as part of a career (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). In doing so, the study responds to calls for taking a broader, holistic view of the career satisfaction of internationally mobile individuals, integrating nonwork aspects into international career research (cf. Chen, Hsu and Shaffer, 2024). The international mobility of skilled professionals has generated a global market for talent (Khilji, Tarique and Schuler, 2015; Kerr *et al.*, 2016; Tung, 2016), resulting in this skilled and mobile workforce becoming an enduring feature of national and international economies (Crowley-Henry, O' Connor and Al Ariss, 2018). This has focused research attention to the transnational transfer of human capital (Gerhards *et al.*, 2017), or talent circulation (González-Ramos, 2014; Jons, 2015; Zha, 2016). The term 'brain chain' – as opposed to dichotomous 'brain drain/brain gain' discourses – has been recently used to highlight that the circularity of knowledge and skills promoted through migration encompasses complex linkages between home and host countries, and private, professional, and societal spheres (Friesen and Collins, 2017). As migrants tend to be embedded in familial, socio-economic, political, and cultural realms in both home and host countries (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007), a transnational perspective on migrants' careers could encourage the examination and understanding of career experiences that spread across international borders (cf. Goodson and Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2017). Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the literature reviewed, this research takes 'migrant' as an umbrella term in which assigned and self-initiated expatriation are included (Andresen et al., 2014).

A circularity of skills/talent perspective (Carr, Inkson and Thorn, 2005; Tung, 2008) and the utilisation of 'brain chains' (Friesen and Collins, 2017) suggest that the individual migrants are able to act as a bridge between national spheres, or, in other words, operate in a transnational space. Transnationalism takes place 'within fluid social spaces that are constantly reworked through migrants' simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society' (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007, p. 131). In this sense, transnationalism encompasses the interplay of the migrants' agency and the structures that support or inhibit it (Morawska, 2003). In spite of post-enlargement, socio-economic and politically-motivated arguments that have resulted in the EU-

wide freedom of movement becoming a conditional rather than a fundamental right for EU citizens (Roos and Westerveen, 2020), supra-national EU-structures allow and promote the free movement of EU citizens within EU territory, fostering a mode of [intra-EU] migration that is unique in the world (Barbulescu, 2017). It is within this context that this research is framed.

This initial chapter gives an overview of the study and the structure of the dissertation. First, in this introductory chapter, the study sample is described, and the scope of the study outlined.

## 1.2. Scope of the Study

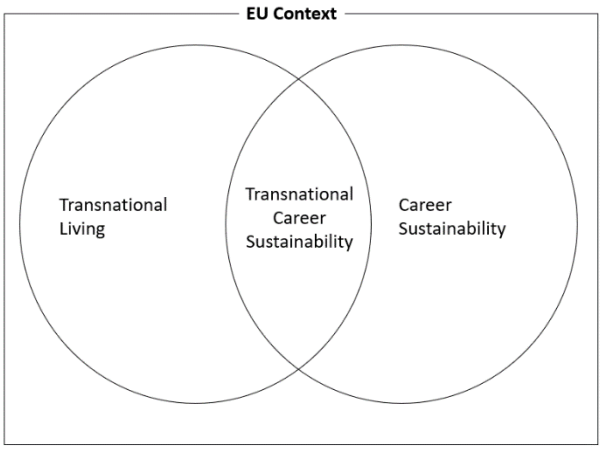
This is a qualitative research undertaking. This research considers international careers from an emic point of view, at a micro level of analysis, focusing on the individual intra-EU migrant and the evolving relational and professional networks and transnational engagements supporting and influencing their international career. The individual is at the centre of the study, reflecting the unique socio-cultural attributes, values, and individual motivations (knowing-why), competency deployment or mobilisation (knowing-how), and networks (knowing-whom) (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Zikic, 2015; Dickmann *et al.*, 2018) that tie intra-EU migrants to both their home and host countries. These individuals' personal context – such as stage of life/career, ideology, culture, social status, etc – and its temporality, in other words, the time and timing of their particular life/career circumstances, are intrinsically linked to their international career development (Cohen and Duberley, 2015).

The focus of this dissertation is on the dynamic interplay, over time, of home/host country [socio-economic, cultural, relational] engagement in relation to the careers of intra-EU migrants. Even within the unifying context of the EU, the specific home and host country economic and socio-political landscapes affect intra-EU migrants' home-host country interactions (Stoyanov, Woodward and Stoyanova, 2018), influencing their career-related decisions. As 'a series of separate but related experiences and adventures through which a person passes during a lifetime' (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977, p. 31), a career is socially embedded, developing in accordance with the different stages and phases of a person's life (Super, 1980). As such, careers are anchored in the context, time, and space – this is, they are mediated by time, and evolve over an individual's life. Therefore, in this study career is defined as 'an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organisations that form a unique pattern over the individual's lifespan' (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009, p. 1543).

Adopting a 'whole-life' view of careers (Litano and Major, 2016; Hirschi *et al.*, 2020), this study focuses on the transnational career experiences of 42 EU citizens [Irish, German, and Spanish] who moved from their respective countries of origin to live and work in Spain, Ireland, and/or Germany. The sample in question have various professions and occupations, including self-employment. The common denominator is that all are educated to third level, and as EU citizens, enjoy the legal rights and privileges that come with the EU-wide freedom of movement to live and work in any EU country. To my knowledge, the impact the EU freedom of work and movement may have on intra-EU careers has not been explored or highlighted in expatriation and management studies. This knowledge gap is considered in the dissertation, leading to a recommended alternative denomination for this specific type of migrant/expatriate (see Chapters Six and Eight).

The scope of the study is depicted in Figure 1.1 below.

***1. Figure 1.1: Scope of the study***




While initial reviews of the literature focused on international management literature – in particular literature on expatriation and migration – talent management, and international human resource management (IHRM), the career element took centre stage as the study developed. Within the career literature, contemporary career conceptualisations such as career crafting and sustainable career provided the theoretical base to the study as it progressed. Given the study is set in the specific regulatory, political and socio-economic supra-context of the EU, the inter-disciplinary literature on transnationalism and in particular transnational living likewise guided this research undertaking.

## 1.3. Research Questions

As stated above, migration between and within affluent or economically-developed countries – as is the case of intra-EU migration – while generally considered 'privileged' or lifestyle migration (Erlinghagen *et al.*, 2021), can equally have positive or negative consequences for home and host countries and the migrants themselves. On reviewing the literature in the business/management field and related disciplines, the effects of skilled migrants' transnational engagement were explored in relation to home-country innovation (Foley and Kerr, 2013; Bosetti, Cattaneo and Verdolini, 2015), improved business networks (Docquier and Lodigiani, 2010) and entrepreneurship (Stoyanov, Woodward and Stoyanova, 2018; Baluku *et al.*, 2019; Elo and Minto-Coy, 2019). In terms of micro-level research, literature looking at the career satisfaction of internationally mobile individuals has recently linked career satisfaction to host-country community embeddedness, from a whole-life perspective of careers (Chen, Hsu and Shaffer, 2024). However, the literature reviewed to date doesn't explain *why* intra-EU migrants maintain home and host country transnational engagements while enacting an international (intra-EU) career, and how these transnational engagements may facilitate individuals' career sustainability.

The study's research questions stem from the aforementioned research gap, as well as the exploration of participants' transnational engagement and the researcher's own experience living and working in the three EU countries featured in this study. The research questions are:

i. Given the particularities of intra-EU mobility, how can EU citizens living and working within the EU be best described and categorised?

This question seeks to describe and categorise the typology of the sample under investigation, which is compared and placed within the context of the EU. Given the tensions and debate around extant nomenclature pertaining to global mobility populations, the focus is on the complications in applying narrow definitions and categories of international mobility without considering the context(s) in which individuals are embedded in. This question provides the basis for the contextual positioning of the research undertaking, and in doing so relates to the first aim of this study: to understand if and how EU citizens may live transnational lives within the EU.

ii. How, and in which ways, do EU citizens living and working within the EU live transnational lives?

This question focuses on the intra-EU career experiences of EU citizens and their ongoing, continuous associations with their home countries, in different forms over time and space, while

living in their host countries. Life stage and significant life occurrences influence home and host country socio-economic, political, and relational engagement over time. Considering the peculiarity of intra-EU migration, this study explores the ways in which the participants may sustain simultaneous engagements in home and host countries over time and circumstances, effectively 'living in two countries' (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). This study interrogates the career narratives of intra-EU migrants to understand the simultaneous interplay between host and home countries that they agentically navigate, over time and circumstance.

iii. How are the diverse elements of a sustainable career balanced, enacted, and experienced across (intra-EU) borders?

This question explores how living between home and host countries may influence the career sustainability of intra-EU migrants, and, if so, how this may happen, from a whole-life perspective of career. Living between diverse cultures and languages may necessitate reflection and re-examination of career competencies, as well as for individuals to reassess their capabilities, limitations, and life/career goals, in order to achieve and/or maintain a happy, healthy, and productive transnational career, where happiness, health, and productivity are the indicators of a sustainable career (De Vos and Van Der Heijden, 2015; De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020).

The rationale for choosing the research topic, and the specific host countries and nationalities of this study's cohort is explained in the following section.

## 1.4. Research Rationale

The researcher's personal circumstances and life trajectory, as well as her own experience of intra-EU career mobility, strongly influenced her interest (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Creswell and Poth, 2018) in migration and intra-EU career movements. As a dual EU and non-EU passport holder, and long-time resident in Ireland, the particularities of intra-EU migration captivated the researcher's interest as she observed how naturally the new generations of EU citizens – for whom the right to live and work in any EU country is part of normal life – are able to avail of career opportunities within the EU. Living and working in Ireland for over twenty years, the researcher has met many colleagues from different EU countries who also became long-term residents in Ireland. Their accounts of living between their two 'homes', and how the EU regulations and structures, as well as the opportunities offered in their host country were instrumental in – and complemented – their decision to stay fascinated the researcher. In reviewing the expatriation and migration literature, the researcher's experience and knowledge

of intra-EU migration caused her to question the 'fit' of this cohort with the existing nomenclature and boundary conditions assigned to the 'migrant' and 'expatriate' terms. In particular, the citizenship and temporality boundary conditions that are applied to these terms didn't seem to be relevant to this research's cohort (see Chapter Four), as their EU citizenship allowed for more fluidity of movement.

At first, the researcher's experience led to a research focus on migrant talent attraction and talent management, as well as individual career capital development and utilisation when on international assignments – whether organisationally-led or self-initiated. This research agenda led to two co-authored publications: a book chapter (Crowley-Henry, O'Connor and Suarez-Bilbao, 2020) and a paper in the Journal of Global Mobility (Crowley-Henry, O'Connor and Suarez-Bilbao, 2021). The researcher's interest in intra-EU migration was further developed by her availing of the opportunity to join the H2020 EU-funded programme Global Mobility of Employees (GLOMO) which necessitated her moving to Germany for sixteen months. This move coincided with the data collection stage, extending and re-focusing the data collection within Germany and Spain, as well as Ireland. The researcher's participation in the GLOMO project, and her reflecting on the collected participants' narratives, led to a renewed focus on the career literature, specifically the chaos theory of careers, career shocks, and career crafting. This parallel research focus led to a first-authored publication in Career Development International (Suarez-Bilbao *et al.*, 2023). Due to the dynamic and mainly inductive nature of the research undertaking, in analysing the data the research focus evolved into what became a study of the transnational career sustainability of intra-EU migrants. The following section provides an overview of the methodological approach of this study.

## 1.5. Methodological Approach

This research adopts a social constructionist, interpretivist paradigm, which assumes subjective, co-created knowledge (Cunliffe, 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2022). In line with the researcher's ontological and epistemological position (see Chapter Two), this research project is qualitative in nature, and follows an inductive analytical approach which is mainly data driven. A qualitative approach suits the explorative nature of the research. Given the aforementioned rationale for the study and its micro-level focus, with the individual intra-EU migrant as the unit of analysis, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were deemed to be the most suitable technique for data collection. The geographical location chosen for this study are the EU-member countries of Germany, Ireland, and Spain. Apart from the researcher's professional experience in, and contextual knowledge of, working in these particular geographical locations within the EU, the countries were chosen as they are all original members of the Union. Original EU membership –

implying these countries are considered advanced democracies that observe and promote European values – is a unifying characteristic of these countries; while their specific cultural, linguistic and socio-economic landscape provides diversity to the study within the supra-context of the EU (see Chapter Three). The three-site geographical context of this study and the wider transnational context in which research participants are embedded are thus important considerations in this dissertation.

In total, forty-two interviews were conducted over a two-year period. Ireland-based participants were interviewed between July 2020 and February 2021, Germany-based participants were interviewed between December 2020 and October 2021, and Spain-based participants were interviewed between December 2020 and November 2022. These periods generally coincided with the researcher living in Ireland, Germany and Spain respectively. The interviews, supplemented with contemporaneous contextual information, as well as experiential awareness and self-reflection from the perspective of the researcher during her time in these geographical locations, facilitated an informed and comprehensive study of intra-EU migration. The study pioneers a close investigation of transnational embeddedness and its influence on career sustainability as described by the research participants and interpreted by the researcher. The dissertation does not focus on specific organisational contexts, roles, or role levels. Instead, it gives a view of individuals in different occupational areas and employment positions, including self-employment, and at different stages in their careers. Specific country and transnational contexts are used instead of an organisational context in order to evaluate both work and nonwork influences on the participants' attainment, maintenance and/or perception of transnational career sustainability across time. This is consistent with the whole-life view of career (Litano and Major, 2016; Hirschi *et al.*, 2020) adopted in this dissertation.

## 1.6 Literature Review Overview

This dissertation integrates several literature streams: international business and IHRM literature, careers literature, and interdisciplinary literature on migration and transnationalism. The international business and IHRM literature was reviewed in relation to expatriation and self-initiated expatriation (e.g. Suutari and Brewster, 2000; Cerdin and Le Pargneux, 2014; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; McNulty and Brewster, 2017; Dickmann *et al.*, 2018; Andresen, Pattie and Hippler, 2020; Brewster, Suutari and Waxin, 2021), connecting it to interdisciplinary literature on migration (e.g. Docquier and Lodigiani, 2010; de Haas *et al.*, 2019) and transnationalism (e.g. Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Stoyanov, Woodward and Stoyanova, 2018; Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). In particular, the concept of transnational living is examined from the perspective of international careers. Within the career literature, the focus of the literature

review is the contemporary concept of career sustainability (Newman, 2011; De Hauw and Greenhaus, 2015; De Vos and Van Der Heijden, 2015; McDonald and Hite, 2018; De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020) and the notion of person/life-career fit from a whole-life perspective of career (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020) within a transnational context.

The focus of the first part of the literature review was to examine the differences in motivation for geographical career mobility, the diverse host country integration/adjustment modes and the resulting career outcomes of current categories of mobile professionals. These different categorisations are then placed in juxtaposition to intra-EU migration. This study draws from interdisciplinary literature, and specifically literature on transnationalism, as inductively it is a concept that resonated with the participants' career experiences between home and host countries. The conceptualisation and boundary delineation of international career categories has been the subject of inconclusive debate (e.g. Doherty, Dickmann and Mills, 2011; Andresen *et al.*, 2014; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; McNulty and Brewster, 2017) which has brought to light issues around racism and bias (Crowley-Henry, O' Connor and Al Ariss, 2018). Thus, transnationalism was considered as a lens offering unique perspectives for a better-informed understanding of career mobility spanning both home and host countries, as it offers a dual and simultaneous home/host country focus (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1992, 1995; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007) on international careers. In this sense, this study goes beyond discussions on boundary conditions and 'either-or' categorisations of global workers that classify them according to what they *are deemed to be* (or not) rather than according to what these internationally-mobile individuals *do* – pursue an international career – and *how* they do it. In doing so, the first research question (see page 5) of this study is answered.

Given that careers are essential to understanding the link between individuals and societies (Gunz, Mayrhofer and Tolbert, 2011) – and in the case of transnational careers, between two societies – the literature review connects the contemporary concepts of transnational living and career sustainability. Taking a whole-life perspective of career, which maintains a career encompasses work and nonwork roles (Litano and Major, 2016; Hirschi *et al.*, 2020), the latter part of the literature review focuses on the contemporary concept of the sustainable career (De Vos and Van Der Heijden, 2015; McDonald and Hite, 2018; De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020) as this study's organising framework, and highlights the concept's relevance in a transnational context. This dissertation examines the most commonly utilised indicators of a sustainable career (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020) in existing empirical studies: happiness, health, and productivity (see Table 5.2, Chapter Five), highlighting the importance of subjective (and whole-life) career elements promoting a happy and healthy – as well as productive – career and life (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020). This

dissertation integrates the concepts of transnational living and sustainable careers, which led to the development of an organising framework of transnational sustainable careers, outlined in detail in Chapter Eight.

## 1.7 Outline of Contribution

This research contributes to international business literature, career literature, and interdisciplinary migration literature in several ways. In being exploratory, this study lays the foundation for subsequent research. First, given the peculiarity of intra-EU migration, this study addresses a nomenclature fit question pertaining intra-EU career mobility. In investigating the transnational careers of intra-EU migrants, it adopts a holistic 'whole-life' view (Litano and Major, 2016; Hirschi *et al.*, 2020) of the participants' dynamic careers, which are simultaneously enacted in both their home and host countries. Bringing into focus the dynamism of intra-EU careers, facilitated by the EU supra-national context and its institutions, the term EU-transnational is proposed to describe the participants of this study.

Next, this dissertation highlights how a blending of interdisciplinary concepts best fits, describes, and explains the careers of intra-EU migrants over time and contexts, providing a novel way of considering globally mobile professionals through a transnational living lens. Transnational living conceptualises transnationalism as simultaneously living in two countries (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021) – which was proved in this study's sample of 42 intra-EU migrants in relation to their concurrent social integration and social organisation in both home and host countries, the complementarity found in home and host country political, socio-economic, and relational engagements, and the balance and rhythm of these engagements. The interplay between EU structures facilitating intra-EU mobility (see Chapter Three), and the participants' own proactivity in maintaining simultaneous home/host country engagements is reflected in these five dimensions indicating the simultaneity, intensity and scope of transnational living for this study's cohort. Addressing international mobility from novel interdisciplinary perspectives enables the development of theoretical concepts, contributing to the existing knowledge in the international careers literature.

This dissertation contributes to research on international careers by investigating the association and application of the contemporary transnational living concept to international, and specifically intra-EU, careers. Transnational living, as an *action*, can be understood according to the level of intensity in which one lives a transnational life (Itzigsohn *et al.*, 1999), its dimensions of variation, and its temporal forms (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). The EU provides a stable context to explore the effects of geographical proximity, the availability of

affordable and frequent intra-EU travel, and, overall, the influence of the EU regulatory and socio-economic supra-structure in facilitating intra-EU migration. In doing so, the five dimensions of transnational living are proved empirically in the sample, and the transnational living concept is adapted and visualised in relation to intra-EU careers. The analysis and visualisation of the dimensions of transnational living responds to research question (ii).

Finally, given the inductive, exploratory nature of this research undertaking, priority is placed on analysing the whole-life elements influencing the careers of intra-EU migrants, and how the participant narratives illustrated the particularities of living in and within two countries, and in so doing striving for a sustainable career. The insights connected theoretically with both the sustainable career and transnational living concepts. The resulting findings, then, enabled the researcher to put forth a transnational sustainable career organising framework, which combines the two concepts guiding this study. In particular, this study highlights the transnational living dimension of complementarity as an overarching dimension facilitating a sustainable career, as well as career/life fit in a transnational context.

## 1.8 Structure: Overview of Chapters' Content

This initial chapter introduces the reason for the study, its scope, and the research questions it aims to answer, as well as delineating the structure of the thesis. Chapter Two presents the research philosophy and methodology underpinning the study. Next, Chapter Three details the specific context in which the research is set – the EU member states of Germany, Ireland, and Spain.

Chapters Four and Five examine the literature pertaining to this study undertaking, showing the gaps concerning the characteristics and particularities of intra-EU career mobility. Chapter Four reviews the literature on international human resource management (IHRM) and international careers, specifically in relation to expatriation, self-initiated expatriation (SIE), and migration. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the migration literature, the chapter also focuses on transnationalism and the contemporary concept of transnational living.

In Chapter Five, the focus is on the novel concept of a sustainable career and its theoretical development. The chapter examines the key dimensions and indicators of a sustainable career and summarises how these elements have been used to date in both theoretical and empirical research. Both the concepts of sustainable career and transnational living serve as theoretical frameworks in interpreting the inductive patterns in the data.

Chapters Six and Seven critically discuss and analyse the findings of this inductive study in the context of the preceding literature review. Chapter Six focuses on the IHRM, international careers and transnational living literature, while the focal point in Chapter Seven is the sustainable career of the sample of intra-EU transnationals. The role of the five dimensions of transnational living – social integration, social organisation, complementarity, balance, and rhythm – in achieving and maintaining a sustainable career in a transnational context is discussed and interpreted.

Chapter Eight presents the discussion and conceptual contributions of the research. The contributions include proposing a definition to better describe the group being studied in this research undertaking and intra-EU migration in general, and a new multi-stage organising framework concerning the development of the career sustainability concept in living transnationally within a (intra-EU) transnational social field. Finally, Chapter Eight concludes the study.

# Chapter Two – Methodology

## 2.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to detail the philosophical underpinnings of this qualitative study and the researcher's ontological and epistemological position (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), as well as describing the research design (Mason, 2017) and analytical process (Cunliffe, 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2022; Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022) undertaken for this dissertation. Akin to the building of a house, which should be done from the foundations upwards, research design should encompass first and foremost the understanding of the values underpinning the researcher's philosophy. As a researcher, my beliefs and values align with a relativist paradigm, as I believe human beings' experience reality (what is real, what exists) in multiple and diverse ways, influenced by our own individual experiences and social interactions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, my position is that knowledge (what can be known, or what is true) is socially constructed (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017; Mason, 2017; Creswell and Poth, 2018) and the role of the researcher is to question (and seek answers to) how research participants give meaning to social experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). I take a bricolage approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022) to the process of enquiry followed in this dissertation. A bricoleur engages with the data in order to craft a trustworthy and creative arrangement (of insights, theory and ideas) from a complex process of discovery, actively making analytical decisions and choices – in terms of research design, data collection, analysis and presentation – that connect the patterns found in the data to the research question (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022).

This research was an inductive process, crafted from the research data (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022). As a qualitative, inductive undertaking, this dissertation *explores* the lived experiences of intra-EU mobile, highly qualified professionals. The European Commission defines intra-EU mobility as 'the action of European Union (EU) nationals undertaking their right to free movement by moving from one EU Member State to another' (Fries-Tersch, Jones and Siöland, 2021, p. 13). As will be detailed in the literature review (Chapter Four), skilled migrants are defined as 'qualified (or possessing equivalent professional experience) individuals living/working in a country other than their own country of origin or home country' (Iredale, 2001, p. 90). The participants in this study are qualified European nationals living/working in an EU country other than their own. Given the particularities of intra-EU mobility, my research aims are twofold: (1) to understand how, why and in which ways do EU citizens living and working within the EU live transnational lives, and (2) How are the diverse elements of a sustainable career balanced, enacted, and experienced across (intra-EU) borders?

My personal circumstances and life trajectory, as well as my particular experience of intra-EU labour mobility, influence my interest (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Creswell and Poth, 2018) in migration and intra-EU labour movements, thus informing my ontological, theoretical, and methodological position (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017). My research considers the experience of intra-EU mobility from the participants' own migration reality (*Lebenswelt*, or life-world), and from the perspective of a common understanding (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973) of geographical labour mobility as a phenomenon, paying particular attention to the temporality and flow (Langley, 2023) of this mobility, exploring why and in which ways intra-EU skilled migrants' may engage with and 'link back' to their home countries. An interpretative approach allows me to portray participants' own lived experiences, as they understand and make sense of them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). This is an inductive study, crafted from the research narratives, taking shape from my reflexive interpretation of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021). As arguably no study can be exclusively inductive (Byrne, 2022), the analysis was supported by relevant literature in order to help me to competently answer the research questions.

In the following sections, I first delineate my ontological and epistemological position, as well as the underpinning axiology informing and influencing this dissertation's research design. Subsequently, I describe how my ontological and epistemological position informed my research design. I then specify the methods of data collection, detailing the sampling process and sample. The final section of this chapter discusses the method used for analysis and interpretation of the data.

## 2.2 Philosophical underpinnings, Ontology and Epistemology

### 2.2.1 Ontology

Ontology – from the Greek root *ontos*, meaning '*to be*' – reflects our view of the world, what we, as researchers, believe to be real. Therefore, as visually represented in Figure 2.1 below, ontology is concerned with the nature of 'being' or what can be known about reality – what *is* reality (Mason, 2017). I adhere to a relativist ontology, as I believe our social reality is co-constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). That is, as human beings, while inhabiting the same physical world, our general (e.g., the country we live in) and personal (e.g., our race, mother language, education, social class, etc) contexts can be quite different. For example, native English-speakers and non-native English-speakers might perceive the reality of living/working in an English-speaking country differently. As stated by Bogdan and Taylor (1975, p. 14) 'the important reality is what people perceive it to be'. It is my belief that there are multiple social realities, which are influenced by individual contexts, experiences, and social interactions. Thus, my research is

concerned with exploring how participants in this study have socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 2009) the reality of their transnational lives and careers.

*2. Figure 2.1: Ontology: Compiled from Creswell & Poth (2018), Denzin & Lincoln (2011), Mason (2017)*

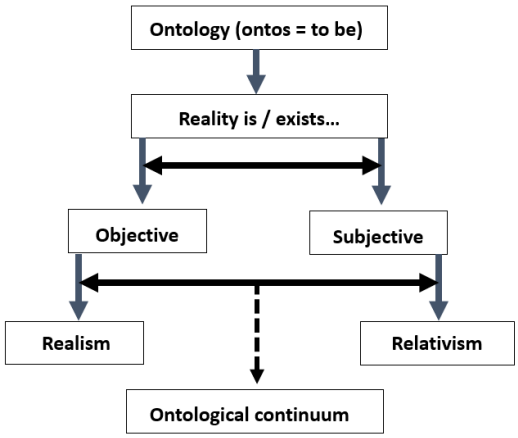


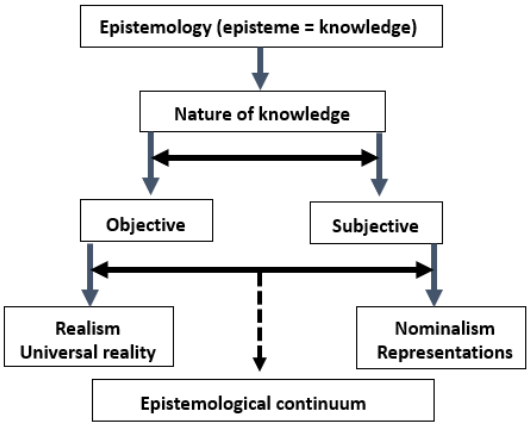

Figure 2.1 above depicts extreme philosophical positions. However, scholars have described objectivism and subjectivism as 'a continuum's polar opposites with varying philosophical positions aligned between them' (Holden and Lynch, 2004, p. 4). On one extreme, objectivism reflects a positive ontology, which has historically prevailed in scientific research and generally in disciplines favouring experimental, causal enquiry (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017). Here, the ontological assumption is that reality is a concrete structure that exists independently of the individual experiencing it (Holden and Lynch, 2004). Extreme subjectivism, on the other end of the continuum, maintains that what is real (reality) only exists in individuals' minds and therefore is relative (Holden and Lynch, 2004). My ontological position, nonetheless, is less extreme, as I believe reality is co-constructed through experiences and social interactions (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). This is in line with Cunliffe's depiction of ontological assumptions about the nature of reality as having permeable and fluid boundaries, in terms of human action and interpretation, relationality and human interaction across time and space, and contextualisation (Cunliffe, 2011). I adhere to a subjectivist ontology, supported by a social constructionist epistemology which places knowledge in social exchanges and relational processes (Gergen, 2009, 2011a), as will be further detailed in the following section.

### 2.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge – how we come to know what we know (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) – and is driven by ontological beliefs (Mason, 2017). The extremes of the epistemological continuum (see Figure 2.2 below) are realism, on the extreme objective position, and nominalism on the extreme subjective position (Holden and Lynch, 2004). Realism

is concerned with positivist enquiry, while nominalism negates that objects can be known other than by their representations, such as labels, texts, and language (Holden and Lynch, 2004).

*3. Figure 2.2: Epistemology: Created from Mason (2017), Guest et al (2013), Denzin & Lincoln (2011)*




Gergen (2009, 2011a) cautions against these binaries, rather advocating that what we believe to be real, and therefore what we can know, stems from relational processes or collaborative actions. Consistent with Gergen's (2009, 2011) view, I subscribe to an epistemological position of subjective, co-created knowledge which assumes that knowledge (in other words, how do we know the world) is dependent on social interactions within contexts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The assumption is that human beings construct, 'make sense' of, and interpret their own reality (Cassell *et al.*, 2009) within a socially shared understanding of reality (Gergen, 2009). Thus, social processes (of which career-related issues are part) and the meaning individuals ascribe to their working lives are constructed from their own individual realities and social context (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017). As a subjectivist, social constructionist researcher, I am interested in how the participants in this study, whose careers span both home and host countries, construct, interpret, and make sense of their career experiences within this transnational space.

There is no objective reality of migration, but there can be a [cultural/community] 'shared' understanding (Gergen *et al.*, 1996) of what individual migrants consider to be their 'truth' or their reality. This shared understanding accounts for context – this is, migrants' specific historical/cultural settings (Andresen, Brewster and Suutari, 2020). For example, depending on their own cultural or geo-political position, or language conventions, participants might consider [represent] themselves as 'expatriates', 'migrants', or simply 'EU citizens'. In other words, what we know is subjective, through our interactions with society and the general context (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017) and can be known through representations of knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In this dissertation, representations refer to textual transcriptions of participants'

interviews recounting their lived and shared experiences in pursuing an international career while maintaining (or not) home-country engagement. Participants' narratives in turn reflect contextual influences and representations such as culture and identity (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011; Bataille and Vough, 2022).

## 2.3 Axiology, researcher's background, and positionality

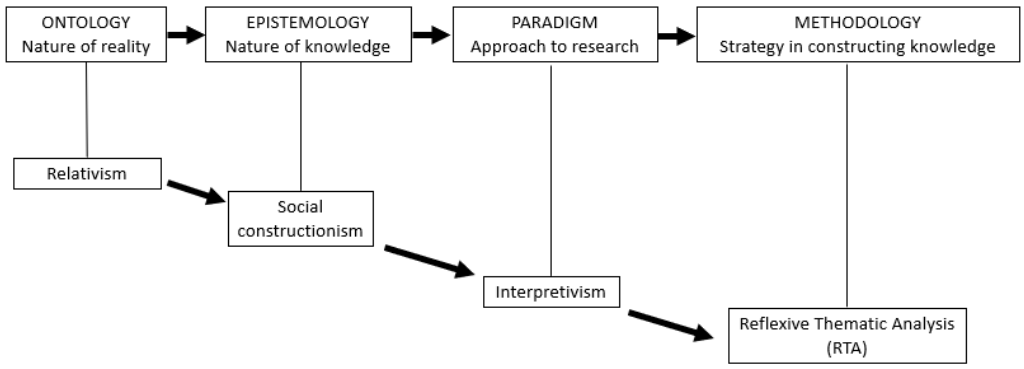
I am a migrant, and a daughter of migrants. My parents moved from their native Spain to Mexico in the late 60s. I was born in Mexico City, where I lived the first 22 years of my life. The latter part of my life I have spent in Europe. I have lived and worked in Ireland (Dublin) for 21 years, in Spain (Bilbao, Malaga, and Alicante) for 9 years and in Germany (Bamberg) for 16 months. I am a native Spanish speaker, near-native English speaker, and have limited knowledge/comprehension of the German language. I hold dual Mexican-Spanish nationality. However, even though my Spanish passport affords me freedom of movement within the EU, the fact that I was born and spent my formative years in Mexico, and most of my working life in Ireland, culturally my experience of living and working in Spain is comparable to that of a(n) [EU] foreigner.

The original idea for my research topic came from an observation of the impact (I perceived) the Irish diaspora has had in the economic development of the country. I noted the efforts made at both national and organisational level to re-attract diaspora back to Ireland, and the social support available to Irish citizens abroad through diasporic networks. I was curious if other nations' diasporas were as active. My original idea was to study (and compare) Irish and Mexican migrants' careers in the USA. However, my focus shifted to Europe-based research due to my participation in the H2020-funded Global Mobility of Employees (GLOMO) project. My acceptance in the project was conditional – what the H2020-Marie S Curie programmes term the 'mobility rule' – to me moving from Ireland to Germany in August 2020, in the middle of the COVID 19 global pandemic. Having been a member of a 'migrant' or 'expatriate' socio-cultural groups all my adult life, my work has a marked social component and is situated within a qualitative paradigm. As an interpretivist researcher, I bring my own experience of reality to my research (Gray, 2022), while appreciating that, since I subscribe to a socially constructed view of reality (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017), other migrants' experiences of reality – including those of the participants in this research – may differ to mine (Creswell and Poth, 2018). As will be detailed in the following sections, adhering to a social constructionist view, my research focuses on how events, experiences, and the meaning individuals attribute to those realities are affected by a range of social structures and reproductions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## 2.4 Study design: Researcher's paradigms

My study design pursues an interpretative approach to research (Mason, 2017), following a relativist ontology – positioned between a subjective and inter-subjective problematic (Cunliffe, 2011) – and a social constructionist epistemology (Gergen, 2015; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017). Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) is my chosen strategy of enquiry and analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021, 2022), in accordance with my ontological and epistemological position (see Figure 2.3 below), and my own background and perspective as an 'insider'. Both constructivism and social constructionism stem (ontologically) from a relativist paradigm, in that both advocate a subjective view of reality (Gergen, 2009; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017). Epistemologically, however, what distinguishes these paradigms is that the focus of constructivism is on the cognitive processes in which individuals ascribe meaning to their experienced reality (Gergen, 1989), while social constructionism considers that knowledge is achieved by 'interaction, processes, and social practices' (Young and Collin, 2004, p. 377), placing knowledge within social exchanges (Gergen, 2009).

***Figure 2.3: Researcher's paradigms and study design***




Sugarman and Martin (2011) caution that, while individuals cannot be understood without considering their personal, socio-cultural, and historical context, their agency and self-determination 'cannot be explained *entirely* as an artifact of social practice… relations require participants' (Sugarman and Martin, 2011, p. 285) emphasis my own). However, Gergen regards the individual as 'the common intersection of multiple relations' – augmented, rather than being completely free or constrained (Gergen, 2011b, p. 317). My role as a researcher, then, is to reflexively interpret the meaning participants' assign to their own lived experiences. This 'active' position (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2021) is consistent with post-positivist enquiry, which holds that the researcher is 'present' through co-creation and argumentation (Rossman, Rallis and Kuntz, 2010). Thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

advocates the researcher 'reflecting on, trying to understand, and interrogating: their values and personal positioning; their assumptions and expectations about the topic of their research; and, in designs with participants, their relationship to and with participants; their design and methodological choices; and their disciplinary location and standpoint' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 18).

Figure 2.3 above graphically represents my ontological and epistemological stance, research paradigm, and methodology design. My research takes an *emic* (insider) perspective (Creswell and Poth, 2018), striving to understand reality from the viewpoint of the individual (migrants) and the meaning(s) they ascribe to their lived experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), as well as the socio-cultural context and the cultural/structural conditions that enable their account. In other words, this research undertaking acknowledges that the (personal, cultural, and wider) context(s) in which the participants are embedded influences how they construct their own reality. As detailed in Table 2.1 below, an interpretative approach emphasises the shared constructions of meaning, or ways of 'knowing the world' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), pointing to a process of social exchange through (written or spoken) language(s) and other social processes. This is, meaning-making and interpretation occurs as the participants share their socially constructed lived experiences. I am aware that, while I may share core values with others – including the participants in this research – the way these values may shape social experiences and processes will be different to others, in accordance with individual circumstances.

In this sense, interpretivism is 'subjectively situated: relative to our own embedded experiences, which influence our observations, interpretations, and research accounts (the double hermeneutic) … consequently, social realities and knowledge are not durable in the sense of being replicable, generalizable, and predictive but instead offer contextualized understandings' (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 656). From an interpretative perspective, meanings cannot be objectified, and neither can the researcher be detached from the researched (Cunliffe, 2011). The interpretative approach highlights the involvement of the researcher through reflexivity (Braun and Clarke, 2021), while a social constructionist stance emphasises awareness of the contextual and temporal references underpinning the participants' worldview (Gergen *et al.*, 1996). These two perspectives – social constructionism and interpretivism (see Table 2.1 below) – are my philosophical frames of reference.

*Table 2.1. Researcher's Ontological and Epistemological position*

| CONCEPT | SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM | INTERPRETIVISM |
|---|---|---|
| Ontology | Relativism - co-constructed reality, framed by social interactions. Socially-relative, simultaneous realities. Different perspectives depending on the individual context. | Relativism - subjective reality.<br><br>Context = human action & interpretation. |
| Epistemology | Intersubjective and subjective elements come together to convey meaning - more than one 'truth', co-constructed meanings, derived from social interactions. Knowledge generation is relational. | Subjectivist - knowledge is relative to particular circumstances. Multiple ways of knowing. |
| Assumption | The social context and social interactions influence collectively-constructed (multiple) realities. Constructed realities are relational by nature. Humans as intentional & reflexive subjects, constructors & enactors of social realities. | Social relationships determine how individuals make sense of themselves and others. Humans as actors, interpreters & sense makers. |

***Source: Compiled from Berger & Luckman (1966), Gergen et al (1996), Gergen (2009, 2011), Denzin & Lincoln (2011), Cunliffe (2011) and Creswell & Poth (2018).***

In the sections below I detail how my ontological and epistemological position, as well as my positionality as a researcher informed my research design (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, 2022) and theoretical framework.

## 2.5 Research Design and Strategy of Inquiry

Research design comprises the entire process of research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation and write up (Creswell and Poth, 2018). A solid ontological and epistemological foundation provides direction to this research project (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Mason, 2017). Akin to good architect's plans being crucial to the smooth completion of building work, a research design and methodology appropriate to answering the research question are necessary when crafting a research project. In line with my ontological and epistemological position, my research project and design are qualitative in nature, and follow an inductive analytical approach which is mainly data driven. My micro-level research project considers intra-EU migration from an international career/Human Research Management (HRM) perspective, reflecting my disciplinary position. This research focuses on the individual intra-EU migrant and the evolving relational and professional transnational engagements within and between their home and host countries that support and influence their international career. These individuals' personal

context – such as stage of life and career, ideology, culture, social status, etc. – and its temporality, in other words, the time and timing of specific life/career events and circumstances, are intrinsically linked to their international career development (Cohen, Duberley and Ravishankar, 2015).

Qualitative research is concerned with exploration and obtaining rich (non-numerical) data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). An explorative approach (Creswell and Poth, 2018) is conducive to further understanding of the complexity of international careers and the relationships and networks that support/encourage them (or not) over time, in order to appreciate their impact at individual, organisational and national/country or supra-national (i.e. EU) levels. Qualitative methods are the most suitable for depicting lived experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Mason, 2017) and socially embedded processes (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017; Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022), thus answering '*why*' and '*how*' questions (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013), such as the questions concerning this research. In being inductive, this research maintained flexibility and focused on the iteration between data gathering, the formulation and re-formulation of research questions, and concepts/theories found in the literature that could explain the data (Easterby-Smith, Golden-Biddle and Locke, 2008). I followed this iterative process while staying close to the information provided by the participants in this study, interpreting the meaning they gave to their lived experience of international careers and, specifically, intra-EU career mobility. In this sense, the concepts and frameworks used in this study were considered after the data collection.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) use the simile of a bricoleur to represent how the qualitative researcher designs, constructs and presents complex research as if it was a photomontage, comprising of interpretations, perspectives and (collective) understandings in relation to the phenomena under study. The bricoleur simile is also used by Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman to refer to the researcher's 'agency, creativity, and craft in the process of designing, conducting and presenting research' (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022, p. 217). The authors introduce the notion of methodological bricolage as an approach to choosing and describing the qualitative research methods and analytic moves tailored to reaching the research objectives (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022). These methods and analytic moves are the tools and techniques used to collect, analyse and present research data (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The method of primary data collection in this study consisted of semi-structured exploratory interviews which broadly followed a topic guide to ensure key areas of interest were covered (see next section for further detail). However, the interviews resembled conversations, as participants were free to speak about topics and events in their lives – and within their

transnational context(s) – which were important to them, reflecting on their intra-EU career journeys and making sense of them.

Primary data was supplemented with secondary data consisting of country-specific reports and contemporaneous news items (including social media) that contextualised the research, contributing to a better understanding of the challenges participants encounter when enacting an intra-EU career. The three-site geographical context of this study (see Chapter Three) and the wider transnational context in which research participants are embedded are thus important considerations in this dissertation. Secondary contextual data was triangulated with my own 'in situ' (country-specific) observations and experiences in the period I lived as a cultural outsider in the three countries covered in this study. In this sense, my methodological bricolage borrows analytical moves from autoethnography, as in eliciting interview questions/conversations I draw from reflections on my own intra-EU career and the cultural adjustments I had to make while living outside of my home country, empathising with the participants in relation to the complexity of their transnational lives and careers. I found participants perceiving me as 'one of them' was advantageous for my research, as it helped to create rapport (yielding rich narratives) as well as enabling a more in-depth interpretation of their lives and careers as intra-EU movers.

In terms of analysis, I believe Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) provides the best methodological fit for this research as RTA is used to 'identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' lived experiences, views and perspectives, and behaviour and practices' (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p. 297). Reflexive Thematic Analysis aligns with my qualitative, social construction paradigm, while linking together all the elements of the study (Trainor and Bundon, 2021), as will be described in the following sections.

## 2.6 Data Collection: Trustworthy qualitative research and ethical considerations

My research focus is on migrants' perception of *their* reality; their lives and careers in a foreign country, according to their individual and social context. However, in topics such as migration, the individual experience is also contained in, or elevated to, a cultural process/group or structure (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013). It is from this situated reality where I, as a researcher, can begin to explore – from the migrants' perspective – and interpret the *why* and *how* of these individuals' transnational engagements, and what these engagements mean to them in terms of their intra-EU careers. Since my research has a micro focus, with the individual intra-EU migrant as the unit of analysis, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were deemed to

be the most suitable technique for data collection. To this effect, I prepared a topic guide (Mason, 2017) and submitted it for ethical approval at my university institution, which ensured I took potential vulnerabilities and sensitivities into account. Ethical approval was obtained on the 16.03.2020 (ID: 2399908).

The topic guide contains open-ended questions, which afforded me the flexibility to explore shared meanings in relation to cultural and social processes (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013), and in so doing, answer the research questions. While the topic guide focused primarily on host-home country relationships and engagement, home and host country careers, and career capital flows, a broad range of topics were included. The guide was designed to get a sense of the individual's international career experience, the nature of their relationship with their host and home countries, the actors and (EU regulatory) structures involved, the frequency of home-country engagements, changing motivations for mobility, integration/adaptation issues, differences between home and host country career experiences, etc. I used a flexible and fluid approach to interviewing, resembling the 'flow of real-world conversation' as in keeping with qualitative research design (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 13). I conducted four pilot interviews (02-03/2020) to test and refine the topic guide. Two interviewees were Irish (returned migrants) and two were Ireland-based foreigners – both non-EU citizens. The aim was to test the interview topic guide and refine follow-up questions to ensure all interview participants responded to the themes I wished to probe. Please refer to Appendix A for the topic guide and related open-ended questions in full.

The COVID19 pandemic, which coincided with the planned data collection period, rendered face-to-face interviews unviable. Since 'collecting data skilfully also requires being able to respond flexibly' (Cassell *et al.*, 2009, p. 520), faced with the impossibility of conducting face-to-face interviews, I conducted all interviews via Zoom or Teams instead, according to the participants' particular preference of video-conferencing software/platform. Transnational and transcultural identities are made possible, in great part, due to the 'globalised space' (Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016, p. 7) provided by internet use and access. Using an internet-based data collection instrument such as Twitter or LinkedIn for purposeful participant selection, and conducting interviews via Teams or Zoom is fitting of my research topic. Moreover, these are the tools my research participants most likely use to maintain their home-country engagement (especially during COVID travel restrictions). Equally, Teams/Zoom interviews allow both researcher and research participants more flexibility, while reducing financial cost and minimising logistical and geographical space/time considerations (Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016). However, it can be more difficult to observe non-verbal communication and

interpret emotions in an online setting as opposed to a face-to-face interview (Lobe, Morgan and Hoffman, 2022).

Even though all interviews were conducted via Teams or Zoom, I lived in the specific countries where my interviewees were based while conducting the research, giving me an 'insider' perspective on the socio-political and economic context in their host countries at the time of the interviews. I have lived in Ireland continuously since 2005. Ireland-based participants were interviewed between July 2020 and February 2021, when I was living in Dublin. Germany-based participants were interviewed between December 2020 and October 2021, during the time I lived in Bamberg (Germany). Spain-based participants were interviewed between December 2020 and November 2022. Only four of the fourteen interviews with Spain-based participants were conducted while I was living in Spain; however, I have lived in Spain in three different periods (from March 1992 to November 1995, from March 2002 to March 2005, and again from December 2021 to January 2024), the last of which included the data analysis phase.

As previously mentioned, I have dual Mexican-Spanish nationality. However, while my Spanish nationality affords me the same rights and benefits as a Spanish person both in Spain and the EU, my cultural upbringing in Mexico means I have felt as much of an outsider in Spain as in Ireland or Germany at times. Therefore, my experience of living in Spain (as an outsider/insider) helped me understand and interpret some of the contextual information and the lived experiences shared by the Spain-based participants. Overall, I believe the participants considered me 'one of them', given my experience with intra-EU mobility (as an EU citizen), which contributed to creating a good rapport, as it made the participants comfortable sharing their own stories. Since I was aware that this perceived 'insider' position could also prevent participants from sharing certain aspects of their reality that they may have taken for granted I knew or understood, I was careful to explore topics in detail as much as possible, regardless of my preconceptions or relative knowledge of their life-world (as a shared understanding).

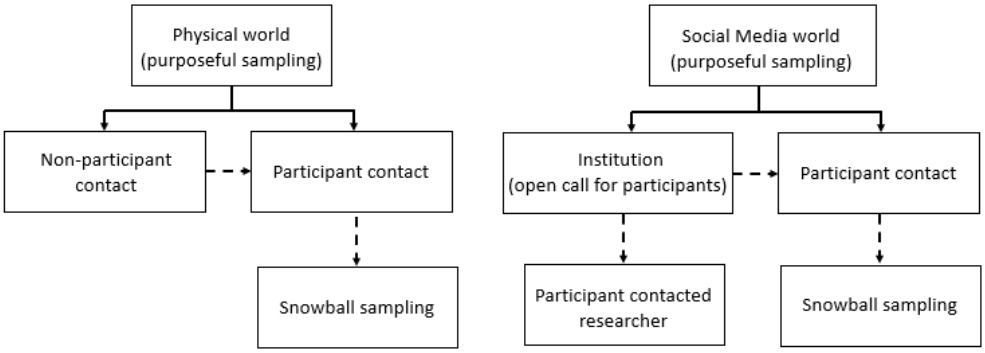
Once they agreed to be interviewed, I sent the participants a summary of the research aims and objectives, as well as the procedure for processing the data, together with a consent form which they were asked to sign before the interview (see Appendix B). All interviews were recorded, with explicit participant consent expressed both in each individual consent form filled and signed by all participants before being interviewed, as well as orally at the beginning of the recording. I took notes immediately after the interviews to document the general flow of the conversation and my own observations regarding interviewer-participant rapport and non-verbal communication. I further updated these notes when watching the interviews again at the transcription stage. The recordings were erased, as agreed with the interviewees and stated in

the consent forms, once they approved the transcriptions. The transcriptions and corresponding notes are held on secure university servers, in line with data protection legislation both in Ireland and the EU. Any identifying information was removed to protect respondents' confidentiality and anonymity. Important potential background information, such as age, family status, gender, etc. was recorded under pseudonyms in a separate file to protect participants' identity.

### 2.6.1 Research sample

My approach to data collection entailed selecting participants who were able and willing to engage in deep, meaningful conversations regarding their individual lived experiences as skilled migrants (Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh, 2009). Purposive sampling (Creswell and Poth, 2018) via personal contacts and social media [mainly Twitter] constituted my initial participant recruitment strategy (see Figure 2.4 below).

***Figure 2.4: Sampling strategy***




This strategy is in-keeping with RTA, as this method emphasises the importance of building rapport and establishing a relationship with research participants (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Purposive sampling entails selecting participants who can provide knowledge/information about the research study/questions (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Participant calls on Twitter were targeted at the Irish Diaspora through the Irish Embassy and Irish Business Network in Germany, as well as related Twitter communities for German and Spanish Diaspora in the EU. Figure 2.4 above details the path followed (i.e. physical world contact or social media contact) for recruiting participants. Snowballing sampling followed from the initial sample selection, as participants recommended friends or colleagues willing to participate (see Figure 2.4). In total, 42 intra-EU migrants were interviewed. All participants are Europeans. The interviewees were based in three European countries, members of the European Union (EU): Germany, Ireland and Spain. Forty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted with Irish (n=7) and Spanish (n=7) citizens living/working in Germany, German (n=7) and Spanish (n=7) citizens in Ireland, and Irish (n=7)

and German (n=7) citizens in Spain. Table 2.2 below details the selection (inclusion and exclusion) criteria.

*2. Table 2.2 Research participant inclusion and exclusion criteria*

| INCLUSION | EXCLUSION |
|---|---|
| • German (n=7) and Irish (n=7) citizens living/working in Spain; Spanish (n=7) and Irish (n=7) citizens living/working in Germany; and German (n=7) and Spanish (n=7) citizens living/working in Ireland.<br>Total = 42 intra-EU migrants<br>• Educated to 3rd level or equivalent professional experience<br>• Adults, currently resident/working in the above countries for at least 3 years<br>• No particular profession / occupation<br>• No upper age limit (provided working career / professionally active)<br>• Gender balance = equal/similar male/female distribution | • Any other nationalities<br>• Unskilled / no 3rd level qualification<br>• Second-generation migrants (and above)<br>• Under 18, illegal workers<br>• Short-stay workers (summer, project work, contract work under 3 years)<br>• Retirees or (non-working) 'trailing spouses' |

Expatriate scholars have called for the inclusion of more diversity in regard to participants in expatriation studies (Brewster, Suutari and Waxin, 2021). This research answers that call by including a purposefully diverse sample in terms of participants' occupations, which range from professional and knowledge worker roles to classical musicians (n=2). Table 2.3 below displays participants' demographics, time in host country and occupation. It must be noted that *Fred** is a Hungarian-born dual Hungarian-Irish national, however, he fulfils the inclusion requirements as he is an Irish citizen (he travels with an Irish passport, and is employed as an Irish national), and he considers Ireland his home country. *Clare* was born in Ireland but has dual Irish/French nationality (as her mother is French). *Liz* is a dual Irish/German citizen. *Liz* acquired the German nationality after fifteen years living in Germany in order to be able to vote in her host country but has kept her Irish passport and considers Ireland 'home'. To ensure anonymity pseudonyms were used and specific employer/company names omitted; instead, the general industry/area of activity is noted. As will be detailed in the Findings (Chapters Six and Seven), the participants are employed in a variety of organisation types, including multinational corporations (MNCs), small-medium enterprises (SMEs), public sector, non-for-profit organisations, and self-employment.

### 3. *Table 2.3 Interviewee demographics, time in host country and occupation**

| Code | Pseudonym | Years in Host Country | Age | Gender | Industry / Area |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE1-ES | Moritz | 30 | 60 | M | Consultancy / Business coach |
| DE2-ES | Karl | 22 | 51 | M | Automotive (Production line) |
| DE3-ES | Helga | 18 | 53 | F | Education / School teacher |
| DE4-ES | Rupert | 18 | 46 | M | Law / Estate agent |
| DE5-ES | Anika | 28 | 53 | F | Translator (Economics) |
| DE6-ES | Nina | 23 | 54 | F | Hospitality / Travel writer |
| DE7-ES | Alex | 23 | 46 | M | Lifestyle Consultant (Feng-shui) |
| DE1-IE | Laura | 9 | 27 | F | Music / Education management |
| DE2-IE | Doris | 20 | 46 | F | Community radio (Outreach coordinator) |
| DE3-IE | Tania | 17 | 42 | F | Admin / Aero Leasing |
| DE4-IE | Melina | 3 | 29 | F | IT (Social Media) |
| DE5-IE | Feli | 12 | 51 | F | Non-for-profit / management |
| DE6-IE | Simon | 25 | 45 | M | Academia |
| DE7-IE | Bettina | 14 | 52 | F | Nursing & Graphic Design |
| | | | | | |
| ES1-DE | Jose | 8 | 37 | M | Academia |
| ES2-DE | Andres | 8 | 34 | M | Architect & researcher |
| ES3-DE | Elena | 3 | 48 | F | Geriatric Nurse |
| ES4-DE | Nano | 6 | 33 | M | Roads Engineer |
| ES5-DE | Patri | 10 | 28 | F | Classical musician (Oboe) |
| ES6-DE | Maite | 7 | 29 | F | Scientist (Biochemist) |
| ES7-DE | Cari | 6 | 30 | F | Architect (set design) |
| ES1-IE | Susana | 15 | 42 | F | Admin / Legal firm |
| ES2-IE | Carmen | 14 | 42 | F | IT (Sales) |
| ES3-IE | Arturo | 16 | 44 | M | Admin / Sales (Education) |
| ES4-IE | Sandra | 27 | 54 | F | Community radio (Production) |
| ES5-IE | Peter | 4 | 40 | M | Sales / Aero Leasing |
| ES6-IE | Bruno | 10 | 43 | M | Customer Service / IT |
| ES7-IE | Robert | 4 | 34 | M | Entrepreneur |
| | | | | | |
| IE1-DE | Noel | 6 | 36 | M | Research |
| IE2-DE | Ivan | 9 | 44 | M | Frontend Engineer /eCommerce |
| IE3-DE | Oliver | 10 | 41 | M | Media / TV |
| IE4-DE | Fred | 4 | 38 | M | Data analyst / Hospitality |
| IE5-DE | Fintan | 15 | 42 | M | Academia |
| IE6-DE | Luke | 24 | 47 | M | Translator (English, French, German) |
| IE7-DE | Liz | 28 | 50 | F | Office Manager/Data Protection Officer |
| IE1-ES | Conor | 9 | 44 | M | IT / Inside Sales Management |
| IE2-ES | Clare | 22 | 44 | F | Academia |
| IE3-ES | Jason | 18 | 49 | M | Education (Innovation) / Entrepreneur |
| IE4-ES | Kathy | 16 | 43 | F | Languages & IT |
| IE5-ES | Sam | 6 | 54 | M | Teacher / Technical writer |
| IE6-ES | Gerry | 3 | 55 | M | Engineer / Project manager |
| IE7-ES | Emmet | 26 | 53 | M | Language teacher / Publisher |

***The first two letters in the code indicate participants' home country and the last two letters their host country. (i.e. DE=Germany [Deutschland], ES=Spain [España], IE=Ireland). The***

***numbers indicate the order in which participants were interviewed. The table is sorted by nationality (alphabetically, according to country code).***

## 2.7 Data Analysis

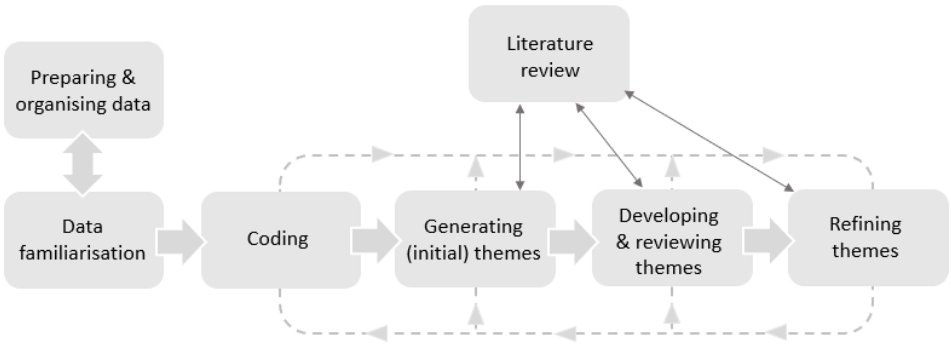
A social constructionist, interpretivist paradigm assumes subjective, co-created knowledge (Cunliffe, 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2022). This assumption implies that, instead of adopting positivist/objective constructs such as internal/external validity and reliability, interpretivist researchers strive to obtain credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In other words, qualitative research must demonstrate trustworthiness (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022). I aimed to obtain credibility by referring to post-interview notes recording non-verbal communication, adding these notes to the verbatim transcriptions, and requesting interviewees to check the transcriptions for inaccuracies and possible misinterpretations in the verbatim transcripts; thus, increasing confirmability. This element of credibility has also been described as maintaining fidelity to the data, communicating and demonstrating how staying close to the participants' life world(s) informs research analysis and theorising (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022). In detailing the methodological process and analytical moves I followed, I sought to achieve dependability (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022).

My choice to use RTA as the method for analysing the data lies in its compatibility with my ontological and epistemological stance (see previous section) and an interpretivist, qualitative paradigm (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2021, 2022). Complex and emotionally charged topics such as acculturation (e.g. Hajro *et al.*, 2019), embeddedness (e.g. Chen, Hsu and Shaffer, 2024), and migrant career transitions (e.g. O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2020) suit the use of RTA as an analysis method. For example, I believe RTA contributes to a richer understanding of how migrants make sense of the role of culture, family, community, and the EU regulatory framework in maintaining (or not) transnational engagements while enacting an international career, as RTA seeks to identify patterns within and across the data set. The application of qualitative methodological techniques within a qualitative paradigm (or Big Q) is consistent with RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2021, 2022; Trainor and Bundon, 2021). "Big Q" refers to data, values, and practices consonant with a qualitative paradigm, as opposed "small q" which integrates some positivist features (i.e. reliability measures) to qualitative enquiry (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Trainor and Bundon, 2021). RTA 'emphasises the importance of the researcher's subjectivity as analytic *resource*, and her reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation' (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 330). In this sense, RTA fits Denzin and Lincoln's (2011) description of the research process as a crystal, with its multiple sides reflecting the different perspectives (multiple realities) of the research participants; and the researcher's

interpretation of the same. Since RTA recognises the active role of the researcher in the co-construction of knowledge (Trainor and Bundon, 2021; Braun and Clarke, 2022), an equally fitting simile is that of a 'montage', a cinematic editing technique in which time/space sequences are layered [by the director/editor] over each other to reveal a 'complete' picture; a more contextualised and deeper version of reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

I subscribe to a Big Q approach to research, following a social constructionist and interpretative paradigm, a predominantly inductive approach to data analysis and the consideration of both semantic and latent levels of analysis (Trainor and Bundon, 2021; Braun and Clarke, 2022). A semantic level refers to the 'explicit or surface meanings of the data', in terms of individual narrative texts/transcriptions; while a latent approach seeks to 'identify the features that gave it that particular form and meaning' and relates to the whole (or majority) of the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84). In analysing the data, I followed Braun and Clarke's RTA data analysis process, which includes: 'data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes; systematic data coding; generating initial themes from coded and collated data; developing and reviewing themes; refining, defining and naming themes; and writing the report' (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 330). As an early-stage researcher, I used this process as a guide and as inspiration, learning how to do RTA as I followed the process. I must note – as do more experienced researchers (Braun and Clarke, 2021, 2022; Byrne, 2022) – that although the specific moves and phases are presented in a tidy, linear fashion (Figure 2.5), the experience of moving through the process was much more complex and messier. It was an iterative process that followed flexibly as a guideline rather than a template, as advised by Braun and Clarke (2021). Therefore, in my process I also included an initial analytical step of 'preparing and organising the data', that helped me familiarise with the data, as I detail below.

***Figure 2.5: Visualisation of the data analysis process detailed in this section.***



### 2.7.1 Preparing and Organising the Data

As previously mentioned, all interviews were video recorded, with explicit written and verbal participants' consent. *Sandra* [ES4-IE] (see Table 2.3 in section 2.6.1 above) did not switch on her camera for the interview, therefore I could not record non-verbal communication in this case. Most interviews were conducted in English (n=36) as this was the common language between me and the participants, and/or the participants' working language. *Elena, Nano, Cari* (all Spanish living/working in Germany) and *Carl, Helga,* and *Anika* (all Germans living/working in Spain) were more comfortable speaking Spanish and therefore were interviewed in Spanish. I could not offer to interview German speakers in their native language as my German is quite limited.

English language interviews were automatically transcribed by the AI of the video conferencing tool used (i.e. Teams or Zoom). I then re-watched the recorded interviews and corrected the AI transcriptions, noting non-English terms used by participants (which I left in their original form, written in italics), as well as colloquialisms, place names, and any other text that was incorrectly transcribed by AI. During the transcription phase, I also added behavioural and participants' 'action' information (such as 'laughing', 'smiling', 'gesticulating', etc) to the transcripts. No automatic transcriptions were generated for the interviews conducted in Spanish; therefore I transcribed and subsequently translated all Spanish-language interviews without the aid of software. I took additional notes at this transcription stage, recording my initial impressions, contextual information, and the general flow of the interview. I recorded these reflective notes separately using MAXQDA memos attached to each interview transcription.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. I highlighted text in yellow when I had doubts regarding the correct comprehension or interpretation of the recording. I used capitalised text to signal emphasis as per participants' accounts, also noting silences and hesitations with ellipses, in order to capture 'all that's *really* said' (Laverty, 2003, p. 19, italics added). I then sent the transcriptions to the participants, asking them to check for accuracy and to correct the comprehension/transcription if needed. Three of the participants expressly asked for the transcriptions not to be sent back to them, noting both lack of time for checking the transcription and confidence that they had not shared sensitive information. I sent 39 transcriptions back to the participants for review, of which 36 were proofed and/or returned with comments. Three participants did not respond to my request to review the transcription, so I used the original transcription instead. I prepared the reviewed/proofed transcriptions for analysis with MAXQDA software, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase RTA process for data engagement, coding, and

theme development (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2021, 2022). I describe and document the process of data familiarisation, systematic data coding, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, and refining, defining, and naming themes – in the following subsections, while I will cover the write-up of the analysis in the Findings and Discussion Chapters (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight). I stress that although I follow this clear, systematic process for reporting, in practice the process was 'messier', moving back and forth between phases (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Trainor and Bundon, 2021).

I should also note that I followed a different methodology and process favouring small-sample studies (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - IPA) for previously analysing 24 of the 42 interviews for a paper (co-written with my supervisors) I presented at the AOM 2022 conference in Seattle. The reviewed version of the paper was subsequently published in *Career Development International* (Suarez-Bilbao *et al*, 2023 – see Appendix C). IPA is suitable for small sample sizes – with the recommended sample being 8-10 participants in order to fully unpack the interviews. In this PhD undertaking, with 42 participants, I followed the RTA method of analysis. I returned to the data set with fresh eyes, using 'clean' versions of the participant-reviewed transcripts, re-familiarising myself with all the interviews, watching the recordings again, making new notes, re-reading the transcripts, and coding them following the RTA process. This process will be detailed in the next sub-sections.

### 2.7.2 Data Familiarisation and Writing Familiarisation Notes

In RTA, the coding and analysis of the data is seen as a *process* that involves 'immersion in the data, reading, reflecting, questioning, imagining, wondering, writing, retreating and returning' (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 332). The first step in this process involved exploring and familiarising (and re-familiarising) myself with the data, noting important text passages and initial ideas (Braun and Clarke, 2006), starting to make sense, and reflecting on the experiences the participants were sharing (Trainor and Bundon, 2021). I also summarised each interview, including notes on the duration and general flow of the interview, how the interviewee was recruited to participate in the study (i.e. via personal connection, snowballing, social media, etc.), and my impressions regarding contextual information and/or surprising facts. Indeed, data familiarisation started in the interview transcription phase, and subsequently by reflecting on the comments received by the participants upon the review of their transcripts. Using Microsoft Excel, I recorded further demographic data (as displayed in Table 2.3 in section 2.6.1) and information such as (self-perceived) level of host-country language proficiency currently and on arrival to the host country, qualification level, and other relevant information at these initial stages of data familiarisation.

### 2.7.3 Generating Initial Codes and Systematic Data Coding

In qualitative enquiry, codes are described as 'essence-capturing and essential elements of the research story that, when clustered together according to similarity and regularity [patterns], they actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections' (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9). RTA considers coding as a process of interpretation, which goes beyond simple identification (Braun and Clarke, 2022). In this sense, coding is an active process, where codes 'evolve in an organic way over the coding process, as insight shifts and changes… capturing the researcher's developing and deepening interpretation of their data' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 9). Codes thus are selected – through a process of *organising* – for their meaningfulness and importance relative to the topic or research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006), rather than for how frequently they appear in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). However, I did use Word Clouds (see Figure 2.6) at this initial stage to help me visualise the most common/used words in any given combination of texts/transcriptions to get a sense of which were the important topics for the participants in relation to their international career.

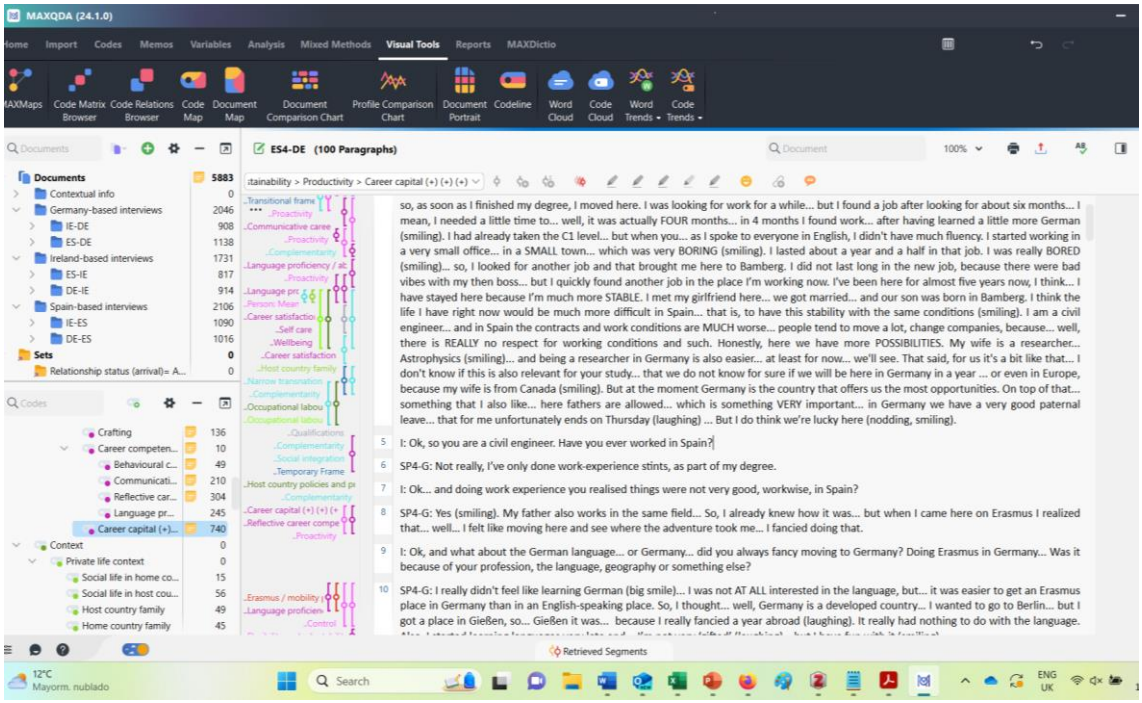
***Figure 2.6: Sample Word Cloud***


To create the Word Clouds, I used stop lists in order to omit linking (and, or, if, etc) and high-frequency but irrelevant words (such as: the, an, in, somebody, sometimes, question, etc) for the analysis. The resulting word clouds (see Figure 2.6 for a sample) gave me a visual idea of the most important/used words for each participant (and groups of participants) in recounting their motivations for mobility and their individual experiences as expatriates/migrants. Of course, the use of some of these words were prompted by the topics in the interview guide, however, the open questions were designed to elicit 'free' answers from participants. Therefore, the rationale for including this step in the analysis was to bring my attention to what the participants deemed important, in order to minimise researcher's bias when coding.

I coded the transcripts on a 'case-by-case' basis, following an open or inclusive coding process, by first coding line-by-line, or rather sentence-by-sentence, retaining whole

sentences/passages in order not to lose context (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and then identifying 'clusters' of meaning, patterns or themes for each of the participants' lived experiences. Larkin and colleagues (2006) refer to this initial coding stage as descriptive coding. I followed an organic and open-ended approach to generating initial codes, focusing on both semantic and latent meanings (Trainor and Bundon, 2021), noting what the participants said/shared (semantic) as well as what I interpreted was implied or omitted (latent). This was an intense exercise, providing a large number of codes, with each individual interview producing between 67 and 210 codes. Figure 2.7 below illustrates a 52-minute interview which contains 170 coded sections.

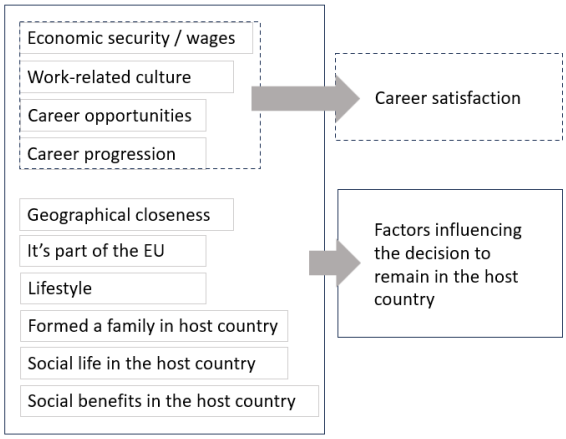
*Figure 2.7: MAXQDA – Initial Coding Sample*




As I was generating too many codes and notes, which were difficult to manage in MAXQDA, I also used Microsoft Excel to organise some of the data collected. Then, I started collapsing, simplifying, and refining the codes to make them more manageable within MAXQDA. Using the MAXQDA software alongside Microsoft Excel (for organising the data) facilitated moving back and forth between interview transcripts, which helped me become more focused on the patterns I was beginning to see. The process of collapsing and refining codes allowed me to organise the data according to meaningful 'blocks' or groups throughout the entire data set (see Figure 2.8 below for a visual example of the process). As I follow an inductive approach, codes and grouped codes were predominantly data-driven at this initial stage. However, I acknowledge that my previous familiarity with the literature elicited connections of meaning between the coded data and theory, therefore a degree of deductive reasoning was also used in clustering the codes. As illustrated in Figure 2.8 below, consistent with these connections of meaning, I

placed some codes in more than one category. In this example, while I classified all the codes included in the left-hand-side box into the 'factors influencing the decision to remain in the host country' group/category, the codes included in the dotted-line box were also under the 'career satisfaction' group/category.

*Figure 2.8: Organising codes into blocks or groups (sample visual)*



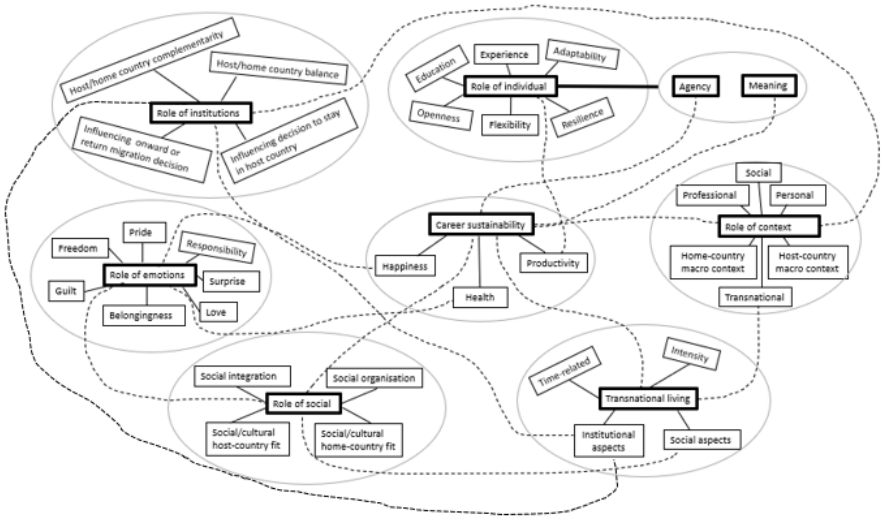

### 2.7.4 Generating Initial Themes from Coded and Collated Data

Themes are developed from codes, and as such are 'constructed at the intersection of the data, the researcher's subjectivity, theoretical and conceptual understanding' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, pp. 9–10). In generating initial themes, I condensed the codes once again into core and important concepts that appeared throughout all the individual transcripts, thus organising them into potential themes and sub-themes that may explain my research questions. These themes connected similar codes across all interviews. For example, in the sample visual above (Figure 2.8), 'career satisfaction influencing the decision to remain in the host country' became a theme. In this phase I started to connect the inductive codes to theoretical concepts that I came across in the literature review that could potentially explain the data.

Braun and Clarke (2021) liken themes to 'multi-faceted crystals, capturing multiple observations or facets' (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 340). My positionality as a migrant (and thus an insider-outsider in this study) and the original 'problem' that inspired me to pursue a PhD (see Axiology, section 2.3) influenced what interested me in the data, in terms of looking to connect the data with theory and relate it to my research questions. I created theme maps (see Figure 2.9 for a sample theme map) to visually identify the connections and relationships between codes, themes, and subthemes (Trainor and Bundon, 2021). This phase was also iterative and reflexive, going back and forth between interview transcripts, and between the coded data and the literature, re-drawing 'tighter' cluster maps at every iteration. I also created

a ‘miscellaneous’ category/folder to contain those codes that did not completely fit the theme maps (Byrne, 2022).

*10.* ***Figure 2.9: Sample of initial theme and sub-theme cluster map***



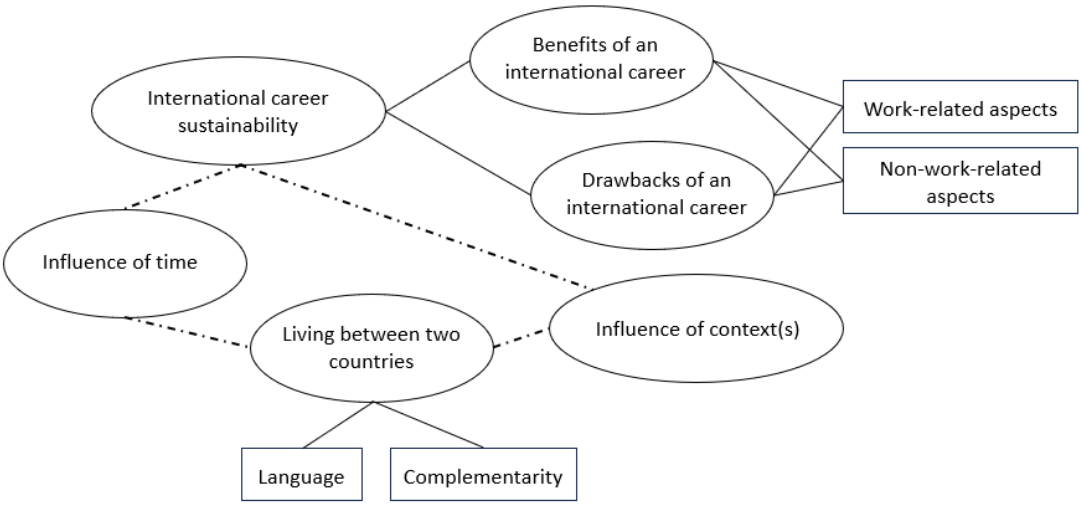

### 2.7.5 Developing, Reviewing, Refining and Defining Themes

Braun and Clarke define themes as ‘patterns of shared meaning, united by a central concept or idea’ (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 341). This phase of analysis reveals relationships and boundaries between themes, with the aim to ‘tell a coherent story that reflects the data [narratives] and answers the research questions’ (Trainor and Bundon, 2021, pp. 718–719). Here, I further developed and combined themes and sub-themes, connecting the developing patterns to concepts in the literature that may help make sense of (or explain) these patterns (Locke, Feldman and Golden-Biddle, 2020). At the same time, I reviewed the coded data within the themes and sub-themes to make sure the patterns told a coherent story, while remaining faithful to the insights provided by the participants (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022). Figure 2.10 below illustrates the resulting thematic map.

Throughout the iterative process (see Figure 2.5), I was conscious of my responsibility for my own interpretation of the participants’ accounts (Clarke and Braun, 2017) in allocating themes and connecting these themes to concepts in the literature that helped explain the insights, respecting participants’ voices, but ultimately actively selecting and deploying the narrative evidence requisite to answer the research question(s). Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2021) advocate for the responsibility of the researcher (when conducting RTA) to actively locate and retrieve themes/patterns in the data. The authors are critical of the notion that themes ‘emerge’ or are ‘discovered’, as they argue using this language denies ‘the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them’ (Braun

and Clarke, 2006, p. 80). For the purpose of this dissertation, I focus on the themes related to the sample's international careers (and if/how they achieve maintain career sustainability while working abroad), and their transnational lives.

*11.* ***Figure 2.10: Refined themes and subthemes map***




This was a complex, dynamic, and iterative process. The refined themes, and related research questions evolved along the research process, as I moved back and forth from the participants narratives and the literature, at all stages of the process, up to the reporting/write up phase. In light of my interpretation of the data collected, I determined that the career sustainability and transnational living concepts, which I develop in the literature review chapters (see Chapters 4 and 5), were the theoretical frameworks which best fit my data.

## 2.8 Conclusion

In this Chapter I have detailed how my ontological and epistemological position, as well as my positionality, have influenced this study's research design and the methodological moves I have made along the analytic process. This detailed account, a custom-fit arrangement, a specific combination of analytical moves (some discussed in this Chapter and some of which will be detailed in the Findings Chapter Six and Seven), aims to achieve trustworthiness (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022) by signalling my competence as a researcher and my faithful engagement with the data, justifying my chosen analytic moves and producing visual aids to illustrate the analytical process followed (Locke, Feldman and Golden-Biddle, 2020), thus attesting to the integrity of my research.

Van Maanen (1979) argues that participants' accounts are 'situationally, historically, and biographically mediated' (p. 540) and the social structures in which they are embedded contain

rules and norms that, as deemed obvious, may not be articulated explicitly. Therefore, it is the task of the researcher to infer and interpret these meanings, contextualising them in order to critically understand the participants' social and cultural contexts. In addition to the interview transcripts and secondary literature, I gathered contextual information in relation to the participants' national (Germany, Ireland and Spain) and supra-national (EU) socio-cultural, economic, historical and contemporary context(s). These contextual considerations are detailed in the next chapter (Chapter 3). Contextual secondary sources such as economic reports and news items, as well as my own personal experiences living in the three subject countries of this study, aided interpretation of the interviews and triangulation of the data.

Triangulation adds credibility and validity to qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). I attempt methodological triangulation (i.e. using more than one method to obtain data) by collecting raw interview data, which I position in the context of the EU and specifically in Germany, Ireland, and Spain (see next Chapter for further detail), adding my own contextual and situational knowledge of these geographical contexts (Balcom, Doucet and Dubé, 2021). Further, methodological triangulation includes a detailed literature review on contemporary research in the fields of careers, migration/expatriation, and transnationalism. I consider different [interdisciplinary] theoretical frameworks (see Chapters 4 and 5) in the interpretation of the findings, thus engaging in theory triangulation. Following the bricolage approach to research (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022), the next chapter provide the context of this study, aided by both text analysis (of academic and policy documents, as well as contemporary news items and reports) reviewed reflexively from my unique and well placed insider status; with my philosophical stance underpinning my reflexive hermeneutic approach.

# Chapter 3 – Contextualisation of the Study.

## 3.1 Introduction

Chapter two has presented the research philosophy and methodology underpinning this study. This chapter details the specific context in which the study was conducted, looking at the geographic territories in which it was set – Germany, Ireland, and Spain – as well as the supra-context of the European Union (EU) to which these countries belong. Therefore, this chapter examines the national and regional contexts, as well as the transnational field in which participants' careers unfold, highlighting how these broader settings impact career decisions. The chapter considers the socio-economic, political, and general macro-level factors affecting participants' intra-EU careers in the specific time period of the study. Consistent with Mayrhofer and colleagues (2007), the focus of this chapter is on the greater geographical, socio-economic and time-specific context in which careers are enacted, rather than the meso-level organisational context (Johns, 2006), which was not the aim of the study. Context is particularly relevant in international careers as there are culture-specific (Bader, Froese and Kraeh, 2018; Briscoe *et al.*, 2021) and/or geographically-specific (Dickmann and Watson, 2017; Kozhevnikov, 2021) job demands, expectations, and social conventions which migrants/expats must make sense of (Jokinen, Brewster and Suutari, 2008; McKenna and Richardson, 2016), while acquiring and/or mobilising career capital (Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi, 1995; Zikic, 2015) across international borders. The individual context refers to elements such as stage of life or career, ideology, culture, and social status, acknowledging that these personal dimensions shape and are shaped by the participants' career experiences. The work examines the national and regional contexts in which participants' careers unfold, highlighting how these broader settings impact career decisions.

Inkson, Dries and Arnold (2015) state that 'to understand careers we need to consider the wider contexts' in which careers take place (Inkson, Dries and Arnold, 2015, p. 4). As a social constructionist, it is my belief that an individual develops knowledge of their world in a social and relational context. In this sense, constructs are created within specific institutions, cultures, and situations, and in certain temporal periods - e.g. broad (social, political, and economic), proximal (personal, family), and temporal contexts. Germany, Ireland, and Spain were the countries chosen as the geographical location of the participants of this study because they are all original members of the EU. As will be further detailed in the next section, transitional measures regulating the movement of workers do not apply for original member countries, as opposed to Eastern European countries, which accessed the EU at later stages (Vassilopoulou, Samaluk and Seierstad, 2014). In terms of the temporal context, the empirical research was conducted at different stages of, and immediately after, the global COVID19 pandemic, which considerably restricted international mobility. Of course, the global pandemic affected *all*

employees and self-employed individuals by restricting freedoms and altering working practices and environments everywhere. However, individuals who were living and working abroad when the pandemic hit were markedly affected by this shock event (Lazar and Yorke, 2021).

Following the bricolage approach to research (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022), the next sections provide the context of this study, aided by both text analysis (of academic and policy documents, as well as contemporary news items and reports) reviewed reflexively from an 'insider/outsider' perspective. The researcher's own positionality (see Chapter Two) influences her particular observations with regard to the specific macro-level context as it relates to intra-EU labour mobility and careers. Supranational EU values, rules and regulations are considered here, as well as the country-level socio-economic, cultural, and regulatory specificities influencing intra-European mobility. As a qualitative researcher, the author's aim is to better understand how the macro context influences participants' careers. Given this qualitative, social constructionist, and interpretative approach, this chapter presents particulars on the geographic and temporal context of the study.

## 3.2 Chapter Overview

First, the chapter gives an overview of the EU's regulatory and socio-economic environment, as the supra-context of this research undertaking. Then, both Hofstede's and GLOBE's cultural dimensions guide cultural considerations in terms of the overall context, as well as comparisons between the countries which are part of this study. The temporal context is briefly described before giving an overview of the specific political and socio-economic contexts of the three countries featured in this study – Germany, Ireland, and Spain. Differences in the countries' language, education and health systems are also highlighted. The chapter concludes summarising the commonalities and complementarities between these three countries.

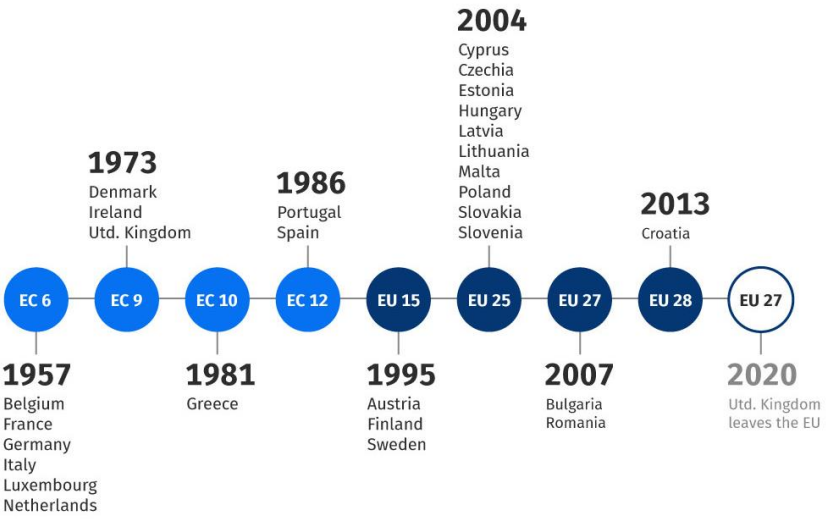
## 3.3 The European Union (EU)

The European Union (EU) is a geo-political supranational institution, comprising a single market and an integrated regulatory framework for all its members, which defines the Union's competencies via a series of Treaties spanning four decades. Against this unifying socio-political, economic, and regulatory background, member states retain their own sovereignty and some internal regulatory idiosyncrasies. At its core, the EU as a project represents the pursuit of peace, solidarity, and economic prosperity for European countries; the vision of a European ideal (Held and McNally, 2014). The Council of Europe, predecessor of the EU, was created in 1949 to promote democracy and protect human rights and the rule of law in Europe after the Second World War. *Germany* (then West Germany) was one of the six founding countries of the next

iteration of the EU, the European Economic Community (EEC), in 1958, after the Treaty of Rome. The other founding members of the EEC were France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxemburg. *Ireland*, together with Denmark and the United Kingdom, joined the ECC in 1973; with *Spain* and Portugal joining in 1986. The Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992 by the then eleven members – including Greece, that joined in 1981 – marked the creation of the EU (which replaced the EEC) and the birth of the European Citizen. The Lisbon Treaty, signed by twenty-seven EU countries in 2007, extended EU competencies with the aim to further improve democracy, efficiency, and transparency in European institutions (European Union, 2019). Figure 3.1 below shows the EU creation timeline.

The creation of the European Common Market was one of the core purposes of the EU. The European Common Market allows the (current) twenty-seven member countries free movement of goods, capital, people, and services throughout the Union (Roggenthien, 2016). The free movement of goods prevents customs duties and/or ancillary charges between member states, and harmonises international trade with European-wide trade negotiations and a common customs tariff for third countries (Roggenthien, 2016); which ensures equal standards and better quality control, transparent pricing and improved consumer choice, while facilitating production efficiencies of scale, thus resulting in stronger economic growth (Poutvaara *et al.*, 2019). The free movement of capital is the broadest of the four fundamental freedoms of the EU single market, which liberalised intra-EU capital movements and payments. The free movement of capital was essential for the introduction of the euro in 1999-2002 and thus the development of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The introduction and promotion of the euro as an international currency contributes to the EU's leadership and efficient investment, reinforcing economic growth in the region (Scheinert, 2021).

12. ***Figure 3.1: European Union timeline (Year of entry to the EEC and EU).***




***Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020***

The freedom of people, often considered the EU's greatest achievement (Hutt, 2016), refers to the free movement and settlement of any European citizen in any other EU-member state, affording European workers the right of non-discrimination on grounds of nationality in relation to employment and citizen rights (European Commission, 2016). In sum, all European citizens have the right to live, work, and provide services in any EU member state (European Union, 2019). The free movement of people influences the re-distribution of the labour market (Hutt, 2016). Labour re-distribution is in general positive for the workers, employers and the macro-economic environment in general as it promotes the transfer of human capital while responding to localised demographic and skills shortages within the EU (European Commission, 2016). However, intra-EU labour movement has also highlighted differences between EU Member States in relation to employment opportunities and conditions which can vary from country to country, impacting an individual's quality of life (Eurofound, 2017). According to Eurostat Population and Migration Statistics, 13 million people of working age (of which 7.3 million were actively looking for work or employed – i.e. 'active') were living in or had moved to another country within the EU in 2019 (Fries-Tersch, Jones and Siöland, 2021). In 2019 'active' intra-EU movers (from/to the 27 Member States) represented 3.6% of the total EU labour force, with Germany hosting 3.3 million (of which close to 300,000 moved in 2018) and Spain 1.4 million EU-resident intra-EU movers of working age (Fries-Tersch, Jones and Siöland, 2021). These figures indicate that, considering the relative ease of movement within the EU and compared to other regions worldwide, a relatively small percentage of EU citizens exercise their right to move, work and reside in another EU country (European Commission, 2016).

The freedom of movement was, of the four freedoms of the EU, the one most affected by the global pandemic. A coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement – and in some cases and time-periods, a complete travel ban – in the EU was adopted by Member States in October 2020 (*Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic*, 2020). The temporary restrictions on non-essential travel within the EU were eased as European Member States rolled out national COVID vaccine programmes, changing the focus from geographically-based restrictions (i.e. countries/regions with high numbers of Corona Virus infections) to a person-based approach in which only vaccinated or (negative) tested individuals were allowed to travel (European Commission, 2022). In sum, the global pandemic greatly restricted mobility within Europe (as well as internationally). However, even before the pandemic, the EU's freedom of movement had attracted negative attention from some groups, reflecting recent political and social developments within the European Union, which have given rise to populist movements (*European Populism: Trends, Threats and Future Prospects*, 2017) fuelled by the rise of inequality – made more evident after the COVID19 pandemic (Filauro and Fischer, 2021) – and largely

unresolved disagreements amongst Member States and the extent of individual countries' exposure/involvement in relation to the EU response to migratory crises (Angeli, 2018).

## 3.4 Overview of the EU geo-political, socio-economic, and cultural context

### 3.4.1 Geo-political context

The broad context in which this study is positioned is the geographical, political, and socio-economic area of the EU, specifically the countries of Germany, Ireland, and Spain, as both home and host countries of the study participants. These countries were chosen as they are all early members of the EEC/EU, although they joined the union at different stages (see previous section, and Figure 3.1). Germany is geographically and politically at the centre of Europe, being one of the founding members of the EU. According to the United Nations classification, Ireland belongs geographically to the Northern European region, while Germany and Spain are situated in Western and Southern Europe respectively (*European Populism: Trends, Threats and Future Prospects*, 2017). The official languages of these three countries are also diverse, respectively German, English, and Spanish.

### 3.4.2 Socio-economic context

Socio-economic conditions such as income inequality can affect citizens' trust in national and EU institutions, acting as push or pull factors of intra-EU mobility (Milanović, 2011). Even though participants' careers occur within the unifying legal/regulatory context of the EU, each country's specific socio-economic, political, and cultural characteristics determine its appeal to intra-EU workers. The distribution of market income (i.e. income originating from labour and capital); the impact of social benefits such as pensions, unemployment, health, and other social transfers; and income tax systems (progressive or not) are the key economic drivers affecting income inequality (Coffey, 2020). While EU-level inequality in disposable incomes has slightly declined (Filauro and Fischer, 2021) – augmenting productivity and reducing the time spent at work, thus improving the average EU living standards (Brandolini and Rosolia, 2019) – income inequality, social transfers and income levels vary within EU Member States (Dauderstädt, 2019). Income inequality has been rising in *Germany* (traditionally a low-income inequality country) while income growth has been low in the country (European Commission, 2016). *Spain* also presents rising income inequality, but this is abetted by high-income growth (European Commission, 2016). *Ireland* is an outlier amongst EU countries (and internationally) as it presents high-income growth and falling income inequality (Coffey, 2020). The following sections will expand on these

characteristics as they relate to Germany, Ireland, and Spain as both home and host countries of the study participants.

Societal forces and specific social conditions which go beyond economic indicators also shape the EU (and the world). Social progress is defined as 'the capacity of a society to meet the basic human needs of its citizens and communities to enhance and sustain the quality of their lives, and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential' (Porter, Stern and Green, 2014, p. 5). The Social Progress Index was developed in 2014 to go beyond economic measures to include social and environmental outcome indicators according to how well a society provides for (1) the basic human needs, (2) wellbeing, and (3) opportunities for its citizens (Porter, Stern and Green, 2014). Basic human needs comprise nutrition and basic medical care, water and sanitation, shelter, and personal safety. The foundations of wellbeing include the access to basic knowledge (education), access to information and communications, health and wellness, and how well a society uses its resources with a view to conserve them for future generations. Opportunities comprise the protection of personal rights, personal freedom and choice, inclusiveness, and access to advanced education/knowledge (Social Progress Index, 2024). The Social Progress Index insights in 2024 (which comprise data from 2011-2023) report a decline or stagnation in terms of social progress for most countries in the EU (see Figure 3.2).

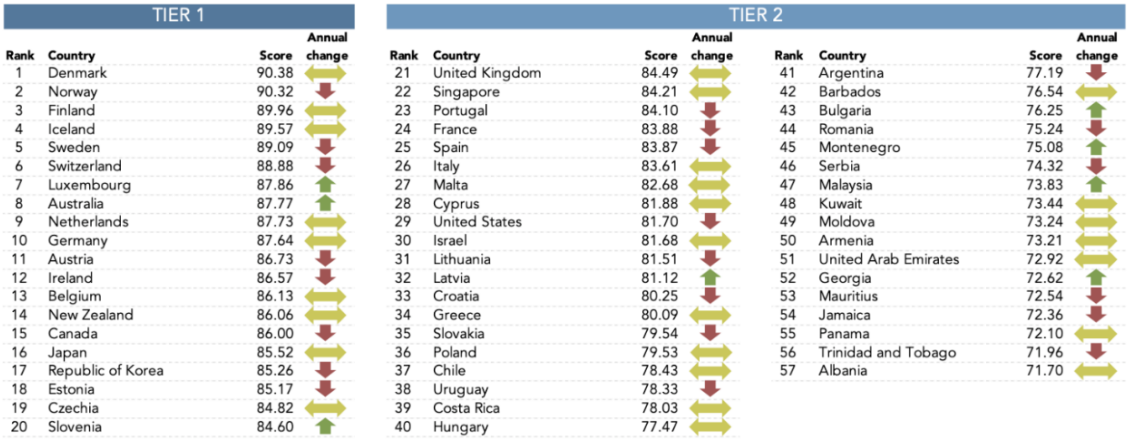
13. ***Figure 3.2: European 2024 Social Progress Index Map***


***Source:*** *www.socialprogress.org* ***(2024)***

As shown in Figure 3.2, while Germany's social progress has been stagnant, both Ireland's and Spain's social progress has declined. However, Germany (at no. 10, with an 87.64 score) and Ireland (at no. 12, with an 86.57 score) are ranked among the top 20 countries (Tier 1) in social progress overall, while Spain is ranked 25$^{th}$ (Tier 2) with an 83.87 social progress score. Figure 3.3 shows that there are few differences between the top and lowest-scoring countries (n=20) in Tier 1, which are all high or stable-income economies. However, the countries (n=37) ranked in Tier 2, which features a wider range of social progress scores, present ample differences in

[economic] development (Social Progress Index, 2024). All the EU member states are either in Tier 1 or Tier 2 (see Figure 3.3).

*14. Figure 3.3: 2024 Social Progress Index Rankings – Tier 1 & Tier 2*



TIER 1

| Rank | Country | Score | Annual change |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Denmark | 90.38 | |
| 2 | Norway | 90.32 | |
| 3 | Finland | 89.96 | |
| 4 | Iceland | 89.57 | |
| 5 | Sweden | 89.09 | |
| 6 | Switzerland | 88.88 | |
| 7 | Luxembourg | 87.86 | |
| 8 | Australia | 87.77 | |
| 9 | Netherlands | 87.73 | |
| 10 | Germany | 87.64 | |
| 11 | Austria | 86.73 | |
| 12 | Ireland | 86.57 | |
| 13 | Belgium | 86.13 | |
| 14 | New Zealand | 86.06 | |
| 15 | Canada | 86.00 | |
| 16 | Japan | 85.52 | |
| 17 | Republic of Korea | 85.26 | |
| 18 | Estonia | 85.17 | |
| 19 | Czechia | 84.82 | |
| 20 | Slovenia | 84.60 | |

TIER 2

| Rank | Country | Score | Annual change |
|---|---|---|---|
| 21 | United Kingdom | 84.49 | |
| 22 | Singapore | 84.21 | |
| 23 | Portugal | 84.10 | |
| 24 | France | 83.88 | |
| 25 | Spain | 83.87 | |
| 26 | Italy | 83.61 | |
| 27 | Malta | 82.68 | |
| 28 | Cyprus | 81.88 | |
| 29 | United States | 81.70 | |
| 30 | Israel | 81.68 | |
| 31 | Lithuania | 81.51 | |
| 32 | Latvia | 81.12 | |
| 33 | Croatia | 80.25 | |
| 34 | Greece | 80.09 | |
| 35 | Slovakia | 79.54 | |
| 36 | Poland | 79.53 | |
| 37 | Chile | 78.43 | |
| 38 | Uruguay | 78.33 | |
| 39 | Costa Rica | 78.03 | |
| 40 | Hungary | 77.47 | |
| 41 | Argentina | 77.19 | |
| 42 | Barbados | 76.54 | |
| 43 | Bulgaria | 76.25 | |
| 44 | Romania | 75.24 | |
| 45 | Montenegro | 75.08 | |
| 46 | Serbia | 74.32 | |
| 47 | Malaysia | 73.83 | |
| 48 | Kuwait | 73.44 | |
| 49 | Moldova | 73.24 | |
| 50 | Armenia | 73.21 | |
| 51 | United Arab Emirates | 72.92 | |
| 52 | Georgia | 72.62 | |
| 53 | Mauritius | 72.54 | |
| 54 | Jamaica | 72.36 | |
| 55 | Panama | 72.10 | |
| 56 | Trinidad and Tobago | 71.96 | |
| 57 | Albania | 71.70 | |

***Source:** www.socialprogress.org **(2024)***

### 3.4.3 Cultural Context

Management studies tend to use two referents for explaining or detailing national culture: Hofstede's national culture dimensions (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010), and the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness Research Program) study (House *et al.*, 2004; House, 2014). As will be discussed in the following subsections, there are similitudes and differences between these two models, which are summarised in Table 3.1 below. A notable difference that pertains to the geographical scope of this study is that the GLOBE model considers Germany as two distinct regions: Germany-East (former GDR) and Germany-West (former FRG).

*4. Table 3.1 Differences between GLOBE and Hofstede's Models*

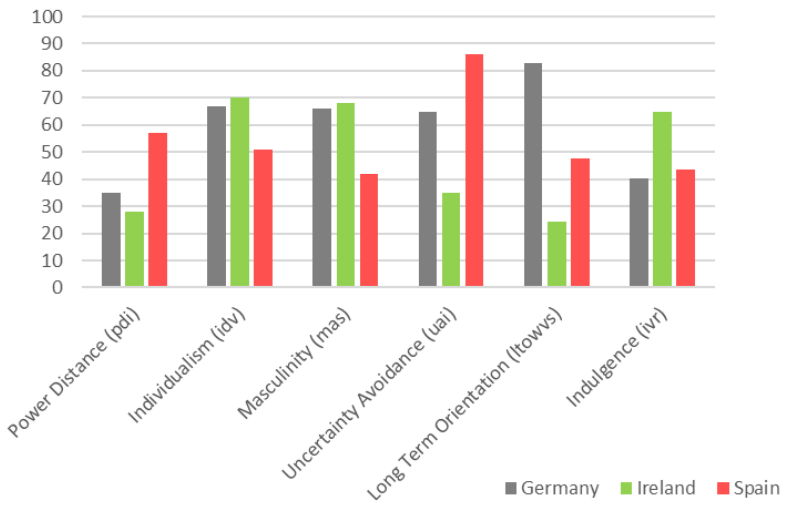
| Differences | GLOBE Model | Hofstede Model |
|---|---|---|
| Researchers | Multi-researcher (n=170) collaboration | One primary researcher |
| Respondents | Managers | Employees & managers |
| Organisational scope | Multiple organisations & industries | IBM & subsidiaries |
| Countries/societies included | 62 | 72 |
| *of which European countries | 26 (including Germany, Ireland & Spain) | 22 (including Germany-East/ Germany-West, Ireland & Spain) |
| Cultural dimensions | 9 | 6 |

***Source: Adapted from Shi and Wang (2011)***

#### 3.4.3.1 Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Hofstede's seminal cross-cultural work identified five cultural dimensions – power distance (pdi), individualism (idv), masculinity (mas), uncertainty avoidance (uai), and long-term orientation (lto) – used to understand the differences in cultural values across nations, and how these cultural values influence individuals' cultural behaviour (Hofstede, 2001). An additional dimension of indulgence/restraint was added to the original five dimensions after conducting a supplementary study with Chinese employees (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Considering cultural drivers (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Hofstede Insights, 2022) through the lens of Hofstede's upgraded six dimensions (6D) model, Ireland (28/100) and Germany (35/100) are both low power distance countries (see Figure 3.4), pointing to these society's low acceptance of unequal distribution of power and commitment to minimising inequalities. Instead, Spain is considered a high power-distance country at 57/100 which, according to Hofstede's 6D model, denotes a more hierarchical society (Hofstede Insights, 2022).

15. ***Figure 3.4: Hofstede's 6D model of national culture – Germany, Ireland, and Spain comparison***




***Source:*** *https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/* ***(2024)***

Spain's deviation is noted as well in the individualism and masculinity dimensions, in which it scores 51/100 and 42/100 respectively, compared to Germany (67 and 66 respectively) and Ireland (70 and 68). High individualism scores in Germany and Ireland mean that individual decisions and choices are encouraged as Irish and Germans are expected to be self-reliant [in work] and display initiative, while Spanish society is slightly more collectivist [when compared to other European countries] with individuals supporting each other and leaning on group leaders and members (Hofstede Insights, 2022). According to Hofstede (Hofstede Insights, 2022), this

slight collectivist orientation might influence the Spanish feminine (as opposed to masculine) tendency to seek consensus and, from a career perspective, being comfortable with their role and pursuing subjective rather than objective career success. High masculinity scores, such as Germany's (66) and Ireland's (68), instead, indicate a society driven by competition, a desire to stand out (Hofstede Insights, 2022) and, career-wise outwardly, objective success (see Figure 3.4).

As shown in Figure 3.4, Ireland is the outlier regarding the indulgence dimension, at 65/100 as opposed to Germany's 40/100 and Spain's 44/100. Both German and Spanish societies are considered to be restrained by social norms, tend to control their desires and impulses and delay gratification (Hofstede Insights, 2022). The Irish – scoring high on the indulgence dimension – are considered to be optimistic and prefer not to delay gratification, enjoying life and having fun while they can (Hofstede Insights, 2022). According to Hofstede (Hofstede Insights, 2022), there is a considerable enough distance between the three countries' scores in relation to the uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation dimensions (see Figure 3.4). Long-term orientation refers to a country's connection to its past while facing the challenges of its present and future (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Hofstede Insights, 2022). Ireland (24/100), at the lower end of the scale, is considered to be a normative society, more connected to their past, showing considerable respect for traditions, but not greatly concerned with making plans for the future. In contrast, at the higher end, Germany (83) is believed to be a pragmatic country, able to adapt their traditions to changing times and with a clear preference to save for the future (Hofstede Insights, 2022). Spain (48) is ranked in the middle of the three countries (Hofstede Insights, 2022).

A similar pattern is observed in relation to the uncertainty avoidance dimension (see Figure 3.4), which reflects the relationship a society has with unknown situations/events and ambiguity (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Hofstede Insights, 2022) – here, Ireland (35) is again at the lower end of the scale, but Spain (86) is at the higher end and Germany (65) roughly between the two. Ireland's low score can be interpreted as a reflection of the Irish alleged imaginative and creative approach to unknown situations and ambiguity, favouring practical solutions to established rules. The Spanish high score can indicate reticence to change the status quo, coupled with a desire for security in the work realm (i.e. a 'job for life'), as opposed to Irish people, who tend to have many different roles throughout their careers, with employers prioritising experience and attitude [in general] over role-specific qualifications (Hofstede Insights, 2022). Germany's score (65) is also high, which is reflected in the country's allegedly well-deserved reputation for systematic thinking and planning, and its reliance on experts (Hofstede Insights, 2022).

### 3.4.3.2 GLOBE cultural dimensions

The GLOBE project defines culture as 'shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations' (globeproject.com). GLOBE measures cultural values (i.e. what 'should be') and practices (i.e. what is) in 62 countries around the world (Shi and Wang, 2011), according to nine dimensions: performance orientation, assertiveness, future orientation, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (House *et al.*, 2004; House, 2014). Figure 3.5 below shows a GLOBE comparison between Germany (East & West), Ireland, and Spain across the nine dimensions.

***Figure 3.5: GLOBE cultural dimensions – Germany, Ireland, and Spain comparison***


***Source:*** *https://globeproject.com/study_2004_2007%3Fpage_id=data.html#data*

Hofstede's work was influential in the development of GLOBE's nine culture dimensions (House *et al.*, 2004; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010), to the point that the GLOBE researchers maintained some of the labels in Hofstede's original dimensions – power distance and uncertainty avoidance – while renaming long term orientation as future orientation (Shi and Wang, 2011). Despite the similarities between Hofstede's and GLOBES' cultural dimensions, different scales [psychology-derived, rather than anthropological] were used by GLOBE researchers to measure institutional and in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, and assertiveness (House *et al.*, 2004; Shi and Wang, 2011).

#### 3.4.3.3 National political culture

The national political culture concept suits this study as it considers culture as shared frames of meaning pertaining to the 'right way' to organise social life, rather than shared values, practices or behaviours, and identities (Chevrier, 2009). Chevrier proposes a definition of national political culture(s) that 'refines the nature of shared references that shape sense-making processes… [advocating that] regulatory and normative institutions are embedded in the frames of meaning', as a society develops and promotes these shared references through myths and symbolic imagery (Chevrier, 2009, p. 172). The author argues that even when, on the surface, globalisation has made [Western] national country cultures more homogeneous, national political culture pinpoints a national culture's most feared threat, and the different ways in which a people interpret the 'right way' to act when faced with this threat. National institutions, such as educational and health systems, as will be detailed in the following individual country sections, can contribute to enforcing the idea of national political culture, feeding the myths and reputational systems that sustain it.

### 3.4.4 Temporal context

As a further consideration within the broader context as discussed in the previous sections, this study takes place at various stages (immediately before, during, and after) of the COVID19 pandemic, with interviews conducted between July 2020 and August 2022. European citizens are privileged, as intra-EU mobility is relatively easy from an administrative point of view, in the sense that European citizens have the right to move, work and establish their residency freely within Europe, retaining their home-country and European rights (Roggenthien, 2016). The global pandemic, however, halted European and global mobility, greatly disturbing people's lives, and livelihoods, and affecting the European (and global) economy. For the first time since the establishment of the EU, at the height of the pandemic the EU's most cherished freedom – the freedom of movement – was suspended. Intra-EU migrants were able to compare the response to the pandemic – at both societal and country levels in terms of regulations and management

of the health crisis – in both their host and home countries, which influenced their perception of safety and overall wellbeing in their host country (Rosa González, Barker and Shah, 2022). Against this backdrop, participants' changing perceptions and anxieties, as pertaining to them and their loved ones abroad, were considered in the interviews, which are analysed and discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

## 3.5 Germany

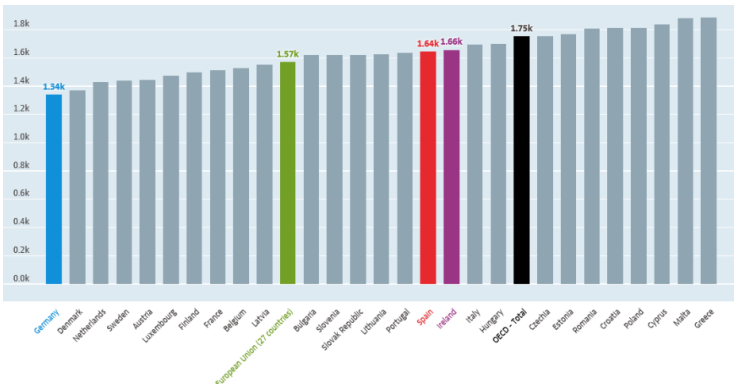
### 3.5.1 Political and socio-economic context

Germany has been a member of the EU (in its different iterations) since 1958 and has been, in general, quite committed to the European project (Europa.eu, 2022). Politically, Germany is a federal parliamentary republic, comprising sixteen largely autonomous states, with the chancellor as the head of government and the president as a (diplomatic, representative) head of state. Geographically, the country is located in central Europe and is the fourth largest (357,168 sq. km) and most populated (83.2 million people) EU Member State, with roughly 45.4 million people in employment in May 2022 and a 2.7% unemployment rate (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022).

As previously mentioned, while considered a low-income inequality country, Germany's income inequality, although relatively stable, has been rising faster than its income growth, affecting German-resident workers' well-being (Filauro and Fischer, 2021). In the 198s and 90s market income inequality in Germany was abated through government intervention [redistribution], while tax system changes and labour market developments drove income distribution to widen significantly in the 2000s, stabilising afterwards and remaining stable predominantly as a result of increased employment opportunities since 2005 (Brandolini and Rosolia, 2019). The job market in Germany was at its highest level in 2017 driven by increased business activity (Deutsche Welle, 2018). Germany's unemployment rate was 5.9% in December 2023 (Trading Economics, 2024). Although generally considered to be extremely industrious, according to OECD statistics Germans worked 1,349 hours/worker in average in 2022 (see Figure 3.6 below), comparatively less than any other EU country and the lowest average of any OECD country (OECD, 2023b). Germany is marked in blue, Spain in red, and Ireland in burgundy/purple, with the EU average marked in green in Figure 3.6.

Germany's low annual hours/worker average may be due to the relatively large amount of holidays (including public holidays) the country offers its workers, and the high share of (mainly women) part-time employees (OECD, 2021). This exemplifies the positive work conditions in Germany, which may be attractive to intra-EU migration.

17. ***Figure 3.6: Average annual hours worked in the EU in 2022 (including OECD average)***




***Source: OECD (2024), Hours worked (indicator). doi: 10.1787/47be1c78-en***

Germany's economy, the fifth most productive in the world (World Population Review, 2022), is supported by a strong middle class (Brandolini and Rosolia, 2019). While Germany is well-known worldwide for its industrial prowess, in 2017 nearly three-quarters of the total working population (44.3 million people) were employed in the services sector, with between five and six million people employed as skilled craftsmen and women (Sibum, 2018). In 2018 the *Dekra Arbeitsmarkt* [Labour Market] *Report* announced that the most in-demand skills/jobs in Germany are: software developers, architects and programmers; electronic engineers and electricians; nurses; IT consultants and IT analysts; customer advisors and account managers; production assistants; sales professionals; product managers; architects and civil engineers (deutschland.de, 2019). Interestingly, most of the participants in this study are employed in the aforementioned roles and/or professions (see Table 2.2 in Chapter Two). Germany is host country for 3.3 million EU citizens (European Commission, 2021). Germany's Coalition Government recently announced measures designed to attract skilled labour from abroad [within and outside the EU], in order to correct imbalances caused by the country's demographic composition – with more people leaving than entering the labour market – which are affecting productivity and burdening the state's pension system (Reuters, 2022).

### 3.5.2 Language

German is the third most commonly studied foreign language as a compulsory subject in general education curriculum in the EU, after English and Spanish (Eurostat, 2024b). In vocational education, German was the most commonly studied language in 2020 (Eurostat, 2024b). While the influx of foreign professionals has meant English and other foreign languages are increasingly spoken at an administrative level in Germany, not having an adequate level of German language is a clear disadvantage and a barrier for foreigners to surmount. There is also a difference in the use of English and other foreign languages in bigger cities like Berlin, Hamburg, or Frankfurt – in which there are more employment opportunities available and thus a higher number of

foreigners – and smaller towns. This difference is also evident between regions, perhaps as a reflection of the economic openness as well as the labour requirements of the specific Länder (States), and in relation to the particular professions/occupations needed in every region. For example, as will be discussed further in Chapters Six and Seven, the participants in this study who are employed in the IT industry, research and academia were able to work mainly through English, while for nurses, architects, civil engineers, and other professions/occupations a working-level (B1) of German was required.

### 3.5.3 Education system

Germany follows a differentiated lower secondary education model (European Education and Culture Executive Agency (European Commission) *et al.*, 2022). Essentially, by the time they are 10 years old, students in Germany are placed on one of three different tracks: (1) the Gymnasium track is reserved for advanced students who plan to go to university, (2) Realschule is chosen for students who plan to work in blue-collar occupations, or learn a trade, and (3) Hauptschule for students designated for lower blue-collar jobs and trades. Germany emphasises vocational education and training (VET), which combines in-classroom and work-based learning, thus facilitating school-to-work transitions (OECD, 2023a). However, the country has experienced growing educational polarisation, with young adults having either very low or very high educational attainment in 2022 (OECD, 2023a).

### 3.5.4 Health system

Non-economic aspects of the social progress of a country include how it provides for the health and wellness of its people (Porter, Stern and Green, 2014; Social Progress Index, 2024). Germany's health expenditure was the highest in the EU in 2021, reflecting an increase in public funding during the COVID years (Kyriakides, 2023). In Germany, the nearly universal coverage for healthcare is funded through contributions to compulsory social insurance schemes in the case of working individuals, while the unemployed are entirely covered by the state through taxation (Schersten, 1998). Out-of-pocket health payments in Germany ranked among the lowest in the EU in 2021 (Kyriakides, 2023).

## 3.6 Ireland

### 3.6.1 Political and socio-economic context

Ireland joined the EU in 1973 (Europa.eu, 2022). The country has since run referenda for all European Treaty approvals and, together with Germany, Latvia, and Slovakia, allows its citizens to challenge the Treaties' constitutionality prior to enactment (Hodson and Maher, 2018).

Politically, Ireland is a highly centralised parliamentary republic in which the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) is the head of government while the President, who as head of state is elected by the people, has a mainly diplomatic and ceremonial role (Europa.eu, 2022). Geographically, the Republic of Ireland is a small island nation (69,797 sq. km) located in North-western Europe. Ireland was under British rule until 1922, when, after the War of Independence (1919-1921), the island was partitioned into the six counties that form Northern Ireland (still part of the United Kingdom) and the twenty-six counties of the Republic of Ireland (Living in Ireland, 2022) that are home to 5.1 million people (CSO, 2023). Individuals born in Northern Ireland have the right to hold both a British and Irish passport if they wish (Living in Ireland, 2022). Ireland – both North and South – has historically been a land of emigration, with its Diaspora reportedly doubling the Irish global population (Irial, 2012). The country's share of intra-EU mobile individuals is also quite high, at 10% of its population (European Commission, 2021), down from 32% in 2015 (European Commission, 2016). Over the last few years, Ireland has reported positive net migration, with more immigrants arriving in the country than people leaving, which may be attributed to the country's economic success in terms of foreign labour attraction (De Bromhead, Adams and Casey, 2021).

As a small, open economy, Ireland is in a better economic position than most EU countries, boasting good employment levels, rising wages and decreasing income inequality; ranking twenty-fourth (out of 137 countries) in the World Economic Forum Global Competitive Index 2018 (Broom, 2019). The country's unemployment rate was 4.9% in December 2023, which is considered to be full employment (Trading Economics, 2024). Ireland experienced record economic growth in the 1990s, in part due to substantial increases in foreign direct investment (FDI) from multinational corporations (MNCs), fuelling job growth that has continued up to present times (De Bromhead, Adams and Casey, 2021). Recently, 79% of Irish employers report skills/employee shortages and difficulties in hiring (Manpower Group, 2022). In 2021, MNCs directly employed 300,000 people in the country (CPL, 2022), competing for talent with homegrown enterprises. According to OECD statistics, the average annual hours worked in Ireland in 2022 was 1.66k hours/worker (see Figure 3.6), similar to Spain's average [at 1.64k] and over the 1.5k hours/worker EU27 average (OECD, 2023b). Ireland is reported to have fewer social protections (i.e. severance payments, health insurance provision, etc) compared to Germany and Spain. However, Ireland, in line with other Northern European nations such as Sweden or Denmark, tends to offer good working conditions and stronger commitment to talent management practices (European Commission, 2016).

General talent shortages are reported in Ireland (Manpower Group, 2022), with the sectors reporting the highest talent shortages in 2021 being Technology, Life Sciences (Pharma

in particular), and the Financial Services sector, as well as the Hospitality and Construction sectors, which were among the most affected by the global pandemic (CPL, 2022). This trend in the Irish employment market has resulted in stronger employee negotiating power and rising salaries, coupled with flexible employment conditions and individualised benefit packages as means of employee attraction/retention, making Ireland a desirable destination for intra-EU workers (CPL, 2022). According to the latest census, there were 631,785 non-Irish citizens (12% of the resident population) living in Ireland in 2022, of which almost half were EU citizens (CSO, 2023). Of the total EU citizens living in Ireland in 2022, 17, 953 were Spanish citizens and 12,390 German citizens (CSO, 2023). The country's current full employment situation may complicate employee recruitment and retention at the organisational level, but it facilitates employment for individuals with the right skills and knowledge (Manpower Group, 2022).

### 3.6.2 Language

Being an English-speaking country enhances Ireland's attractiveness to foreign talent, as English is the most commonly studied foreign language in the EU (Eurostat, 2020). According to Eurostat, in 2020 96% of EU students will have learnt English as a foreign language in upper secondary education, and 79% of EU students have learnt English at vocational education level (Eurostat, 2024b).

### 3.6.3 Education system

Ireland's educational model is based on a common core curriculum, a system in which after successfully completing primary education, all students progress to lower secondary level where they follow the same general common core curriculum (European Education and Culture Executive Agency (European Commission) *et al.*, 2022). According to Eurostat data, Ireland leads the ranking of the most highly educated population in the EU, with around 50% of 25–74-year-old individuals having completed higher education (Eurostat, 2023). Only 13% of 25–34-year-olds in Ireland have VET as their highest educational attainment, and only 5% of young adults have not obtained upper secondary education (OECD, 2023a).

### 3.6.4 Health system

Ireland's health expenditure per capita was close to the EU average in 2021, with private sources accounting for over 22 % of spending – above the EU average of 19 % (Kyriakides, 2023). The country operates a two-tier system in which tier1 low-income individuals (about 30% of the population) are provided with medical cards allowing them to avail of free health service provision, and tier2 (the majority of the population) either pay directly or take out voluntary

insurance for medical services (Schersten, 1998). Despite the improvements in the Irish health care system in the last decades, it remains unfair as those who can afford private health insurance may benefit from shorter waiting times, although at the same time, in not qualifying for free primary care they bear the substantial cost of routine medical fees (European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2009).

## 3.7 Spain

### 3.7.1 Political and socio-economic context

Spain has been a member of the EU since January 1986, once the country demonstrated its commitment to democratic rule after the death of General Franco ended its dictatorship in 1975 (Europa.eu, 2022), and has been a supporter of the Union ever since. In 2005 Spain held a referendum in which 82% of its citizens voted in favour of ratifying the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (Europa.eu, 2022). Politically, Spain is a parliamentary monarchy in which the head of government is the prime minister and the monarch acts as head of state as well as having supreme command of the armed forces (La Moncloa, 2022). The state is composed of seventeen distinct and diverse autonomous regions, and two autonomous cities (Ceuta and Melilla) in North Africa (Europa.eu, 2022). Geographically, Spain is located in southern Europe and is the second largest (505,990 sq km) and fourth most populated (47.4 million people) Member State (Europa.eu, 2022).

Spain's progressive coalition government has raised the country's minimum wage by almost 30%, to 42% of the average salary, and increased taxes for the highest earners. Spain's minimum wage is currently €1,126 per month, while Germany's is €1,500 per month, and Ireland's €1,350 per month (Eurostat, 2024a). Considering that in 2020 there were 3.2 million self-employed people in Spain, the recently introduced progressive income tax rate for the self-employed – effectively relating the tax rate to income, as opposed to the previously used 'flat' rate – was a popular decision by the current government (La Moncloa, 2022). Although inequality in Spain – traditionally a high-inequality country – had been decreasing before the 2008 crisis, current levels are rising again, damaging social cohesion (European Commission, 2016) and threatening the stability of the coalition government. The country's unemployment rate is one of the highest in the EU, standing at 11.8% in September 2023 (Trading Economics, 2024).

Spain is home to approximately 1.4 million intra-EU movers, a 4% increase since 2015 (European Commission, 2021). According to the European Commission, Spain has the highest percentage of over-qualified workers (36%) in the EU, which includes tertiary degree holders and

individuals with upper-secondary education working in low-skilled positions (European Commission, 2016). Despite Spanish workers enduring very long working days – starting at 8 or 9 am in the morning, breaking for two hours for lunch, and returning to work until about 8 pm – the country's productivity rate is below the EU average (Gálvez, Tirado and Alcaráz, 2018; Eurostat, 2024a). This '*jornada partida*' [split working day] has an impact on Spanish families, and especially on the careers of working mothers, as gender inequality in relation to domestic tasks also affects the work-life balance of Spanish women (Gálvez, Tirado and Alcaráz, 2018).

### 3.7.2 Language

Spanish was the second most studied foreign language in 2020 in the general education curriculum in the EU, ranking fourth at the vocational education level (Eurostat, 2024b). Within Spain, the most spoken foreign language is English (11%), followed by French (5%), Italian (2%), Portuguese (1.2%), and German (1%); however, Spain is one of the countries in the EU where young people speak the least English (Language Knowledge EU, 2024).

### 3.7.3 Education system

Spain's educational model – like Ireland's – is based on a common core curriculum, a system in which after successfully completing primary education, all students progress to lower secondary level where they follow the same general common core curriculum (European Education and Culture Executive Agency [European Commission] *et al.*, 2022). Compulsory education in the country starts from 6 to 16 years of age, with students graduating at age 17 from general upper secondary programmes, and between 17-21 from VET programmes (OECD, 2023a). According to Eurostat data, around 48% of 25–34-year-olds in Spain have attained tertiary education, surpassing the EU target [45%] set for 2030 (Eurostat, 2023).

### 3.7.4 Health system

Spain's national health system – funded mainly through general taxation and managed at a regional (autonomous community) level – provides universal health coverage for all the country's nationals and residents alike (Bernal-Delgado *et al.*, 2018). Despite increasing health spending per capita over the last decade, dedicating 10.7% of GDP to health expenditure in 2021, Spain's health expenditure is below the EU average (Kyriakides, 2023). The life expectancy of the Spanish population was the highest in the EU (83 years) in 2022, and the country's rate of mortality from preventable and treatable illnesses fall below the EU average, which is a testament to the strength of the Spanish primary health care system (Kyriakides, 2023). However, the country

needs to address the current shortage of doctors and nurses in order to enhance access to and provision of services (Kyriakides, 2023).

Due to its geographical location, Spain has a mild climate all year round, with over 3,000 hrs of sunshine a year (Spanish Tourism, 2024). The Spanish weather and outdoor lifestyle can have a beneficial effect on individuals' mood and mental state, thus influencing both health and wellbeing. As will be detailed in the findings, the Spanish weather and lifestyle can strongly influence migration decisions.

## 3.8 Conclusion

This chapter contextualises the study, providing background to the particular socio-economic, cultural and political environment of the three countries in which the study participants live their lives and enact their careers. Specifically, the chapter aimed to highlight the complementarity, differences, and similitudes between Germany, Ireland, and Spain, within the broader integrative institutional and legal EU context. These macro-level contextual details are drawn upon in the findings chapters to explain the complementarity dimension of transnational living, and the complementarity of host and home country elements of relevance to the current conceptualisation of the sustainable career.

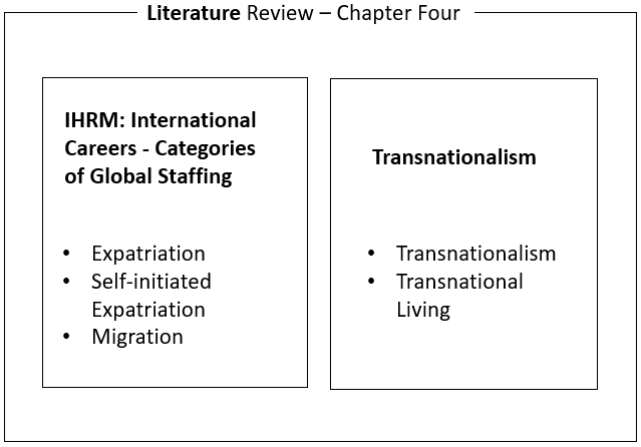
The following chapters – Chapters Four and Five – consider international business and IHRM literature, as well as career literature and interdisciplinary literature which inform the findings detailed in Chapters Six and Seven.

# Chapter Four – Literature Review: Forms of International Work and Transnationalism

## 4.1 Overview of Chapter Four (Literature Review – Part One)

The methodology (Chapter Two) and contextualisation of the study (Chapter Three) chapters have discussed the research approach, sample cohort, and context of this study in depth. Emphasising the inductive nature of this study, these chapters were presented at the beginning of the dissertation. It was within this inductive research approach that themes were elicited from participants' interviews and grouped within the overall literature framework presented in this and next chapters (Chapter Four and Chapter Five). This chapter, positioned within the international career literature and interdisciplinary literature on transnationalism, presents a traditional [narrative] literature review divided into two interrelated sections (Figure 4.1). First, the chapter gives an overview of the different classification or typology of internationally mobile individuals as pertaining to IHRM. As this dissertation is positioned within the IHRM, expatriation and career management literatures, the overview focuses specifically on individuals employed [and living] abroad. The chapter continues by introducing the anthropologically rooted concepts of transnationalism and transnational living [as an *action*], proposing them as more adequate definitions for the intra-EU mobile population which is the subject of this study, and their simultaneous engagement with both home and host countries within the supra socio-economic and regulatory context of the EU.

18. ***Figure 4.1: Chapter Four Structure***




The first section of this chapter (Section 4.2) presents the most common forms of classifying highly skilled professionals with careers spanning two or more geographical/international locations as depicted in the management literature. In particular, the focus of this section is the motivational differences (i.e. *knowing-why* (Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi, 1995)) relating to the geographical career mobility and associated career experiences of assigned expatriates (AEs), self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) and migrants. Differences in motivations for career mobility may indicate diverse and/or contrasting forms of host-country integration among the different

categories (c.f. Habti and Elo, 2019; Hajro *et al.*, 2019). While expatriation literature has traditionally been concerned with issues pertaining to AEs – both from an organisational and individual perspective – over the last decade the career experiences of SIEs have received increased attention within both interdisciplinary (Habti and Elo, 2019) and management research (Dickmann *et al.*, 2018; Andresen, Brewster and Suutari, 2020). However, even though migration has a considerable economic and socio-cultural impact on business, and through business, on societies (Žilinskaitė and Hajro, 2020; Hajro *et al.*, 2021), migrants [as a group] and migration as a phenomenon are topics that have received less attention from management scholars (Crowley-Henry, O' Connor and Al Ariss, 2018; Groutsis *et al.*, 2023). Thus, section 4.2 focuses on extant research in relation to the careers of these three main types of internationally-mobile professionals – AEs, SIEs, and migrants – concluding with a critique of these assigned categories, as it is argued they do not adequately reflect the fluidity of intra-EU movements. The section's closing argument is that contemporary international career mobility is more fluid than the categories assigned to it, as supported by the empirical data that will be presented in the findings chapter.

Next, the concept of transnationalism is put forward as a lens offering unique perspectives for a better-informed understanding of career mobility spanning both home and host countries. Section 4.3 presents transnationalism as an approach of going beyond oppositional (i.e. relating to either home or host country) considerations regarding international mobility in terms of the individuals' engagement – from a social, economic, cultural, and political perspective – with both home and host countries. The concept of transnationalism offers a dual and simultaneous home/host country focus, highlighting the connections to and engagement with both sending and receiving societies (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1992, 1995; Glick Schiller, 2010) at micro, meso, and macro levels (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx, 2016). The transnational paradigm has its roots in anthropological research and has guided research in interdisciplinary migration studies. However, although the term has been used to refer to operations of multinational corporations (MNCs) with subsidiaries across borders (Hirst and Thompson, 2007), the concept is not commonly used in business research. The chapter's argument is that the inclusion of ***simultaneous*** home and host country engagement in career-related considerations is particularly suitable to the supra-context of the EU. As mentioned in the context chapter (Chapter Three), EU citizens have the right to freely move across EU borders, live, work and provide services in any Member State (European Union, 2019). In this context, the international careers of EU citizens are more fluid, as it is possible for individuals to live their lives between two countries. To conclude this chapter, Section 4.4 introduces the dynamic

concept of transnational living and its associated dimensions as an alternative lens to examine international [intra-EU] careers.

## 4.2 IHRM and Migration/Expatriation: International Careers and Classification of Global Staffing Categories

### 4.2.1 Introduction

Within IHRM, the expatriation literature is generally concerned with aspects that link geographical mobility to work and organisations (Brewster, Suutari and Waxin, 2021), as well as the career experiences – at individual level – and organisational antecedents and outcomes – at meso level – of international moves (Cerdin and Le Pargneux, 2014; Hajro *et al.*, 2019; Pinto, Cabral-Cardoso and Werther Jr., 2020). At a macro level, studies have explored talent management of globally mobile individuals (Vaiman, Haslberger and Vance, 2015) and the effects of brain drain (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė and Žičkutė, 2017), as well as acculturation and/or integration issues (Hajro *et al.*, 2019). Many terms describe and define the myriad of forms in which individuals conduct work across borders (e.g. Andresen et al., 2014; McNulty and Brewster, 2017). In this regard, scholars have highlighted the definitional confusion (Andresen *et al.*, 2014; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; Tharenou, 2015; Crowley-Henry, O' Connor and Al Ariss, 2018) and disciplinary lack of consensus (McNulty and Brewster, 2017) the multiplicity of terminology in use has created.

The focus of this chapter are individuals who live and work in a different country to the one they are born in or raised (or are long-term nationals of and identify with), which is designated as their 'home country'. The most widely used categorisations for this cohort in the management discipline are as an assigned expatriate (AE) and as a self-initiated expatriate (SIE) (Andresen *et al.*, 2014; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; McNulty and Brewster, 2017). However, management scholars have also referred to these individuals as 'skilled migrants' (Crowley-Henry, O' Connor and Al Ariss, 2018; Crowley-Henry, O'Connor and Suarez-Bilbao, 2021) or 'qualified migrants' (Zikic, Bonache and Cerdin, 2010). The sections below will give an overview of the differences and similarities between these three broad types of international workers, focusing on their motivations for international mobility and host-country integration. While both the terms expatriate [AE and SIE] and migrant refer to individuals who live [and work] outside their home country (see Andresen et al., 2014; McNulty and Brewster, 2017), conceptual and practical differences exist between these categories of internationally mobile individuals.

Traditionally, the term expatriate referred to foreign workers or executives of multinational corporations who are temporarily stationed in a foreign country (Shaffer *et al.*,

2012). The term has been subsequently used to also designate individuals who initiate their international move of their own volition rather than being sent on a corporate-sponsored assignment (Suutari and Brewster, 2000). On the other hand, the literature often portrays migrants as individuals who move to another country for economic or socio-political reasons and plan to settle there permanently or for a longer period of time (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013). These perceptions highlight subtle and not-so-subtle differences in how these individuals are portrayed in the management literature (Al Ariss *et al.*, 2012; McNulty and Brewster, 2017).

While expats – both AEs and SIEs – are usually depicted as highly skilled workers who enjoy a relatively high standard of living (Tharenou, 2015; McNulty and Brewster, 2017), migrants are believed to face more significant challenges integrating into the host country society, finding employment, learning the host country language or adapting to the different cultural norms, and may experience discrimination or underemployment (Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010; Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Crowley-Henry, O' Connor and Al Ariss, 2018). At a macro [policy] level, Mügge and van der Haar argue that categories assigned to internationally mobile populations formally define which individuals are wanted or not in a particular host country and '*who* requires integration and *who* does not', without taking into consideration the heterogeneity of these populations in terms of, for instance, their motivations, home country context (i.e. low-income, middle-income or high-income countries) and socio-demographics (Mügge and Van Der Haar, 2016, p. 77).

Due to the shorter timeframe of their stay in the host country, the literature suggests that AEs tend to maintain their national identity and cultural heritage while living abroad (Adams and van de Vijver, 2015). Instead, a longer, open-ended stay in the host country may necessitate SIEs and migrants to give up some aspects of their native culture in order to assimilate/integrate into their new environment (Haslberger and Dickmann, 2016; Hajro *et al.*, 2019). Overall, while the distinction between expatriates and migrants is often nuanced, it reflects – particularly in the case of SIEs –underlying perceptions regarding the individual's social status, their reasons for moving abroad, and their perceived level of integration into or possible reception by the host society.

Traditional and more contemporary forms of global staffing contemplated in the IHRM and expatriation literatures are presented next. Although the author acknowledges there are many forms and categories of global staffing, the focus of this dissertation is on traditional or assigned expatriates (AEs), self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), and [skilled] migrants, and the differences between these categories in terms of motivation for mobility, the intended duration of their stay abroad, and the motivation and barriers to integrate they may encounter. An

overview of the definitions and assumptions found in the literature with regard to these main categories is presented in Table 4.1. Finally, the argument is presented for recognising simultaneity in global mobility, particularly within the EU context, in order to provide a more complete picture of the geographical flexibility present in intra-EU careers.

### 4.2.2 Assigned Expatriates (AEs): Definition and Assumptions

Shaffer and colleagues, in reviewing 114 articles focusing on career-related issues of global workers, defined traditional or assigned expatriates (AEs) as 'employees working for business organisations, who are sent overseas on a temporary basis to complete a time-based task or accomplish an organisational goal' (Shaffer *et al.*, 2012, p. 1286). AEs are generally managers or professionals in relatively senior positions who receive organisational support for the international move (Tharenou, 2015; McNulty and Brewster, 2017). Thus, organisational support and temporality are considered to be the main differentiating characteristics of this form of international worker (Doherty, Dickmann and Mills, 2011; Shaffer *et al.*, 2012; Andresen *et al.*, 2014; Tharenou, 2015; McNulty and Brewster, 2017). These and related definitions of AEs (see Table 4.1) imply that, in accepting an international assignment, AEs' motivations are aligned with organisational objectives. Career advancement and development have been found to be AE's primary motivations for accepting or seeking international assignments (Doherty, Dickmann and Mills, 2011), although lifestyle issues are also considered (Cerdin and Le Pargneux, 2010). Surveying 494 German expatriates in managerial roles, Stahl et al. (2002) found that close to 90% believed their assignment would improve their career prospects in general, while 59% believed it would facilitate career advancement within the organisation. A study by Jokinen, Brewster and Suutari (2008) supports this finding as their Finish sample improved their knowing-how (i.e. skills and abilities) and knowing-whom (i.e. networks) after their international assignment, therefore increasing their career capital.

Organisational support in form of cross-cultural training tailored to the prospective host country has been found to ease AEs' host country sociocultural adjustment (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001). Expatriate adjustment refers to how comfortable individuals are with the different cultural aspects of the host country, and intersects the expatriate's personal, organisational, and host country contexts (Takeuchi, 2010). Since AEs are sent to the host country for a specific period of time – typically between one and five years (Doherty, Dickmann and Mills, 2011) – their level of host-country language identification tends to be low, even if they have undergone pre- or on-assignment language training (Peltokorpi and Zhang, 2022). Peltokorpi and Pudelko argue that language identification goes beyond [foreign] language proficiency, as it refers to how individuals identify themselves and others through their way of learning and using the host

country language (Peltokorpi and Pudelko, 2021). A study by Ren and colleagues (2014) using job/demands-resources theory, found that AEs demonstrated agency in adjusting to the host country in general and the specific assignment in particular by proactively managing cross-cultural demands such as cultural novelty and host country language proficiency (HCLP). Aside from facilitating host country adjustment, foreign language proficiency has been shown to contribute to career success within MNCs (Peltokorpi, 2023), as well as enhancing personal reputation and perceived performance (Lauring, Vulchanov and Stoermer, 2023).

### 4.2.3 Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs): Definition and Assumptions

In contrast with AEs, SIEs initiate their geographical move of their own accord, pursuing individual goals, and without organisational support (Suutari and Brewster, 2000). Cerdin and Selmer (2014), advocating for conceptual clarity, identified four criteria necessary to define an SIE: (1) self-initiated international relocation, (2) intention to seek regular employment, (3) intentions of a temporary stay, and (4) skill/professional qualification (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014, p. 1290). Brewster, Suutari and Waxin (2021) further qualify the self-initiation of the expatriation by the manner in which SIEs obtained a job, and moved abroad: (a) either travelling to the host country and applying for a job once there, (b) applying for a job from their home country and then moving once they secure a job (some might subsequently get support to travel by the organisations employing them), or (c) AEs that decide to stay abroad, working for a different organisation, and therefore become SIEs (Brewster, Suutari and Waxin, 2021). There seems to be consensus in the literature that, aside from a self-initiated move (i.e. lack of organisational support) reflecting personal rather than organisational motives, the main differentiating factor between AEs and SIEs is the amount of time the latter remain in the host country (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; McNulty and Brewster, 2017). In a recent publication reviewing two decades of research on SIEs, Brewster and colleagues defined a SIE as 'someone living and working legally for a temporary period in a country that is not their own. SIEs are people who meet those criteria and who made the decision to work in another country themselves' (Brewster, Suutari and Waxin, 2021, p. 5).

SIEs have been found to display a higher level of agency when compared with AEs (Andresen *et al.*, 2014; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). Like AEs, SIEs are generally portrayed as being highly skilled, and thus belonging to higher status professions or occupations. Indeed, in their definitional boundaries, Cerdin and Selmer suggest that SIEs must have professional qualifications, or be highly skilled (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014), confirming a generalised assumption that these individuals might possess managerial skillsets (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2014; Tharenou, 2015). However, many empirical studies portray SIEs in

non-managerial roles and professions (e.g. Chen *et al.*, 2022; Rosa González, Barker and Shah, 2022; Myers and Thorn, 2023). As with AEs, SIEs' host-country adjustment is also a well-researched topic in the literature (Brewster, Suutari and Waxin, 2021). As their host country stays tend to be longer, SIEs are generally more invested in the host country, have a higher degree of HCLP and thus tend to be more socially and culturally integrated (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2014; Peltokorpi and Zhang, 2022). The effect of HCPL on adjustment, however, could depend on the type of job the SIE performs abroad, as a study of academic SIEs in the Middle East found that while previous expatriation experience positively influenced adjustment, HCLP was not related to adjustment (Isakovic and Forseth Whitman, 2013).

### 4.2.4 Category Overlap

Definitional issues and boundaries between AEs and SIEs are still taking centre stage in the literature (Waxin and Brewster, 2020). McNulty and Vance (2017) argue that in contemporary careers there is a category overlap between AEs and SIEs, as career progression may imply moves between being an AE and an SIE at different stages of life and career. Therefore, AEs can become SIEs by extending their host country stay and moving to a different organisation (McNulty and Vance, 2017). In a similar manner, migrants also self-initiate their international move, and therefore the boundaries between the SIE and migrant categories might blur (Brewster, Suutari and Waxin, 2021). For example, a SIE can experience high host country identification, elongating their stay in the host country to a longer 'open ended' timeframe (Jonczyk Sédès, Miedtank and Oliver, 2022). If an SIE's host-country stay changes from 'open-ended' to permanent, they might be considered a migrant. Andresen and colleagues address this blurring of definitional boundaries by considering migrant as an umbrella term which includes assigned and self-initiated expatriation (Andresen *et al.*, 2014). Equally, other disciplines [such as economics, human geography, etc] which deal with international labour issues, do not differentiate between the expatriate [including SIEs] and migrant groups. Indeed, in practice, there seem to be as many coincident points between AEs and SIEs as there are between SIEs and migrants – depending on the conception and assumptions of the term, which are presented in the next section. See also Table 4.1 below for a summary.

### 5. *Table 4.1 International mobility categories, definitions, and assumptions*

| CONCEPT | DEFINITION | DIFFERENTIATION/ASSUMPTION | AUTHOR(S) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **EXPATRIATES (AEs and SIEs)** | | | |
| Assigned Expatriates (AEs) | Employees of business organisations who are sent overseas on a temporary basis to complete a time-based task or accomplish an organisational goal | Organisationally-led move<br>Fulfilling organisational goals<br>Usually in relatively senior positions<br>Better T&Cs than local employees<br>Temporality (typically 1-5 years)<br>Low level of agency<br><br>Socio-cultural adjustment rather than integration | Suutari & Brewster (2000)<br>Harrison et al (2004)<br>Shaffer et al (2012)<br>McNulty & Brewster (2017)<br><br>Tharenou (2015) |
| Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) | Individuals simultaneously fulfilling four conceptual criteria: (a) self-initiated international relocation, (b) regular employment (intentions), (c) intentions of a temporary stay, and (d) skilled/professional qualifications. | Individual agency<br>Employment in the host country<br>Temporality<br>Highly skilled / qualifications<br><br>'High status' individuals | Cerdin & Selmer (2014)<br><br>Tharenou (2015) |
| Business expatriates | Legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country of which they are not a citizen in order to accomplish a career-related goal being relocated abroad either by an organisation, by self-initiation, or directly employed within the host-country | Includes both expatiates & SIEs<br>Legal employment in the host country<br>Non-citizens<br>Temporality | McNulty & Brewster (2017) |
| **CONCEPT** | **DEFINITION** | **DIFFERENTIATION/ASSUMPTION** | **AUTHOR(S)** |
| **MIGRANT** | | | |
| Migrant | Individual who moves from one country in order to settle in another for a long period of time or permanently | Long-term perspective (settlement)<br>Assimilation and/or integration as goal | Cerdin & Selmer (2014) |
| Migrant | Any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is. | NA | UN Migration Agency (IOM) World Migration Report (2020) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Skilled migrants | Specialized migrant labour force<br><br>Individuals that have a university degree or extensive experience in a given field<br><br>Qualified individuals who move internationally on their own initiative and intend to settle permanently | Labour market / Human capital view<br><br>High educational / skill level<br><br>Intended permanency (assimilation and/or integration as goal) | Bosetti et al (2015)<br>Docquier & Lodigiani (2010)<br><br>Iredale (1999)<br><br>Tharenou (2015) |
| Qualified migrants | Individuals who self-initiate international careers that are both risky and unpredictable, with moves typically being long-term and often involving both career and life transitions | Individual agency<br>'High status' individuals<br>Temporality<br>Physical & psychological mobility (adjustment) | Zikic et al (2010) |
| Lifestyle migrants | Relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life | Choice: 'how' to live as well as 'where' to live<br>Migration as a process, not a one-off act | Benson & O'Reilly (2016) |
| **CONCEPT** | **DEFINITION** | **DIFFERENTIATION/ASSUMPTION** | **AUTHOR(S)** |
| **OTHER** | | | |
| Intra-EU mobility | The movement of EU citizens to live and work in another EU country | Individual agency<br>Move facilitated by EU legal framework | Bartolini et al (2017) |

### 4.2.5 Migrants: Definition and Assumptions

Migration is a complex process (de Haas, Castles and Miller, 2022). Within the economics discipline, the general assumption is that migration decisions are mainly motivated by the availability (or lack of) of labour market opportunities (de Haas *et al.*, 2019; de Haas, Castles and Miller, 2022). This assumption underscores the perception that individuals generally migrate from underdeveloped to developed countries (Clemens, 2016; Hendriks and Bartram, 2016). Notwithstanding, interdisciplinary and business scholarship assume migration motives to be broader, in particular when referring to the international movement of skilled and/or qualified professionals (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Bartolini, Gropas and Triandafyllidou, 2017; Fischer-Souan, 2019). Regardless of the underpinning disciplinary assumption, the migration process tends to be conceptualised or classified according to migration binaries, such as temporary versus permanent, regular versus irregular, skilled versus unskilled, and voluntary versus forced (i.e. migrants versus refugees) (King, 2012). Indeed, it is the temporary versus

permanent distinction that management scholars mainly use to differentiate between [labour] migrants and [assigned and self-initiated] expatriates (Andresen *et al.*, 2014; McNulty and Brewster, 2017), as it is assumed that migrants move with the idea of staying for the long term or permanently, with the goal to assimilate or integrate into the host society (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; Tharenou, 2015). Scholars have pointed at the lack of (host country) language proficiency of migrants as a barrier to their career development in the host country (Zikic, Bonache and Cerdin, 2010; Al Ariss *et al.*, 2012; Zikic, 2015). From an organisational and career perspective, a recent study by Fitzsimons, Baggs and Brannen found that migrants working in a language other than their native language earned 7.6% less than those working on their native language (Fitzsimmons, Baggs and Brannen, 2020). It is logical to assume that a high degree of language proficiency will be needed to assimilate or integrate into the host country's society, however, integration efforts are also contrasted with host-country communities' feelings of hostility or rejection, particularly in cases of political uncertainty, such as Brexit (Jonczyk Sédès, Miedtank and Oliver, 2022).

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), while acknowledging that currently there is no universally accepted definition for migrant at an international level, defines migrant as 'an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently and for a variety of reasons' (IOM, 2008). From an international management [work-related] perspective, the IOM definition is too broad, as it takes into account internal [within country] as well as external [ex-patria] movements. As previously mentioned, Andresen and colleagues, in attempting to clarify the definitional confusion surrounding international mobility terms, considered the term migrant to be an umbrella term for all people who moved across international borders, changing their regular residency – which identified AEs and SIEs as migrant subgroups (Andresen *et al.*, 2014).

Scholars have critiqued the lack of interest from international business and management disciplines regarding global migration, even though the phenomenon clearly impacts individuals, organisations, and societies (Hajro *et al.*, 2021). When it has piqued disciplinary interest, the emphasis has been on skilled migration, from the perspective of work-related international movements. A skilled migrant is defined as 'having a university degree or extensive experience in a given field' (Iredale, 2001, p. 90). It is noted, however, that low-skilled migration is equally crucial for some societies with large shares of high-skilled natives, as migrants tend to do jobs that natives find unattractive (Constant, 2014). This was particularly evident during the recent

COVID19 pandemic, when countries like the UK had to (momentarily) rethink their migration policy as they needed migrants to ease a labour crisis in the agricultural sector (Reynolds, 2020).

As with expatriation and self-initiated expatriation, migration studies span multiple levels of analysis. At individual level, the limited migration-related management literature has focused on migrants' careers (Crowley-Henry, O' Connor and Al Ariss, 2018; Zikic and Voloshyna, 2023) – including underemployment and skill underutilisation (O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2020) – their integration in and adjustment to the host country (Hajro *et al.*, 2019) and their motivations for mobility (Verwiebe *et al.*, 2010; Fischer-Souan, 2019). At the meso level of analysis the literature focus is generally on IHRM and issues of talent attraction and/or retention (Almeida and Fernando, 2017; Crowley-Henry, O'Connor and Suarez-Bilbao, 2021). Migration research spans also the macro level of analysis, in terms of policies and rules regulating the flow or mobility of workers and their (positive and negative) effect on the receiving societies economically, socially, and politically (Groutsis *et al.*, 2023), as well as the effect for the sending and receiving countries, generally expressed in terms of brain drain, brain gain (Docquier and Rapoport, 2012; Hasselbalch, 2019) and, of late, brain circulation (Friesen and Collins, 2017; de Haas *et al.*, 2019).

Indeed, the [macro] economic and migration literature, when considering skilled migrants, has focused traditionally on a brain drain/brain gain dichotomy (Docquier and Lodigiani, 2010; Docquier and Rapoport, 2012). The literature predominantly deems migrants to be from emerging and developing economies, thus as well as being perceived to be at a disadvantage due to their nationality (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013), migrants are believed to display less agency in their international move (Hajro *et al.*, 2019). Nonetheless, there has been renewed scholarly interest on brain circulation (Friesen and Collins, 2017; de Haas *et al.*, 2019) and transnationalism (Levitt and Schiller 2004; Kerr et al. 2016). In maintaining ties and engaging at different levels with two or more nations/societies (De Haas 2005), transnational migrants may avoid the either/or decision in regard to economic and knowledge-based contributions, as well as issues regarding disadvantages due to nationality and/or lack of agency. The transnational approach to migration questions the linear push-pull, no-return model (King, 2012). Individual social relationships and practices [ways of being] and ways of belonging [identity] are equally important for transnational migrants, for which the concept of 'home' is fluid because it means more than one country (Levitt, 2004; Schiller, 2013). This fluidity, reflecting the constant, ongoing, and simultaneous engagement and identification with both home and host countries is what this dissertation intends to address, in exploring and unpacking career mobility within the EU.

### 4.2.6 Unidirectional views of the migration phenomenon versus a more fluid understanding of migration within the European Union (EU): Critique and conclusions

There seems to be general consensus among business scholars in considering temporality (i.e. the amount of time the individual spends in the host country) as the boundary condition that differentiates expatriates – whether assigned or self-initiated – from migrants (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; McNulty and Brewster, 2017). Temporality, however, doesn't seem to be the concern of other disciplines, which rather use the terms immigrant or emigrant to differentiate the directionality of the migration flow (i.e. from host country, receiving perspective, or home country, sending perspective), and quantify these according to migrant stocks and flows (Docquier and Rapoport, 2012) from a labour market-oriented perspective (Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020). Interdisciplinary research does present, however, similar definitional discordances regarding the classification of internationally mobile individuals. The issue often arises from the definition variables used; for example, highly qualified can be defined either as possessing a 2-year college education, or a Master's degree – an inconsistency that is reflected in immigration policies and affects individuals who, not being considered 'highly skilled' or 'highly qualified', face harsher entry barriers (de Haas *et al.*, 2019).

Interestingly, the migration literature notes that [some] highly-skilled migrants have a high degree of mobility and thus tend not to settle, instead continuing to be mobile (Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020), which partly contradicts the demarcation between expatriates and migrants in terms of temporality that some of the management literature supports. Perhaps, as a recent study of Portuguese nurses in post-Brexit UK suggested, there are many contextual factors influencing skilled migrants' (the study uses the term 'labour diaspora') staying versus re-migrating [or returning] decisions, not the least their embeddedness not only in the host-country society, but also in co-ethnic groups, collegial groups, expatriate bubbles and other social formations (Elo, Silva and Vlačić, 2023).

Drawing on interdisciplinary research, Table 4.1 above lists the most common definitions used to design internationally mobile individuals, including both research-based and practice/policy definitions. It should be noted that nuances to these definitions apply in languages other than English, reflecting also cultural assignations of meaning (Al Ariss *et al.*, 2012; Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013). However, since most research and policy on migration is written in English, for this dissertation only English-language definitions are presented. Thus, definitions of migration and other types of geographical mobility vary not only depending on the discipline or viewpoint, but also the language used to describe them and the general context in which they take place, as well as whether they take a home (sending) or host (receiving) country

perspective (Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020). According to the International Migration Research Network (IMISCOE), there is also a difference in the perception – by host country societies and the migrants themselves – of migration movements originating in the Global North and the Global South, which affect migrants' mobility opportunities and outcomes (Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020). This difference in perception is reflected on the nomenclature used – in particular in policy documents – with Global South to Global North movements considered 'migration' while Global North to Global North migration is instead referred to as 'mobility' (Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020). While perception issues are beyond the focus in this dissertation, these perception nuances underpin the issues of migration integration and inclusion in host countries, as well as the perceptions and cultural snobbery that exists within international careers.

De Haas (2021) proposes that migration can be best understood as a function of migrants' capabilities and aspirations, arguing that this distinction allows for the more nuanced and realistic exploration of the interplay between migrants' agency and the structures underpinning the dynamics of the migration process. 'Migration *aspirations* are a function of people's general life aspirations and perceived geographical opportunity structures, while migration *capabilities* are contingent on positive [freedom to] and negative [freedom from] liberties' (de Haas, 2021, p. 17). Opportunity structures refer to structural conditions present in both home and host countries that affect an individual's desires, drives and/or aspirations (de Haas, 2021). The focus of this dissertation is on voluntary, legal, intra-EU migration of EU citizens, therefore, reflecting this focus, the definitions presented in Table 4.1 exclude involuntary and/or illegal movements. Equally, echoing the management disciplinary interest, non-work-related movements (such as students, retirees, etc) are excluded, presenting instead definitions that include only work-related international movements and/or extended stays (for example, when a student, upon completion of their studies, obtains a job in the host country and stays for an extended period of time).

IHRM literature, and, specifically, literature on expatriation (both assigned and self-initiated) and skilled migration, has not, to date, adequately reflected the types of international careers that are common in the unifying regulatory and economic space of the EU. This shortcoming is noteworthy especially when taking into consideration new ways of working, such as 'work from anywhere' and hybrid work. While recognising the value of setting boundary conditions for each of the previously discussed international worker categories – AEs, SIEs, and [skilled] migrants – this study explores how in practice this classification, and more importantly, individuals' self-identification (within or outside the parameters contemplated in the literature) is more fluid than these rigid categories convey. As it has been mentioned in the literature, an

AE can become an SIE along their international career, and an SIE can become a migrant, perhaps going back to being an SIE if they decide to move country again (McKenna and Richardson, 2016; Brewster, Suutari and Waxin, 2021). Given the limitations of existing nomenclature described so far in this chapter, this dissertation also considers interdisciplinary migration research and the concept of transnationalism as an alternative to reflect contemporary trends in the world of work and international careers, whereby unidirectional views of migration/expatriation become circular or more fluid. The concepts of transnationalism and transnational living, which contemplate more fluid forms of international movements, are detailed in the next section.

## 4.3 Transnationalism

### 4.3.1 Introduction

This chapter so far has highlighted that current IHRM categorisations of international workers do not capture the reality of contemporary work-related international movements in terms of transnational engagement – especially in the singular regulatory and political environment of the EU (see Chapter Three). Equally, within the business discipline, expatriation and migration studies are generally focused on high-status employees such as managers (Dickmann, 2012; Suutari *et al.*, 2018; Crowley-Henry, O'Connor and Suarez-Bilbao, 2021), healthcare professionals (Bozionelos, 2009; Chand, 2019; Rosa González, Barker and Shah, 2021) and academics (Fernando and Cohen, 2016; Chen *et al.*, 2022), which do not accurately reflect the wide spectrum of professions and occupations of international workers that exist in practice. This study concurs with Brewster, Suutari, and Waxin's argument that 'to fully capture [international worker] diversity [we need to] expand the research agenda to the types of SIEs not yet studied and to undertake serious comparisons between the types we do study' (Brewster, Suutari and Waxin, 2021, p. 326). Moreover, this PhD undertaking highlights the importance of the particular context(s) where international careers take place (McNulty and Brewster, 2017).

In terms of context, intra-EU mobility, or the movement of citizens from one European Union (EU) member country to another, is a specific type of Global North to Global North movement that has become a prominent feature in recent years (Barbulescu, 2017). Its prominence can be attributed to the lifting of restrictions on labour mobility within the EU as a result of its enlargement over the past few decades (Hasselbalch, 2019). As previously mentioned, the different conceptualisations [AE, SIE, migrant] presented in Table 4.1 do not quite reflect the idiosyncrasies of intra-EU career-related movement or relocation in an EU context. The following sections describe the rationale for considering transnationalism as an alternative focus pertaining to contemporary international mobility – specifically in an EU

context (see Chapter Three) – and examine the concepts of transnationalism and transnational living in more detail.

### 4.3.2 Transnationalism: Rationale for considering an alternative focus pertaining to international mobility

Stemming from the social anthropology and migration literatures, the transnational paradigm posits that migration, as a continuous process, connects mobile individuals ***simultaneously*** to both their home and host countries (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1992, 1995), as some migrants continue to have an active 'presence' in their homeland at the same time as they form part of their host-country societies (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). Transnationalism is defined in this dissertation as "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992, p.1). As will be detailed in the following sections, while the intensity or frequency of transnational engagement can vary according to individuals motivations and life stages (Itzigsohn *et al.*, 1999), transnationalism necessitates concurrent participation in socio-economic, cultural and/or political activities – in both home and host countries – which can be structured/regular (e.g. voting) or informal/flexible (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999; Portes, 2001). Transnationalism, then, challenges the assumption that migration is a unidirectional, once-off process, suggesting instead that even 'settled' one-time migrants may maintain or be embedded in cross-border networks (Amelina and Horvath, 2017). Traditionally, studies on the international movement of people generally presented the unidirectional view of either sending (home countries) or receiving nation states (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1992). Interdisciplinary migration scholarship generally focused on either host country integration/assimilation concerns (from both an individual and macro perspective), or home country development issues (Mügge, 2016) from a resource loss (e.g. skilled labour) and/or gain (e.g. remittances) perspective (de Haas, 2010). In this sense, at a macro level, migrants are viewed as economic assets for countries in need of labour (Massey *et al.*, 1993).

From an individual (micro) perspective, migration is believed to be driven by an awareness of better economic opportunities elsewhere, promoting the international pursuit of human and economic development, as well as access to financial, socio-political and developmental resources that can contribute to lifestyle improvement (de Haas *et al.*, 2019). Rational (or 'predictable') decision-making is also often assumed in studies examining migration and/or self-initiated expatriation processes from a career perspective. However, recent studies suggest that there are more elements at play, and mobility decisions are not always rational or predictable (Dickmann and Watson, 2017; Crowley-Henry, O'Connor and Suarez-Bilbao, 2021).

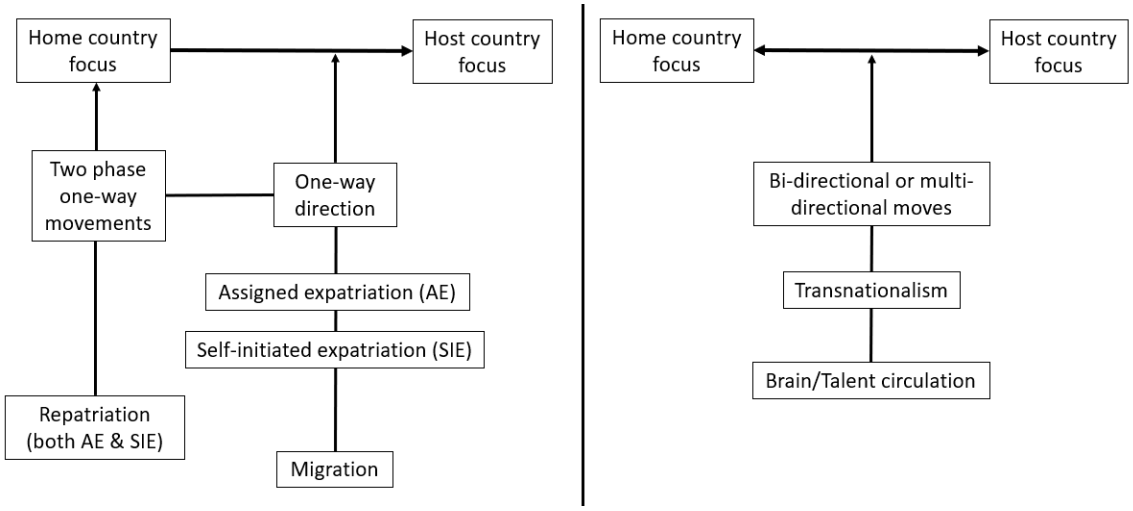
While the management-related expatriation and migration literatures have explored more complex mobility patterns, such as continued expatriation to different host countries – as in the case of global careerists (Suutari and Mäkelä, 2007; Mäkelä and Suutari, 2009) – repatriation (Baruch, Altman and Tung, 2016; Kierner and Suutari, 2018) or return migration (Gittins and Fink, 2015), these studies do not take a transnational (multi-nation engagement) perspective. A notable exception is a study questioning the assumption that return migration intentions and/or the maintenance of transnational ties are the cause or effect of migrants' failure to integrate in the host country (De Haas and Fokkema, 2011).

The process of international mobility begins much earlier than the actual move. Scholars have investigated the antecedents and motivations for mobility of highly skilled individuals from many disciplinary viewpoints. As mentioned in the previous section (Section 4.3.2), the factors that 'push' individuals to leave their countries of origin or home countries and/or 'pull' them to a particular host country have been discussed from a standpoint of socio-economic and political macro-level dynamics (Favell, 2014; Urbański, 2022), and also from a socio-cultural (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė and Žičkutė, 2017) or even emotional (Mack *et al.*, 2020) perspective at the individual level of analysis. From an organisational perspective, the drivers of expatriation reflect strategic IHRM needs of knowledge sharing between HQ and subsidiaries (Furusawa and Brewster, 2018) and talent attraction and development (Vaiman, Haslberger and Vance, 2015; McNulty and Hutchings, 2016), while for individual expatriates represent the pursuit of career-related goals (Dickmann *et al.*, 2018; Lazarova *et al.*, 2021). Management scholars have analysed the different motivations to expatriate of both AEs and SIEs, finding that in general specific career motivations are more important to AEs, while SIEs also take into consideration the 'adventure' aspect, host-country related decisions (i.e. location, reputation, political and socio-economic environment), expected quality of life, and relational factors (Brewster, Suutari and Waxin, 2021). What these interdisciplinary studies have in common is a unidirectional [generally host-country related], one-time view of migration/expatriation, overlooking the fact that migration is a dynamic process and as such it is safe to assume that migrants' motivations to move [or to settle] are not static and thus may change over time (cf. Brewster, Suutari and Waxin, 2021).

Unidirectional and push/pull conceptions of migration have been criticized for their simplistic and functionalist view of the process of moving across international borders, as being aware of individual drivers of migration does not explain this dynamic process (De Haas, 2021). Business-related studies have been, in the last couple of decades, moving away from a functionalist paradigm and/or a purely instrumental view of migration (Bosetti, Cattaneo and Verdolini, 2015), and increasingly focusing also on [both assigned and self-initiated] expatriates' general (physical, cognitive, relational) well-being (Biswas, Mäkelä and Andresen, 2022). In other

words, taking a whole-life view (i.e. considering both work-related and nonwork-related elements) of international careers (O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2020). Equally, expatriation studies have considered the two parts of the expatriation journey – expatriation and repatriation (Dickmann *et al.*, 2018) – emphasising home-host country links and the utilisation of host-country produced capital (Gunasekara *et al.*, 2021). However, a unidirectional perspective still prevails in expatriation studies, considering expatriation and repatriation processes as two (separate) one-direction movements. On the other hand, diaspora studies do reflect a bidirectional or transnational focus (Faist, 2010; Elo, 2014), as does the notion of brain circulation (Tung, 2008; Chand, 2019). Figure 4.2 below represents the interdisciplinary shift from one-way conceptions of migration/expatriation to more dynamic bi-directional and multi-directional movements.

19. ***Figure 4.2: One-way conceptions of international moves versus bi-directional or multi-directional perspectives***




***Source: Literature synthesis developed by the author (Suarez-Bilbao, B., 2023).***

For example, Stoyanov, Woodward, and Stoyanova (2018) found that Bulgarian entrepreneurs living in London leverage their ethnic identity to access resources and facilitate transnational knowledge flows between home and host country. The authors argue that the Bulgarian diaspora use their 'transactive memory' (individual knowledge transferred to the group) to learn from collective experiences, improving their ability to interact with business networks and therefore providing them with competitive advantage (Stoyanov, Woodward and Stoyanova, 2018). From an African development perspective, Chand (2019) argues that the involvement of the African diaspora in the USA in transnational home-country development projects (such as educational or health-related projects) and political lobbying will, in the long term, encourage brain circulation and foster institutional capacity development in African

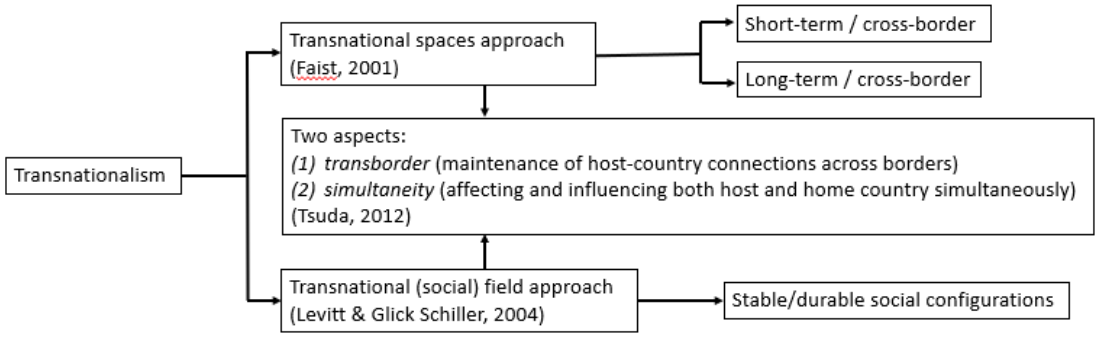
countries. Links between migration or self-initiated expatriation and transnational entrepreneurship are also suggested in the literature (Saxenian, 2006; Selmer *et al.*, 2018; Stoyanov, Woodward and Stoyanova, 2018).

In light of this gap, the following section considers transnationalism and transnational living (Hardill, 2004; Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021) as an alternative to more fixed international worker categories. Two decades ago, Vertovec called for migration studies to examine 'the ways in which transnational social structures and practices have emerged in light of opportunity structures – in both sending and receiving contexts – and how they factor into migrants' own desires and strategies for conducting their lives transnationally' (Vertovec, 2003, p. 653). Opportunity structures, in terms of transnational living, will be explored further in the following sections and presented in the findings.

### 4.3.3 The Transnational Paradigm

Sociological perspectives on migration are concerned with the social structures aiding/obstructing the movement of people across international borders, as well as the different socially-constructed forms of belonging linked to these movements (Amelina and Horvath, 2017). Social scientists agree that, when encountering different cultures as a result of an international move, individuals generally go through a psychological process of acculturation, which ideally leads to their psychological and socio-cultural adjustment in, or integration into, the host-country society (Adams and van de Vijver, 2015). Research on migration experienced a paradigm shift during the 1990s (Vertovec, 2003; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007), mirroring societal transformations that departed from the dominant scholarly perspective of the socio-cultural and economic integration, acculturation and/or assimilation of migrants into the host country society (Berry, 2005; Gonzalez-Loureiro, Kiessling and Dabic, 2015). Scholarly attention shifted from the dichotomous perspective of the leaving/arrival (one-way population movements) and/or settlement of migrants (Amelina and Horvath, 2017) to the idea of a transnational approach (see Figure 4.3 below) to investigate the phenomena linking these 'coming' and 'staying' processes and their effects (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1992, 1995). Indeed, in the early 2000s, interest in socio-economic and political linkages across borders increased among social scientists (Vertovec, 2003, p. 641).

20. ***Figure 4.3: Transnationalism: concept synthesis***




***Source: Literature synthesis developed by the author (Suarez-Bilbao, B., 2023). Created from Faist (2001), Levitt & Glick-Schiller (2004) and Tsuda (2012)***

As previously mentioned, drawing from socio-anthropological research, transnationalism recognises that some migrants continue to have an active presence in their homeland at the same time as they form part of their host-country societies (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007) and thus are embedded in cross-border networks (Amelina and Horvath, 2017). Arguably, transnational practices occur to an even greater extent in contemporary times, due to technology advancements facilitating alternative ways of working (i.e. remote and hybrid work) and engaging (i.e. via social media) with others easily across international boundaries. In this sense, Tedeschi and colleagues consider that 'transnationalism per se is not linear, but rather a fluctuating, in-becoming process'; thus, a transnational individual may go through phases of being and/or ceasing to be transnational (Tedeschi, Vorobeva and Jauhiainen, 2022, p. 612).

In a special issue covering the topic, Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt argue that it is **t**he scale of simultaneity and intensity of activities and networks across borders which provide the social structures enabling transnationalism (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999). Migrants living transnational lives 'cut across national boundaries and bring two societies into a single social field' (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1992, p. 1), while 'making values from two worlds fit' (Levitt, 2001, p. 97) with their lives. As an example, Glick Schiller and colleagues share the experiences of Haitian, Grenadian and Filipino migrants living and working in New York, who are also engaged in home-country development activities via their respective hometown associations, and/or whose home-country institutions (in the case of Philippines) actively promote remittance-sending practices and home-country visits (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1992). A similar home-coming strategy was used by the Irish government in 2013 with The Gathering, an initiative designed to appeal to and reconnect with the Irish Diaspora, which was encouraged – using emotional slogans like 'Be part of it' or 'Come home' – to participate in a home-bound, year-long festival promoting Irish culture, tourism and Diaspora connections (Miley, 2013). However, The Gathering initiative was criticised by some Irish Diaspora groups as

it was deemed to be mainly tourism-centred and revenue-driven, instead of striving to encompass the full range of social, political, and economic transnational relationships between Ireland and its diverse Diaspora (Devlin Trew and Pierse, 2018).

Indeed, migrant transnationalism scholars, while highlighting economic transactions as one of the key elements of migrant home-host country networks and ties, have argued that transnationalism transcends purely economic exchanges (Guarnizo, 2003; Guarnizo, Portes and Haller, 2003). From a behavioural perspective, Levitt (2010) identifies different aspects of and engagement with transnational practices, namely social, economic, and political transnationalism. These categories of being transnational reflect the effect transnational practices have not only on internationally mobile populations but also the socio-economic and political context(s) in which they are embedded (Bilgili, Leung and Malinen, 2023). Apart from transnational behaviour in the socio-economic and political arenas, migrants have different ways of belonging to transnational fields which are generally prompted by recollection and nostalgia (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). For example, migrants can identify with or feel an attachment to a particular country (other than the one they were born in) from having a positive experience when spending a period of study there in their youth, and this (positive) emotional attachment can influence their subsequent international move (Bryła, 2019). Transnational ways of belonging are of increased importance when dealing with issues regarding cultural diversity in terms of social cohesion (Bilgili, Leung and Malinen, 2023), which can have an effect both at organisational and macro/country levels, as well as at the individual level in terms of the individual's social integration in the host country while maintaining home-country engagement.

### 4.3.4 Transnationalism: Simultaneity and Intensity

Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) proposed a social field perspective in studying migration, distinguishing between different (transnational) ways of being and diverse ways of belonging, encompassing both the individual who migrates and those who remain in the home country (and whom (s)he has relational or professional ties with). The social field perspective reflects how 'while some migrants identify more with one society than the other, the majority seem to maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation' (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1992, p. 11). Apart from the migrants themselves, the transnational perspective considers different actors within the transnational social field – such as native populations, community groups and national governments (Bilgili, Leung and Malinen, 2023). Transnational social fields can be understood as transnational social spaces spanning social and professional relationships, as well as institutions (Faist, 2010). However, a social field approach requires not only the existence of transnational networks, but the individual's *consciousness* of

being part of them simultaneously (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). Notably, in an era of globalisation and new ways of working, 'transnational bonds no longer have to be cemented by migration or by exclusive territorial claims. In the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artefacts and through a shared imagination' (Cohen, 1996, p. 516). Itzigsohn and colleagues distinguish between 'broad' and 'narrow' transnationalism according to the intensity of the transnational involvement. Broad transnationalism indicates 'only sporadic physical movement between the two counties, a low level of institutionalisation or just occasional personal involvement', while narrow transnationalism refers to 'those people involved in economic, political, social, or cultural practices that involve a regular movement within the geographic transnational field, a high level of institutionalisation, or constant personal involvement' (Itzigsohn *et al.*, 1999, p. 323).

Transnational social fields are transborder as they are embedded in home and host country societies, which they affect simultaneously. Transborder and simultaneity are essential aspects of transnationalism (Tsuda, 2012). The aspect of simultaneity goes beyond developmental (home country focus) and assimilation (host country focus) views on migration, to incorporate both home and host country perspectives (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Faist, 2010; Tsuda, 2012). Tsuda (2012) proposed four intensity-related ways of transnational engagement: (1) A zero-sum engagement means migrants spend their limited social and economic resources on the society they feel most attached to, which depletes their resources to simultaneously participate in the other society; (2) Co-existence refers to engagement with both home and host country societies, in other words, social and economic resources are divided between home and host countries without engagement in one counteracting participation in the other; (3) Positive reinforcement involves a higher intensity of simultaneity, with greater migrant engagement (and resource investment) in one society encouraging or enabling increased participation also in the other society; and (4) mutually negative reinforcement, although less likely to happen in practice, indicates disengagement from one society as a result from reduced engagement with the other (Tsuda, 2012).

The intensity of transnational engagements affects the different ways of being transnational (i.e. in the social, economic and/or political context(s)) and/or identify with a transnational field(s). For example, in the social realm, apart from physical social connections in the country in which they are based, the intensity of virtual connections online and/or regular telephone conversations with personal and/or professional contacts in the home country [or third countries, in case of wider transnational fields] can vary. Equally, their social media use or content can be directed to either home or host country with different intensity (Bilgili, Leung and Malinen, 2023). As an example of positive reinforcement in the economic realm, transnationals

can invest economic resources (rent, acquiring a mortgage) in their host country while also investing – for instance, buying and/or maintaining a second residence – in their home country (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). Indeed, Carling and colleagues argue that contemporary forms of living facilitate living simultaneously in two countries, contributing to the feeling that some transnationals have of neither having migrated – in a permanent sense of the word – or remained (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). Erdal and Carling, in contemplating the new economics of living transnational lives, propose that economic dimensions are 'relevant as motivations for transnational living' as some economic dimensions can affect the desire and/or possibility of living a transnational life (Erdal and Carling, 2021, p. 5). In a qualitative study of one hundred individuals leading transnational lives – with either Norway or the Netherlands as one of the participants' countries of attachment – the authors explored the economic motivations for transnational living, its [economic and non-economic] costs and gains, as well as the arrangements that enable and barriers that hinder transnational living (Erdal and Carling, 2021). This empirical study formed the base for the authors' transnational living conceptualisation, which will be detailed next.

## 4.4 Transnational Living: Definition and Assumptions

Following the aspect of simultaneity in transnationality, Carling, Erdal and Talleraas (2021) operationalised transnationalism as transnational living. The authors explored the empirical aspects of transnational living and its interaction with welfare states in a study of individuals and couples splitting their lives between two European countries [Norway[1] and the Netherlands], or between one of these European countries and a non-European country (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). Carling and colleagues, highlighting the dynamism of the concept, define transnational living as 'having **sustained** and **similarly significant attachments**, **interactions** and **presences** in two or more societies separated by national borders' (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p. 2 – emphasis added). In conceptualising transnational living, the authors draw inspiration from the conceptually different but interrelated categories of lifestyle migrants, labour migrants, expatriates, and international students, arguing that all these concepts 'extend migration from being a demographic event – defined by the transition from before/origin to after/destination – to being a sustained dual attachment' (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p. 2).

[1] While Norway is not in the EU, EU citizens do not need a residence permit to live or work in Norway. The only requisite is that EU citizens must register with the police if they wish to stay longer than three months. Norway subscribes to the EU four freedoms - i.e. the free movement of goods, services, persons and capital – through the EEA agreement, which was signed in 1994 (https://www.eeas.europa.eu/norway/european-union-and-norway_en?s=174)

21. ***Figure 4.4: Schematic representation of the transnational social field, including people who lead transnational lives***


***Source: (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p. 5)***

Transnational living introduces a category of individuals who 'inhabit the transnational social field (see Figure 4.4 above) but are **hard to classify** as either migrants or non-migrants' (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p. 5).

### 4.4.1 Temporality of Transnational Living

Temporality, as with migration and expatriation research, is essential to understanding transnationalism in general, and transnational living in particular. As previously mentioned, management research has used temporality – i.e. the amount of time an individual has lived abroad – as one way to differentiate between SIEs and migrants (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; McNulty and Brewster, 2017). Transnational living identifies three different temporal forms – namely transitional, temporary, and open-ended – to describe the division of time when living between two countries. These temporal forms can be imagined (or planned) and/or experienced, and are affected by structural/contextual factors (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). Imagined temporality refers to the expectation or plan individuals have with regard to the duration of their stay abroad, which not always coincides with the real or experienced duration (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). As an example, a related study by Erdal and Carling, using the same empirical sample, points out that having (or not) to obtain visas, and regulations (e.g. maximum stay rules for British visitors to the EU after Brexit) influence individuals' transnational living in terms of temporality (Erdal and Carling, 2021).

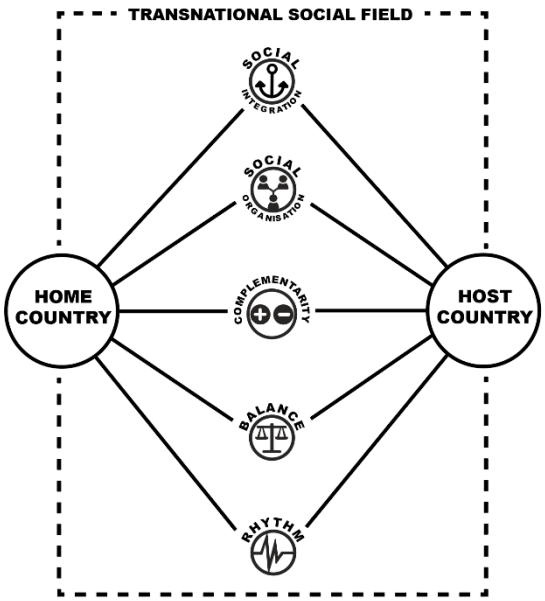
A transitional temporal frame indicates an in-between phase, or an exploratory move before committing to a more permanent one. Temporary frames refer to a specific time in life (or a career) that is generally tied to life phases (a period of study, forming a family, having care-giver obligations to elderly parents, etc) and is expected to end sometime in the future; whether an open-ended temporal frame depicts 'a way of life with no end in sight' (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p. 7). Carling and colleagues highlight the existence of 'compensatory effects'

within these temporal forms. They give as an example of compensatory effects the case of a woman who spends ten months of the year in Brazil and the remaining two in the Netherlands, but whose livelihood is Netherlands-based. The authors argue that, in this particular case, the woman might be 'living in' the Netherlands to a greater extent than her physical presence in the country would suggest, and that her transnational living follows a certain rhythm in the frequency of moves between the two countries she lives in (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). This aspect of transnational living is especially relevant in light of the popularity of hybrid work in recent years.

### 4.4.2 Dimensions of Transnational Living

Carling, Erdal, and Talleraas (2021) identify five dimensions of transnational living. However, the authors advise against considering these dimensions too strictly, as transnational living is subjective in nature and as such has fluid boundaries, rendering strict population inclusions and exclusions futile. The five dimensions of transnational living, connecting transnational individuals simultaneously (although to differing degrees) to both their home and host countries (Figure 4.5) are detailed below and will be further discussed in the findings chapter (Chapter Six).

22. ***Figure 4.5: Schematic representation of the five dimensions of transnational living: Social integration, social organisation, complementarity, balance, and rhythm.***




***Source: Developed by the author (Suarez-Bilbao, B., 2023). Created from Carling, Erdal and Talleraas (2021)***

a. **Social integration,** represented in Figure 4.5 as an anchor, refers to the extent in which transnational living is rooted, or anchored, in a transnational social field (see Figure 4.4)

where transnational practices take place (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). In other words, social integration brings together the context(s) in which a transnational life is lived. As previously mentioned, social integration relates to the personal and/or professional engagement in host and home country societies, transnational virtual communications, participation in cultural events, transnational media consumption (including social media), and/or sustained links to home-country organisations/institutions and ethnic groups in the host country (Bilgili, Leung and Malinen, 2023).

b. **Social organisation** depicts in what ways is transnational living is embedded (or not) in socio-economic relationships, as well as cultural and political activities, and how the importance of these attachments is experienced – for example, by family who might be part of a transnational field but do not engage in transnational living. Within social organisation, interactions can be improvised and flexible or structured and institutionalised (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). Participation in social or sporting activities, for example, can be both flexible (e.g. an improvised game of football) or structured (e.g. gym membership). From a professional perspective, an example of structured/institutionalised social organisation would be, for instance, a journalist in full time employment in the host country but that is also contracted (by a third party) to collaborate regularly with home-country outlets. Institutionalisation or structuration of activities and engagement can be top-down (i.e. ability to vote in home/host country due to having voting rights) or organised at individual level (i.e. fundraising for home-country-related initiatives) (Mügge, 2016). Since social organisation represents the way individuals formalise or engage (in presence or virtually) in socio-economic, cultural and/or political connections, it is represented with a social network icon in Figure 4.5.

c. **Complementarity** looks at the aspects of each country (home and host) that influence, drive or necessitate transnational living. In Figure 4.5 this is depicted by a plus/minus icon. The reason is because, in general, transnational living responds to the desire or need to access resources – for example, financial resources, professional and/or educational opportunities, or other resources that can enhance individual's well-being for themselves or their families – which are situated in a different geographical location (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). In other words, personal, professional and/or relational desires or needs that cannot be realised in the home country. Complementarity implies a shift of resources and an interplay of constraints and opportunities between home and host countries. In this sense, complementarity relates to the intensity and simultaneity of transnational living in terms of the provision of or access to resources in different locations (Tsuda, 2012). Returning to the previously

mentioned example of the lady who lives a transnational life between Brazil and the Netherlands, her source of complementarity may be better economic rewards for working in the Netherlands complementing the good weather, relational needs, and/or lifestyle appeal that Brazil may represent for her.

d. **Balance** refers to the extent of the structural balance (or imbalance) between home and host countries (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). For example, differences in employment opportunities and/or the provision of social protections. In this sense, complementarities between home and host countries often represent an imbalance, as the two countries play different roles in transnational lives (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p. 8). Balance relates to the different ways in which asymmetries can be minimised (or at least make sense of), and temporality in that individuals strive to achieve equilibrium between the home/host country physical and temporal divide, maximising the time in and strength of attachments to both home and host countries.
e. **Rhythm**, as discussed previously, refers to the frequency [or lack of] physical presence and absence across countries; the duration and seasonality of the physical presence in home and host countries (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p. 8).

## 4.5 Conclusion

Mirroring societal transformations that departed from the dominant scholarly perspective of the socio-cultural and economic integration, acculturation and/or assimilation of migrants into the host country society, research on migration experienced a paradigm shift during the 1990s (Vertovec, 2003; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). Scholarly attention shifted from the dichotomous perspective of the leaving/arrival (one-way population movements) and/or settlement of migrants (Amelina and Horvath, 2017) to the idea of a transnational approach to investigate the phenomena linking these 'coming' and 'staying' processes and their effects (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1992, 1995). Transnationalism, as a concept, highlights the importance of migrants (individuals) as social agents acting in transnational fields (Faist, 2010). Transnational living, as an *action*, can be understood according to the level of intensity in which one lives a transnational life (Itzigsohn *et al.*, 1999), its dimensions of variation, and its temporal forms (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). The five modes of variation in transnational living (see Figure 4.5) are an indication of the diversity of the concept, and its fluid boundaries. In the context of the EU, with permeable borders and easy communications that support living simultaneously (whether physically or cognitively) in two countries; and especially in relation to the new ways of working, it could be argued that 'transnationalism does not result from migration, but provides an alternative to it' (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p.1).

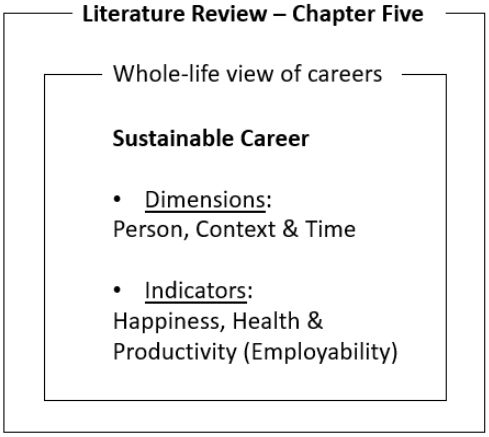
Given that careers are essential to understanding the link between individuals and societies – and in the case of transnational careers between two societies – the conceptualisation of transnational living as an *action* can be associated with dynamic career paradigms, such as the boundaryless career (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999), the career ecosystem framework (Baruch, 2015), and the contemporary concept of sustainable careers (Newman, 2011; Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015; McDonald and Hite, 2018; De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020), as will be detailed in the next chapter.

# Chapter Five – Literature Review: Career Sustainability

## 5.1 Overview Chapter Five (Literature Review – Part Two)

This chapter, the second part of the literature review, is positioned within the international career literature. First, the introduction outlines the definition and perspective of career used in this study undertaking, and gives an overview of the career theories that serve as the backdrop of the contemporary concept of sustainable career, which is the focus and organising framework of this dissertation. The conceptualisation of sustainable career is examined in section 5.3, which summarises theoretical and empirical research on sustainable careers to date. Subsections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 respectively present the key dimensions and indicators of the concept according to the literature. The chapter concludes with a detailed description of the happiness, health, and productivity indicators of a sustainable career and the different proxies or measurements that have been used for the same in empirical research thus far. Figure 5.1 illustrates the scope of this chapter.

*Figure 5.1: Chapter Five: Scope*




## 5.2 Introduction

International mobility and transnational engagement are transformative, and as such, they relate to individuals' life and career satisfaction across contexts and time. Taking a whole-life perspective of career (Litano and Major, 2016; Hirschi *et al.*, 2020), this chapter focuses on the contemporary concept of career sustainability as this study's organising framework, highlighting the concept's relevance in a transnational context. Career is considered subjectively, as 'the moving perspective in which the person sees their life as a whole and interprets the meaning of their various attributes, actions, and the things which happen to them' (Hughes, 1958, p. 63). The whole-life view of careers perspective taken in this study, then, considers both work and nonwork-related experiences (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; Litano and Major, 2016) punctuating participants' overall career paths, as part of the broader context in which careers

are enacted (Mayrhofer, Meyer and Steyrer, 2007; Inkson, Dries and Arnold, 2015; De Vos *et al.*, 2016; Andresen *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, in this study career is defined as 'an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organisations that form a unique pattern over the individual's lifespan' (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009, p. 1543). The term career in this dissertation comprises all professions or occupations (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015a), including self-employment, where both work and nonwork experiences across the life course are incorporated in unpacking career outcomes for intra-EU mobile populations.

There are definitional discrepancies amongst career, management and interdisciplinary scholars regarding the meaning of career (Gunz, Mayrhofer and Tolbert, 2011). Conceptions and understandings of careers have evolved over time in line with economic, technological, and societal developments that have impacted on the world of work, reflecting the diversity of career experiences and structural changes these developments brought about (Baruch and Sullivan, 2022). Contemporary careers are dynamic, unique to the individual that enacts them, and often unpredictable, due to the diverse contextual influences to which they are exposed (De Vos *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, to understand careers it is essential to consider the broader context in which they are embedded (Mayrhofer, Meyer and Steyrer, 2007; Inkson, Dries and Arnold, 2015). From an international career perspective, in an interconnected environment, contextual influences become even more complex (Andresen *et al.*, 2020; Suarez-Bilbao *et al.*, 2023). Three career theories emerged in the late 1990s that reflected the changing landscape of careers and career research: (1) the boundaryless career (Arthur, 1994; Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), (2) the protean career (Hall, 1996), and (3) the intelligent career (Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi, 1995).

Various degrees of 'physical and psychological movement' are hallmark elements of the boundaryless career (Sullivan and Arthur, 2006, p. 21), while the main characteristics of the protean career are that it is driven by individual values, and requires proactivity and adaptability (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). Due to these characteristics, both the boundaryless career and the protean career concepts have been used as frameworks in relation to agentic international careers (e.g. Dickmann, 2012; Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Cerdin and Le Pargneux, 2014; Gunasekara *et al.*, 2021). Equally, boundaryless and protean career orientations have also been linked to graduate proactivity in terms of employability (Donald, Baruch and Ashleigh, 2017). The intelligent career framework focuses on individual competencies in terms of skills and knowledge (knowing-how), network forming (knowing-whom), and the individual's career motivations and drive (knowing-why) (Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi, 1995), and has also been considered when exploring international careers (e.g. Zikic, 2015; Crowley-Henry, O'Connor and Suarez-Bilbao, 2021; Crowley–Henry *et al.*, 2023). Notwithstanding, these theories suggest a 'one size fits all' approach to career construction and development which does not fully comprehend the

nuances and inherent complexity of contemporary careers (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; McDonald and Hite, 2018).

Indeed, scholars have criticized the overly positive view these contemporary career theories offer, pointing out that the expectancy of constant proactivity, self-management and continuous learning may also deplete physical and psychological resources, thus having also negative consequences in people's lives (Baruch and Vardi, 2016). These career paradigms are important in international career research as they underpin the movement to individualised career development. In this current study, they serve as the backdrop to the more contemporary career focus on sustainable careers, which is the concept that is unpacked in this dissertation. The diverse elements put forward in contemporary career theories – i.e. value-driven careers, self-management, adaptability, competence building, and career 'fit' – form the basis of a sustainable career (c.f. De Vos *et al.*, 2016; McDonald and Hite, 2018). The concept of the sustainable career considers both positive and not-so-positive career outcomes (Baruch and Vardi, 2016) for individuals, and takes a dynamic, long-term view of careers (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015a; Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015). In light of the vast research and literature on the topic of careers, which spans the management and vocational literatures (McDonald and Hite, 2018), this dissertation specifically focuses on the contemporary understanding of career sustainability (Newman, 2011; Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015; McDonald and Hite, 2018; De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). The working definition of career sustainability adopted in this dissertation, and the diverse elements and boundary conditions of the concept, will be detailed next.

## 5.3 Sustainable Career

References to sustainability are commonplace nowadays. While there can be diverse interpretations of the meaning of sustainability in different contexts, what is common to all is the long-term and systemic perspective the term portrays (McDonald and Hite, 2018). The sustainable career paradigm emerged in response to the complexity of economic, technological, and societal influences on contemporary careers, reflecting the interconnection between long-term economic prosperity, environmental awareness, and societal wellbeing (McDonald and Hite, 2018). The sustainable career concept draws on elements of the boundaryless (Arthur, 1994; Defillippi and Arthur, 1994) and protean (Hall, 1976, 2002, 2004) career paradigms in relation to the salience of individual agency (Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015; De Vos *et al.*, 2016). However, the concept of career sustainability contemplates reactive as well as proactive behaviours (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2020), and adds a multi-level, systemic perspective (Baruch, 2015) through explicitly recognising that contextual elements (De Vos, Van der Heijden and

Akkermans, 2020; Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2020) and life-span changes influence individual careers (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; McDonald and Hite, 2018). This dissertation adopts Van der Heijden and De Vos' conceptualisation of a sustainable career, defined as 'the sequence of an individual's different career experiences, reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, crossing several social spaces, and characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual' (Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015, p. 7). This definition implies that individual careers need to be considered inside and within the broader life contexts in which they are embedded (Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015), and therefore is consistent with the whole-life view of career (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; Litano and Major, 2016; Hirschi *et al.*, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020) adopted in this dissertation.

As previously mentioned, a whole-life view of career considers work-related and not strictly work-related experiences throughout a person's lifespan (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009; Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014), as well as the significance of contextual influences for career actions and outcomes (Mayrhofer, Meyer and Steyrer, 2007; Akkermans, Seibert and Mol, 2018; Andresen *et al.*, 2020). As a result of these influences, careers are intrinsically complex (Pryor and Bright, 2011; De Vos *et al.*, 2016; Baruch and Sullivan, 2022), with careers enacted across a transnational field presenting added complexity, due to their high exposure to chance events, and deep career and life changes (Suarez-Bilbao *et al.*, 2023). Indeed, in these fast-moving times, a sustainable career requires flexibility and adaptability on the part of the individual to avail of opportunities, manage setbacks, and balance career and life roles (McDonald and Hite, 2018) over time (De Vos *et al.*, 2016).

The interrelationship of multi-level (i.e., personal, organisational and societal) factors over time plays a considerable role in the development and maintenance of career sustainability (McDonald and Hite, 2018; De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). Organisational rules and practices influence the career sustainability of employees (Valcour, 2015), as does the application or continuation of macro-level socio-economic and cultural practices (Baruch, 2015; Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015b; McDonald and Hite, 2018). Therefore, specific national and supra-national contexts (such as the EU – see Chapter Three) can influence individual career sustainability, as societal and regulatory policies and practices direct expectations for organisations and individuals (McDonald and Hite, 2018). For example, in Spain traditionally employees are given a long (3 hrs) lunch break, which elongates the workday to 10-11 hrs, making work-life balance difficult for individuals – especially for those with children or caring responsibilities (Pasamar and Valle Cabrera, 2013).

Career sustainability advocates a life-long career/life fit (McDonald and Hite, 2018; De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020), which implies continuity (De Vos *et al.*, 2016) in adapting to changing conditions over time (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015a). Developing sustainability in one's career involves facilitating personal and intra-personal career goals that will benefit not only the individual career actor, but also their personal and broader context (Fabio and Rosen, 2018; De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). While the development of career sustainability conceptualisations is quite recent (Newman, 2011; Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015; McDonald and Hite, 2018; De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020), the idea of sustainability in careers has been implicit in prior careers research (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015b). From a policy/practice perspective, research on career sustainability contributes to the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, specifically to Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth (United Nations, 2015), as "careers become unsustainable in the absence of decent work" (McDonald and Hite, 2018, p. 356). As will be detailed in the next section (see Table 5.1), to date, scholars have empirically explored the career sustainability of project managers (Akkermans *et al.*, 2020), management consultants (Chudzikowski, Gustafsson and Tams, 2020), managers and human resources (HR) experts (Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020), ex-professional athletes (Richardson and McKenna, 2020), entrepreneurs (Trevisan *et al.*, 2022) and heterogeneous student and worker populations (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020). The key elements of career sustainability considered in these studies will be detailed next.

### 5.3.1 Key Elements and Dimensions of a Sustainable Career

While career sustainability as a philosophical standpoint has been present in careers' research since the 1980s (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015b), to this author's knowledge, the first explicit attempt from management and career scholars to delineate the key elements comprising a sustainable career was by Newman (2011), who deductively analysed the career sustainability needs of Boomers and Gen Y individuals in the United States of America (USA). The author suggested 'sustainable careers incorporate three elements: (1) the need for renewability that supports longer working lives and life balance; (2) the need for *flexibility* and *adaptability* that create resiliency throughout the career; and (3) the need for integration and ego integrity in later [career] stages' (Newman, 2011, p. 138 – italics added).

Recognising career sustainability as a multidimensional construct, Kossek, Valcour, and Lirio (2014) argue that in the pursuit of workforce sustainability the onus is on organisations to promote organisational strategies and practices facilitating employees' sustained work-life balance as well as their present and future wellbeing. The authors define career sustainability as 'providing (1) security to meet economic needs; (2) fit with one's core career and life values; (3)

flexible and capable of evolving to suit one's changing needs and interests; and (4) renewable so that individuals have regular opportunities for rejuvenation' (Kossek, Valcour and Lirio, 2014, p. 309). Multidimensionality is also evident in Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015) conceptualisation of a sustainable career as comprising of four dimensions, namely time, social space, agency, and meaning. In their conceptualisation, time refers to the dynamism of a career, in the sense that it implies *continuity* (Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015; De Vos *et al.*, 2016 – italics added) in the time-related sequencies of career experiences or episodes within life and career stages (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014).

The time dimension is also implicit in Newman's (2011) and Kossek et al. (2014) conceptualisations as the authors refer to longer working lives, and career stages. Newman (2011) posits that by taking the time to pause and recalibrate (renew), promote resilience by *learning from and adapting to change*, and integrate experiences from all adult life stages, seeking meaning in life, individuals can achieve career sustainability (Newman, 2011 – italics added). The social space dimension in Van der Heijden and De Vos' conceptualisation of a sustainable career refers to the interplay between the personal, relational and organisational contexts (Chudzikowski, Gustafsson and Tams, 2020), as well as the wider (macro) context in which careers are embedded (Waxin and Brewster, 2020; Bris *et al.*, 2023), indicating the blurring of work and non-work boundaries (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; De Vos *et al.*, 2016).

The agency dimension recognises that individuals are the primary actors of their own career, and as such they make purposeful career choices (Valcour, 2015), balancing the different influences in their career and life domains in the long term (Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015). Finally, the meaning dimension implies that individuals must decide what is important for them (and their career success) at the different stages throughout their career (Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015; De Vos *et al.*, 2016). These four dimensions – time, social space, agency and meaning – suggest that career sustainability goes beyond career self-management and proactivity, as it can be also influenced by organisational goals and policies, and wider societal issues (De Vos *et al.*, 2016). See Table 5.1 below, which details the key elements necessary to achieve a sustainable career, according to the literature.

***Table 5.1 Summary of the key elements and dimensions of a sustainable career as per extant research***

| Dimensions / Elements | Development | Author(s) |
|---|---|---|
| Renewability, flexibility/adaptability, integration of experiences (meaning) | Emphasis on flexibility/adaptability and renewal | Newman (2011) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Economic security, career-life/values fit, flexibility/adaptability & renewability. | Organisational strategies focused on improving employee wellbeing & work-life balance as way of developing a sustainable workforce | Kossek et al. (2014) |
| Health, productivity, happiness, and employability | Emphasis on fit with broader life context | De Hauw & Greenhaus (2015) |
| Time, social space, agency & meaning | Multidimensional approach | Van der Heijden & De Vos (2015) |
| Alignment of work with individual strengths & values, ongoing learning and renewal, employability & work–life fit over the life course | Fusion of the career-related needs and goals of individuals and organizations | Valcour (2015) |
| Time, social space, agency & meaning | Employability/workability, proactivity (future orientation), broad approach, individualised approach, active involvement & career support | De Vos et al. (2016) |
| Employability & workability | Systemic approach to careers, individual career ownership | Lawrence, Hall & Arthur (2017) |
| Longevity, resilience, interdependency & social justice | Rejuvenation & renewal to ensure career longevity, emphasises decent work for all | McDonald & Hite (2018) |
| Time, person & context | Happiness, health & productivity as indicators of a sustainable career | De Vos et al (2020) |

***Source: Developed by Suarez-Bilbao (2023)***

Lawrence, Hall and Arthur (2015b) see research on sustainable careers as a 'fourth stage' in career theory and research. They articulate the first stage as encompassing the focus on individuals or organisations or occupations, which then moved to a focus on individuals within organisations (second stage), and subsequently extended to a focus on individuals within, outside and across organisations (third stage). Now, they argue, the attention has shifted to 'self-actualising careers that allow individuals to realise their full potential, and access to the social and organisational context which facilitate that realisation' (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015b, p. 433). The authors, drawing on Van der Heijden and De Vos' (2015) conceptualisation of sustainable careers, emphasise the motivational aspect of work in terms of self-awareness as a driver for personal growth and learning – thus promoting long-term employability and workability – as well as a systemic approach to career development as key elements for a sustainable career (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015b). A systemic perspective to career

sustainability underscores the importance of considering individual, organisational and national/supra-national objectives for understanding and managing careers (Baruch, 2015).

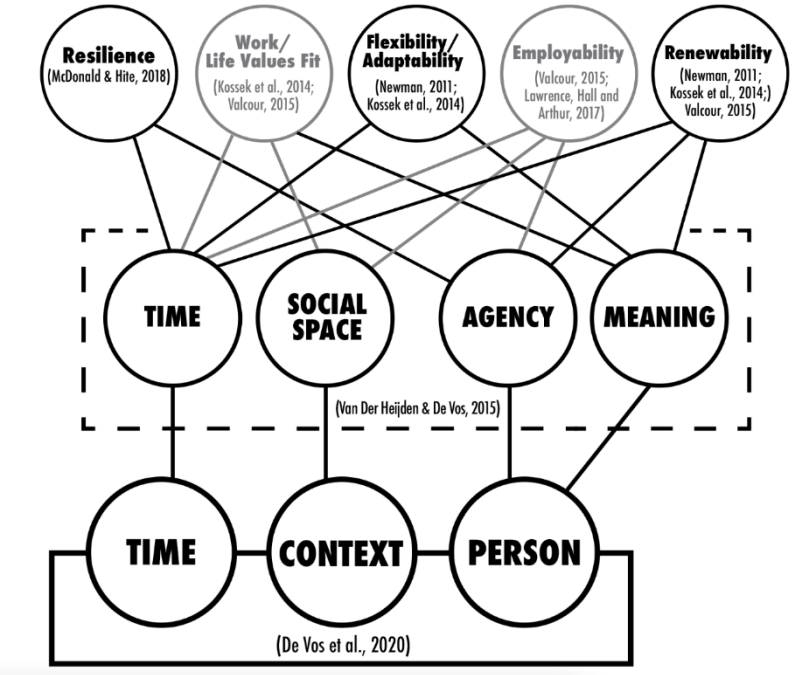
In this sense, labour market and demographic conditions, and macro-level talent needs, as well as management practices such as organisational delayering, offshoring, and the use of contract workers as a cost-saving measure, influence individual's career sustainability (Valcour, 2015). Valcour argues that, from an employer's perspective individuals' career sustainability corresponds to the 'four core objectives of talent management: (1) maximum yield on human capital value, (2) continuous updating of organisational competencies, (3) stability via adaptability, and (4) organisational commitment and retention (Valcour, 2015, p. 23). At the societal level, national and supra-national norms and legislation (see Chapter Three in relation to the regulatory framework of the EU) advocating for social justice and social change also have an impact on career sustainability at the individual level, as, for example, societal/ cultural and regulatory barriers to employment and career development can hinder career sustainability (McDonald and Hite, 2018). In sum, both the organisational and wider socio-cultural national context are part of the social space dimension proposed by Van der Heijden and de Vos (2015).

Scholars have proposed various elements – renewability, flexibility, work/life values fit, employability, workability, resilience, and interdependency between contexts – as key to achieving a sustainable career (see Table 5.1 above). These key elements relate to, and can be incorporated into, the four dimensions proposed by Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015): time, social space, agency and meaning (see Figure 5.2 below). The agency and meaning dimensions were further integrated into the person dimension, and the social space into the context dimension in De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020) conceptualisation (see Figure 5.2). In essence, renewability is linked to the time dimension in that one needs time to pause, reflect and re-energise [as and when needed]. In addition, flexibility, employability, workability, and resilience are linked to the time dimension in terms of people's capacity to adapt to changes (Akkermans, Seibert and Mol, 2018; Garbe and Duberley, 2019) over time (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015b). Work/life values fit relates to seeking meaning from career experiences over the life course (Kossek, Valcour and Lirio, 2014; De Vos *et al.*, 2016; McDonald and Hite, 2018). Moreover, all these elements interact in a social space dimension in which the individual is the central career actor (i.e. the person dimension (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020)).

In this regard, De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020) further integrated the agency and meaning dimensions suggested by Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015) into a singular 'person' dimension, and in doing so proposed a model comprising three dimensions and three

indicators of a sustainable career. See Figure 5.2 for the author's visual interpretation of the development of this model according to the literature reviewed.

24. ***Figure 5.2: Correspondence of various elements of a sustainable career with the dimensions of a sustainable career proposed by De Vos et al (2020).***

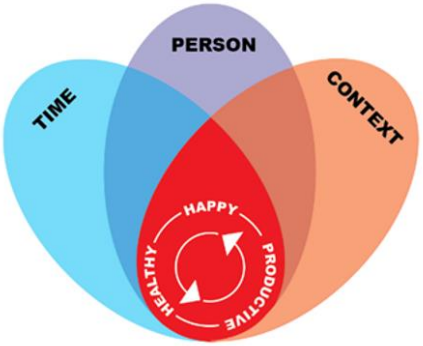



***Source: Developed by Suarez-Bilbao (2023), from Newman (2011), Kossek et al. (2014), Valcour (2015), Lawrence, Hall & Arthur (2017), McDonald & Hite (2018), and De Vos et al. (2020)***

The three interacting dimensions of career sustainability proposed by De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020) are person [to encompass individual agency and personal meaning], context [including personal, organisational and macro contextual influences on an individual's career], and time [in relation to temporal and life stages across the life course] (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). Considering this detailed review of the extant literature on sustainable careers, it is proposed in this dissertation that the model put forward by De Vos *et al.* (2020) broadly integrates all the key elements of a sustainable career presented in Table 5.1 and Figure 5.2. That is, the three dimensions of person, context, and time, as well as the three indicators of a sustainable career – happiness, health, and productivity. Figure 5.3 below depicts the author's interpretation of the career sustainability model (De Vos *et al.*, 2020), which she terms 'career sustainability lotus'. The 'lotus' moniker was chosen to describe Figure 5.3 because the lotus flower in Asian cultures symbolises balance and harmony, which in this author's interpretation resonates with the career sustainability concept. In the centre of the career sustainability 'lotus', individual person/life-career fit is highlighted in red, as 'the notion of a dynamic person-career fit in terms of health, happiness, and productivity is at the core of

sustainable careers' (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020, p. 5). The three indicators of a sustainable career are explained further in the next section.

25. ***Figure 5.3: Career Sustainability 'Lotus': The three dimensions and three indicators of a sustainable career.***




***Source: Developed by Suarez-Bilbao (2023), adapted from De Vos et al. (2020)***

### 5.3.2 Indicators of a Sustainable Career: Happiness, Health and Productivity

The three indicators of a sustainable career put forward by De Vos and colleagues, are happiness [in terms of career satisfaction, from a broader life perspective], health [both physical and mental], and productivity (see Figure 5.2 above), which in their conceptual model is equated with employability, understood as future career potential (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). According to the authors, these three elements contribute to a dynamic person-career fit, resulting in a sustainable career over time, as they argue that in order to achieve career sustainability, individuals need to proactively acquire [and conserve] the resources necessary for achieving their career goals throughout their career (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). The sustainable career perspective highlights the importance of subjective [and whole-life] career elements promoting a happy and healthy – as well as productive – career and life (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020).

The three indicators of a sustainable career will be detailed individually in the following sections. However, in practice these indicators are interrelated and occur across the three broad dimensions of career sustainability (i.e. person, context and time), which, as previously described, cannot be considered independently from each other (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2020). This is, personal and contextual changes over time are likely to affect an individual's happiness, health, and productivity, thus impacting on the sustainability of their career (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). Even though theoretical conceptualisations of career sustainability are quite recent (Newman, 2011; Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015b; Valcour, 2015;

Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015; De Vos and Van Der Heijden, 2017; De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020), there have already been some studies that have empirically explored the construct both qualitatively and quantitatively. Within these empirical studies, the person, context and time dimensions, along with the happiness, health and productivity indicators of a sustainable career (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020) are most prominent, as detailed in Table 5.2 below. This further justifies this dissertation's focus on De Vos et al. (2020) dimensions and indicators of a sustainable career.

*Table 5.2 Summary of empirical research on sustainable careers to date*

| Dimensions / Indicators | Sample | Exploring / testing | Author(s) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Time, person & context<br>Health & wellbeing (workability) | 5205 employees working in diverse sectors in Belgium | Autonomy, strengths use, needs-supply fit & job future-orientedness<br>Perceived work ability & perceived meaningfulness | Stuer et al. (2019) |
| Time, person & context<br>Happiness (career satisfaction) | 385 German academic scientists | Effects of burnout on career (un)sustainability via turnover intentions | Barthauer et al. (2020) |
| Time, person & context<br>Employability (Productivity) | 334 salespeople working for a large retail organization in Hong Kong | Openness, supervisor support & learning (self-reported)<br>Job performance & employability (assessed by supervisors) | Bozionelos, Lin & Lee (2020) |
| Time, social space, agency & meaning | 34 management consultants (worldwide locations) working for a MNC | Tensions as an additional dimension in individual alignment with organisational goals | Chudzikowski, Gustafsson & Tams (2020) |
| Time, person & context<br>Happiness, health & productivity | Mixed sample of (1,581) Germany-based students and age-diverse employees | Whole-life perspective of career.<br>Non-work orientation/roles influencing happiness, health & productivity. | Hirschi et al. (2020) |
| Time, person & context | 129 UK-based (employed) participants recruited at sporting events & leisure activities | Resources generated in leisure activities influencing self-efficacy & resilience. | Kelly et al. (2020) |
| Time, person & context<br>Happiness, health & productivity | 86 HR managers and senior executives of 20 North American firms, early adopters of reduced-load (RL) work | Alignment between individual & organisational goals in work redesign, specifically RL, contributing to career | Kossek & Ollier-Malaterre (2020) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | success & career sustainability | |
| Time, person & context<br>Happiness, health & productivity | 28 former international (sport) players, 6 professional development managers & 1 sports psychologist | Career sustainability of high-profile individuals impacted by physical & emotional social demands & social resources | Richardson & McKenna (2020) |
| Time, person & context<br>Happiness, health & productivity (career success, self-reflection, self-learning) | 28 early and mid-career STEM researchers transitioning to data scientists | Pursuit of career sustainability through career transitions. Role of (external) career catalysts | Ruiz Castro, Van der Heijden & Henderson (2020) |
| Time, person & context<br>Happiness, health & productivity (career satisfaction, career ambition & performance evaluations) | 434 employees of a professional services firm in the Netherlands | Mass career customisation (MCC) choices (common vs. customise up vs. customise down) as an intervention in promoting career satisfaction & support for career self-management. | Straub, Vinkenburg & Van Kleef (2020) |
| Time, person & context<br>Happiness, health & productivity (employability) | 10 MS sufferers in diverse professions/occupations employed in Malaysia | How people living with a chronic illness such as MS manage their career transitions in seeking long-term career sustainability | Vijayasingham, Jogulu & Allotey (2020) |
| Resourceful, flexible, renewable & integrative | Three studies with employees & online freelancers (n=661) of large manufacturing organizations in China | Scale development (study 1) and testing (studies 2&3)<br>Career satisfaction, career plateau & psychological wellbeing | Chin, Jawahar & Li (2022) |
| Time, social space, agency & meaning | 3 Brazil-based Brazilian entrepreneurs | Sustainable entrepreneurship | Trevisan et al. (2022) |
| Time, person & context<br>Happiness (career satisfaction), Health (wellbeing) & Productivity (organisational citizenship behaviour) | 150 employees of a European energy company | Job satisfaction, wellbeing & organisational citizenship behaviour | Curado et al (2023) |

***Source: Developed by Suarez-Bilbao (2023). *Studies are sorted by date (earlier first) and alphabetically.***

Two of the studies detailed in Table 5.2 above explicitly take a whole-life view of career sustainability, by specifically focusing on non-work roles (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020). Hirschi and colleagues (2020) conducted two related quantitative studies (one with university students and one with working adults) in Germany to assess nonwork orientations in relation to work-nonwork conflict and/or alignment. The authors argue that, since both career-related and personal experiences have diverse personal meaning for individuals across their life and career stages, considering personal meaning is essential to understanding career sustainability (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020). Kelly et al (2020) draw on conservation of resources (COR) theory to explore the relationship of time spent on leisure activities, leisure seriousness and work-leisure similarity, and the enhancement/depletion of individuals' self-efficacy and resilience as career-related resources. The authors concluded that the effects of leisure are complex, and as such not always positive, highlighting potential negative effects of investing analogous psychological resources in work and serious leisure activities (Kelly *et al.*, 2020).

Drawing out the commonalities across the conceptualisations of sustainable careers presented in Table 5.1, and visualised in Figure 5.2, the following aspects are evident. First, they highlight the importance of adopting a multi-level and systemic perspective. Second, they emphasise both a present and future orientation (i.e. continuity) in the pursuit of employability (i.e. future career potential). Third, the influence of contextual forces on individual careers is considered. Fourth, the individual's career self-management is on focus, highlighting the individual's resilience, and the need for work-life balance (Newman, 2011; McDonald and Hite, 2018; De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). While all studies listed in Table 5.2 emphasise the systemic, integrated and complex perspective of career sustainability, three studies focus on the interplay between individuals and the organisations that employ them, highlighting the organisational role in facilitating sustainable careers (Chudzikowski, Gustafsson and Tams, 2020; Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020; Straub, Vinkenburg and Van Kleef, 2020). For example, a worldwide inductive study of management consultants employed in a large multinational (Chudzikowski, Gustafsson and Tams, 2020) explores the interplay between individual career sustainability and organisational goals, showing how individual-organisational alignment is construed to ensure career sustainability in a challenging organisational environment. The authors posit that the resolution of tensions arising from antagonistic [individual versus organisational] goals is central to achieving long-term career sustainability (Chudzikowski, Gustafsson and Tams, 2020, p. 10).

The studies by Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre (2020) and Straub, Vinkenburg and Van Kleef (20020) draw attention to gender differences in the pursuit and achievement of career sustainability at different life and career stages. In investigating work redesign collaborative

practices, specifically reduced-load work, in North American firms that are early adopters of this practice, Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre (2020) found that both employees and employers have a part to play in ensuring career sustainability. The authors call for further studies analysing the role of gender in career sustainability in light of different (national) regulations and cultural practices related to work-family balance (Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020). In this regard, Straub, Vinkenburg and Van Kleef (2020) consider the role of gender and parental status when investigating mass career customisation (MCC) practices aimed at customising career development in a professional services firm in the Netherlands. The study reports mixed results; for example, the career satisfaction of mothers who customised down (i.e. invested less effort/time at work) was found to decrease over time, while childless women customising down reported no change in their career satisfaction. When customising up (i.e. investing more time/effort at work), mothers also reported decreased career satisfaction, and the reverse was found to be the case for childless women (Straub, Vinkenburg and Van Kleef, 2020). The authors argue that cultural ideology with respect to motherhood in the Dutch context – and the related 'deviation' from this ideal mother convention – may be the reason behind these results (Straub, Vinkenburg and Van Kleef, 2020).

A few of the studies listed in Table 5.2 draw on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to elucidate the variations in career sustainability indicators across contexts and over time (e.g. Stuer *et al.*, 2019; Barthauer *et al.*, 2020; Bozionelos, Lin and Lee, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020; Chin, Jawahar and Li, 2022). Richardson and McKenna (2020) applying the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, examine the 'inherently non-sustainable' careers of professional athletes. The authors find that, while they might achieve career sustainability in other work-related domains, the particularities of professional athletes' careers [given the extreme physical and psychological demands they face] may limit their career sustainability in the short term. Three sources of demands and resources – physical, psychological/emotional and social – were found to contribute to long-term career sustainability (Richardson and McKenna, 2020, p. 10). The authors found that high-profile professional athletes are exposed to intense social demands, due to public recognition and expectations of flawless on and off the pitch behaviour as athletes are often associated with a national brand image. However, public recognition and expectations were also found to support long-term career sustainability in other domains (Richardson and McKenna, 2020). Vijayasingham, Jogulu and Allotey (2020) provide another extreme example in describing how people living with a chronic illness such as multiple sclerosis (MS) manage their career transitions in seeking long-term career sustainability. The authors highlight that participants' agency was influenced by the lack of structural protection (i.e. regulation, healthcare) in Malaysia, and as such they were exposed to discriminatory and unsupportive

organisational practices post-diagnosis. The diverse sociodemographic sample evidenced that participants with higher career capital (e.g. higher qualifications, longer tenure/work experience and diverse social networks) were better able to leverage their resources in seeking to maintain a meaningful and sustainable career while living with a chronic illness (Vijayasingham, Jogulu and Allotey, 2020).

Regarding the macro-geographical context, of the 14 empirical studies listed in Table 5.2, six took place in Europe (Stuer *et al.*, 2019; Barthauer *et al.*, 2020; Hirschi *et al.*, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020; Straub, Vinkenburg and Van Kleef, 2020; Curado, Gonçalves and Ribeiro, 2023), three in Asia (Bozionelos, Lin and Lee, 2020; Vijayasingham, Jogulu and Allotey, 2020; Chin, Jawahar and Li, 2022), one in North America (Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020), and one in Brazil (Trevisan *et al.*, 2022), while three studies referred to international populations (Chudzikowski, Gustafsson and Tams, 2020; Richardson and McKenna, 2020; Ruiz Castro, Van der Heijden and Henderson, 2020). Except for Chin, Jawahar and Li's study, the empirical studies listed in Table 5.2 used the dimensions (i.e. person, context and time) and indicators [happiness, health and productivity] of career sustainability proposed by De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020) in their conceptualisation of career sustainability. Chin, Jawahar and Li (2022), arguing that the happiness, health and productivity indicators could be operationalised in multiple ways, and are on different metrics (i.e. physiological versus psychological states), developed and validated a psychometric scale to measure career sustainability. The authors draw on Newman's (2011) three dimensions of career sustainability – flexible, renewable, integrative – proposing resourcefulness as an additional factor to comprise the dimensions of a sustainable career (Chin, Jawahar and Li, 2022). Focusing on the consequences of individual perceptions of career sustainability, Chin, Jawahar and Li (2022) found that the relationship between career satisfaction and career sustainability was positive, while individuals who perceived their careers were sustainable were able to avoid career plateaus. The study surveyed both workers with traditional employment contracts and (specialised) contract workers hired for complex projects, and found the psychological wellbeing of contract workers was likely to be higher relative to traditional employees (Chin, Jawahar and Li, 2022).

Given the wide usage of the career sustainability indicators of health, happiness and productivity across studies to date (see Table 5.2), this present study also considers these three indicators [and related dimensions of person, context, and time] in unpacking these elements for the sample of intra-EU migrants for this PhD undertaking. The three indicators of a sustainable career – happiness, health, and productivity – will be detailed individually in the following sections. However, it is noted that in practice these indicators are interrelated and

occur across the three broad dimensions of person, context and time (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020).

#### 5.3.2.1 Happiness

According to De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020), happiness comprises 'the subjective elements of feeling successful or satisfied with one's career, yet seen from a broader life perspective' (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020, p. 4). Most of the empirical studies to date (see Table 5.2) have studied happiness as career satisfaction, or outcomes associated with career satisfaction, such as career fit with personal and organisational goals (Chudzikowski, Gustafsson and Tams, 2020; Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020), self-efficacy (Kelly *et al.*, 2020), career self-management (Straub, Vinkenburg and Van Kleef, 2020) and work-life balance (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020; Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020). Career sustainability implies a long-term, future outlook (Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015; De Vos *et al.*, 2016) in which individuals balance navigating current challenges, balancing work and non-work demands and resources (Stuer *et al.*, 2019; Barthauer *et al.*, 2020; Bozionelos, Lin and Lee, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020) with a view of obtaining career satisfaction (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015b).

Career satisfaction is commonly considered a measure or indicator of career success (Hall and Chandler, 2005; Ng *et al.*, 2005; Shockley *et al.*, 2016). Scholars have considered career success objectively and subjectively (Ng *et al.*, 2005). Objectively, career success refers to elements that 'can be seen and therefore evaluated objectively by others – such as salary and promotions', while subjective career success (SCS) variables 'capture individuals' subjective judgements about their career attainments, such as job and career satisfaction' (Ng *et al.*, 2005, p. 368). In other words, objective career success (OCS) implies social comparisons, for example, with colleagues and/or competitors, while SCS is self-referential and therefore less motivated by peer-to-peer comparisons (Seibert, Akkermans and Liu, 2024). Nevertheless, it is important to understand the co-existence between the objective and subjective elements of career success (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005; Hall and Chandler, 2005; Heslin, 2005). This co-existence calls for joint examination of both objective and subjective perspectives (Abele and Spurk, 2009), and if possible, including both OCS and SCS in empirical studies (Seibert, Akkermans and Liu, 2024). For example, a recent study of Eastern European skilled migrants in Ireland found that this population alternated between OCS and/or SCS taking precedent at different stages of their home and host country careers (O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2020).

As SCS can be context-dependent (Dries, 2011; Smale *et al.*, 2019; Briscoe *et al.*, 2021), diverse SCS measurement scales have been developed taking into consideration different

cultural contexts. A Chinese data study by Pan and Zhou (2015) developed a multidimensional scale – comprising external compensation, intrinsic fulfilment and work-life balance – to capture individual perceptions of happiness in an Asian cultural context. From a USA-based, Western perspective, Shockley *et al*. (2016), stressing that SCS is distinct from objective success and career satisfaction, included eight dimensions – authenticity, growth and development, influence, meaningful work, personal life, quality work, recognition and satisfaction – in their SCS inventory. A recent cross-cultural study on SCS, arguing that 'individual meanings of SCS are a sociocultural construct and not just an individual construct… [and as such] must be assessed in the cultural contexts in which they have emerged' (Briscoe *et al.*, 2021, p. 5), developed a scale comprising seven cross-culturally robust factors, namely (1) learning and development (L&D), (2) work-life balance, (3) positive impact, (4) entrepreneurship, (5) positive work relationships, (6) financial security, and (7) financial success (Briscoe *et al.*, 2021, p. 16). The authors did not consider overall life/career satisfaction as a SCS determining factor but rather as a 'higher order outcome of career success' (Briscoe *et al.*, 2021, p. 11). In a recent review of the organisational psychology and organisational behaviour career success literature, Seibert, Akkermans and Liu (2024) integrate different conceptualisations of SCS, listing eight emerging dimensions 'which focus on people's satisfaction or experience of (a) financial concerns, (b) advancement in responsibility, status, and influence, (c) interpersonal relations, (d) challenge and mastery, (c) meaning and impact, (f) self-development, (g) career opportunities and control, and (h) the work-life interface' (Seibert, Akkermans and Liu, 2024, p. 5). Adopting a whole-life perspective of career development, a recent two-sample study by Chen, Hsu, and Shaffer (2024) examined the relationship between SIEs' community embeddedness, cultural intelligence and career satisfaction. The authors found that, in particular when cultural diversity is valued in the host country, cultural intelligence facilitates community embeddedness, which in turn promotes career satisfaction (Chen, Hsu and Shaffer, 2024).

Happiness is also considered in terms of fit, or 'the adjustment between goals, values and career that align with the employee's personal growth' (Curado, Gonçalves and Ribeiro, 2023, p. 231). The capacity to change and adapt to evolving individual needs and environmental constraints over time ensures career sustainability, emphasising a dynamic person-career fit through a process of competency generation and preservation of resources (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). SCS is thus conditioned by the individual's ability to learn and manage change, as learning implies a process of growth through increasing individual competencies (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015b). Being in learning mode contributes to career sustainability, as it promotes a future-oriented 'growth mindset as [individuals] cycle through relevant approach, action and reflection experiential learning processes' (Heslin, Keating and

Ashford, 2020, p. 1). Pro-learning behaviours also indicate flexibility, which is considered by some scholars a characteristic of career sustainability (e.g. Newman, 2011; Chin, Jawahar and Li, 2022), and relates to L&D (Briscoe *et al.*, 2021) and self-development dimensions of SCS (Seibert, Akkermans and Liu, 2024). Equally, resilience is needed in terms of adjusting to changes in one's life and career (De Vos and Van Der Heijden, 2017). In this regard, research confirms that employees increasingly seek more flexible work arrangements – either in time/working hours (Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020) or job/role location – from their employing organisations (Baruch, Altman and Tung, 2016) in the pursuit of work-life balance, which contributes to SCS (Kelly *et al.*, 2020). A subjective perception of work-life balance indicates how satisfied individuals are with balancing work and non-work needs and commitments (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020), and is likely to be influenced by national contexts/culture in diverse ways (Smale *et al.*, 2019). Since individual needs, goals and values change according to life stages and the broader context in which a career is enacted (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005, 2006), better adjustment and integration of work and nonwork domains can contribute to overall happiness and thus to maintaining a sustainable career (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020).

In summary, both theoretical and empirical career sustainability scholarship has considered career satisfaction and SCS, as well as overall life satisfaction as indicators of a happy life and career. As previously mentioned, career and life satisfaction can be achieved through L&D, self-development, and maintaining work-life balance. Learning (e.g. Bozionelos, Lin and Lee, 2020; Heslin, Keating and Ashford, 2020) is indicative of proactivity in the pursuit of individual growth (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020), and as such may increase competencies such as self-efficacy (e.g. Kelly *et al.*, 2020). Acquiring career competencies, and in doing so achieving career goals, may contribute to SCS (Smale *et al.*, 2019), indicating a relationship between the happiness (i.e. career satisfaction, OCS and SCS) and the productivity (i.e. employability) indicators of a sustainable career, as will be detailed in the following sections. Maintaining work-life balance (e.g. Hirschi *et al.*, 2020; Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020; Straub, Vinkenburg and Van Kleef, 2020) is critical, as work-life balance is important for preserving and maintaining physical and psychological/emotional health, thus achieving career sustainability in the long term. Both physical and psychological wellbeing comprise the health indicator of a sustainable career, which will be detailed next.

#### 5.3.2.2 Health

De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020) take health to encompass both physical and psychological/mental health, across the personal, context and time dimensions. In this sense, certain jobs or occupations – such as professional athletes (Richardson and McKenna, 2020),

nurses, or factory workers – may have stronger physical demands that could affect individuals at later stages in their life and career (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020; Richardson and McKenna, 2020). Psychological demands can also have an accumulative effect on, for example, feelings of stress or burnout (e.g. Kelly *et al.*, 2020; Ruiz Castro, Van der Heijden and Henderson, 2020), which may result in lack of employee engagement, curtailing organisational success (Kuzior, Kettler and Rąb, 2022). Indeed, work-ability, which is defined as the individual's capacity to work in a healthy and productive way in relation to their age and physical/psychological condition, is considered an indicator of a sustainable career (Stuer *et al.*, 2019). Satisfaction with one's life and career (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020) and being able to reconcile work and nonwork commitments (Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020) can equally influence a person's psychological/emotional wellbeing, thus increasing their resilience (Kelly *et al.*, 2020). However, a study by Richardson and McKenna (2020) found that challenging psychological demands endured while playing professional sport also built the athletes' resilience, which they were able to leverage in their professional careers after sport. This finding supports the notion of career sustainability as a dynamic construct, meaning that while happiness, health or productivity may take precedence at a given moment in time, a long-term perspective is needed to achieve overall life-career fit (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020).

In their recent review of the occupational health and safety of (high-status) international employees, De Cieri and Lazarova use a wide-ranging definition of health (in organisations) encompassing health and safety related lifestyle behaviour – assuming both prevention and promotion behaviours – as well as psychological and social factors (De Cieri and Lazarova, 2021). This conceptualisation, in including psychological factors such as mental health, and social factors such as relationships and social support, makes implicit workers' overall wellbeing. However, the authors stress that in the management literature health is regarded as only one aspect of wellbeing, which also includes general happiness (De Cieri and Lazarova, 2021). The blurring of the boundaries of the wellbeing concept is also present in sustainable career conceptualisations (e.g. De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). In a recent meta-analysis Biswas, Mäkelä and Andresen operationalised wellbeing as cognitive evaluations such as life and work satisfaction, work engagement, burnout and stress, as well as affective reactions (i.e. depression, anxiety) of geographically-mobile individuals to certain situations in their life and work (Biswas, Mäkelä and Andresen, 2022). Applying a conservation of resources lens, the authors found that organisational support, work adjustment and spousal support increased work-related wellbeing in their sample of expatriates, while work-family conflict reduced work-related wellbeing (Biswas, Mäkelä and Andresen, 2022). This finding supports the importance of

a holistic, whole-life approach to international careers, as nonwork factors have an impact on the health and therefore work-ability of mobile populations.

Adverse health outcomes [such as psychological and physical malaise, and work-related injuries] are reported in a recent systematic review and meta-analysis of the occupational health of [mostly unskilled] migrant workers (Hargreaves *et al.*, 2019). While unskilled migration is not within this dissertation's focus, the research Hargreaves and colleagues conducted underscores the high exposure to hardship, psychosocial risks, and mental stress of internationally mobile populations. For example, a qualitative study of migrant workers from low- and mid-income countries to Spain found that these individuals were underemployed and were exposed to unfair working conditions which caused them both physical and mental health problems (Agudelo-Suárez *et al.*, 2009). As previously mentioned, the type of occupation/profession or the conditions of the specific job individuals perform can also result in increased levels of anxiety, stress or feelings of insecurity, loneliness, or burnout, affecting individuals' psychological health and overall wellbeing (Rosado-Solomon *et al.*, 2023).

Hostile work environments can certainly affect individuals' health, requiring adequate organisational responses to protect employees' wellbeing (Dickmann and Watson, 2017; Bader, Schuster and Dickmann, 2019). However, research undertaken in the context of the EU-funded Global Mobility of Employees (GLOMO) project suggests that individual perceptions of environmental, organisational or society-related hostility differ, and perceptions of general wellbeing can be affected by, for example, unwelcoming attitudes towards foreigners within the host country society (e.g. as observed after BREXIT) as well as hostile country-level regulations and conditions (Raupp, 2022). Raupp's (2022) research illustrates the interaction of the person (i.e. perceptions of not being welcomed affecting wellbeing), context (i.e. restrictive national regulations or unwelcoming society), and time (i.e. BREXIT) dimensions of career sustainability. It also emphasises the multidimensionality of the wellbeing construct, as it comprises subjective psychological/emotional wellbeing and social wellbeing (i.e. relationships with friends and family), therefore also relating it to overall happiness (Kossek, Valcour and Lirio, 2014). Indeed, at a macro level, some governments are now starting to give credence to measures of gross national happiness along with traditional socio-economic indicators of national wellbeing (Kossek, Valcour and Lirio, 2014). This evidences the interrelationship of the happiness and health indicators of career sustainability in practice.

In sum, theoretical and empirical careers and management scholarship to date has considered health to encompass both physical and psychological wellbeing. In relation to sustainable careers, empirically the health indicator has been considered in terms of workability

(i.e. the ability to work in a healthy and productive way according to one's physical and mental capacities, and age) (Stuer *et al.*, 2019), burnout (Barthauer *et al.*, 2020), resilience (Kelly *et al.*, 2020), and general psychological wellbeing (i.e. (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020; Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020; Richardson and McKenna, 2020; Vijayasingham, Jogulu and Allotey, 2020; Chin, Jawahar and Li, 2022; Curado, Gonçalves and Ribeiro, 2023). Research has shown that career sustainability is a dynamic construct, and as such its dimensions and indicators are interrelated. For example, while workability may relate to the health indicator (in that physical and psychological health are necessary to be able to work), it has also been linked to productivity, as will be detailed in the next section.

#### 5.3.2.3 Productivity [Employability]

Productivity refers to the capacity to perform in a given work role, as well as the potential ability to perform in future jobs, or employability (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020, p. 5). Employability, then, is defined as "a dynamic interplay between employees (who are fulfilling a job), employers (who seek competitive advantage), and the economy/society (striving for full employment) over time" (Fugate *et al.*, 2021, p. 3). Workability relates to employability in that it refers to the extent to which a work role represents "reasonable, long-term expectations from employees, without overambitious challenges in a job today that result in burnout tomorrow" (De Vos and Gielens, 2014, p. 14). Employability implies being able to proactively prepare for future challenges, as well as the ability to react flexibly to both predictable changes and unforeseen events (Fugate and Kinicki, 2008).

Further illustrating the interaction between the three indicators of a sustainable career, Akkermans and Tims (2017) considered employability as indicative of career success (i.e. happiness). The authors argue that reflective career competencies (i.e. knowledge/awareness of one's values and strengths), communicative competencies (i.e. 'selling' your abilities to the labour market) and behavioural competencies (i.e. setting goals and proactively looking for opportunities) improve the individual's perceived employability, thus contributing to their career success (Akkermans and Tims, 2017). These career competencies relate to knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom competencies (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi, 1995). In an international career context, knowing-why refers to the motivations and goals of international career mobility, knowing-what to individual capabilities, qualifications and work and non-work related experiences enabling such mobility, and knowing-whom refers to the support of social and professional networks in facilitating [or restraining] career opportunities and progression of transnational careers (Dickmann *et al.*, 2018; Crowley–Henry *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, career competencies contribute to both the happiness [in terms of

career/values fit and OCS/SCS, as previously detailed] and the productivity indicators [in terms of employability] of a sustainable career.

Career scholars have highlighted the significance of managing career transitions and changes in relation to life-stages in order to maintain long-term employability (De Vos, Jacobs and Verbruggen, 2021). Career transitions occur at diverse career stages (e.g. student to full employment, junior to senior roles, employment to retirement) throughout an individual's life, and require career self-management and adaptability in order to cope with changing work and non-work contexts (Savickas *et al.*, 2009; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). An international career in this sense implies an international career transition, in which individuals acquire tacit knowing-how competencies such as flexibility and adaptability (Zikic, 2015), and cultural agility (Caligiuri, 2012). Career adaptability can increase individual marketability (i.e. communicative competences), thus contributing to both employability and SCS (Rudolph *et al.*, 2017). Cultural agility is defined as 'a mega-competency that enables professionals to perform successfully in cross-cultural situations... a combination of natural abilities, motivation to succeed, guided training, coaching, and development over time' (Caligiuri, 2012, pp. 4–5), and thus can contribute to long-term employability. Development via formal learning (e.g. acquiring further qualifications), experiential learning, or in-company training has been the focus of empirical research in relation to career sustainability. For example, a study conducted in a large retail organisation in Hong Kong found that company-sponsored training enhanced the job performance and employability of sales professionals (Bozionelos, Lin and Lee, 2020). Portraying a more comprehensive, whole-life perspective of learning, Hesling, Keating and Ashford (2020) advocate an active stance of 'being in learning mode' – which the authors see as a meta-competency enabled by a growth mindset – as a strategy to protect and/or enhance career sustainability (Heslin, Keating and Ashford, 2020).

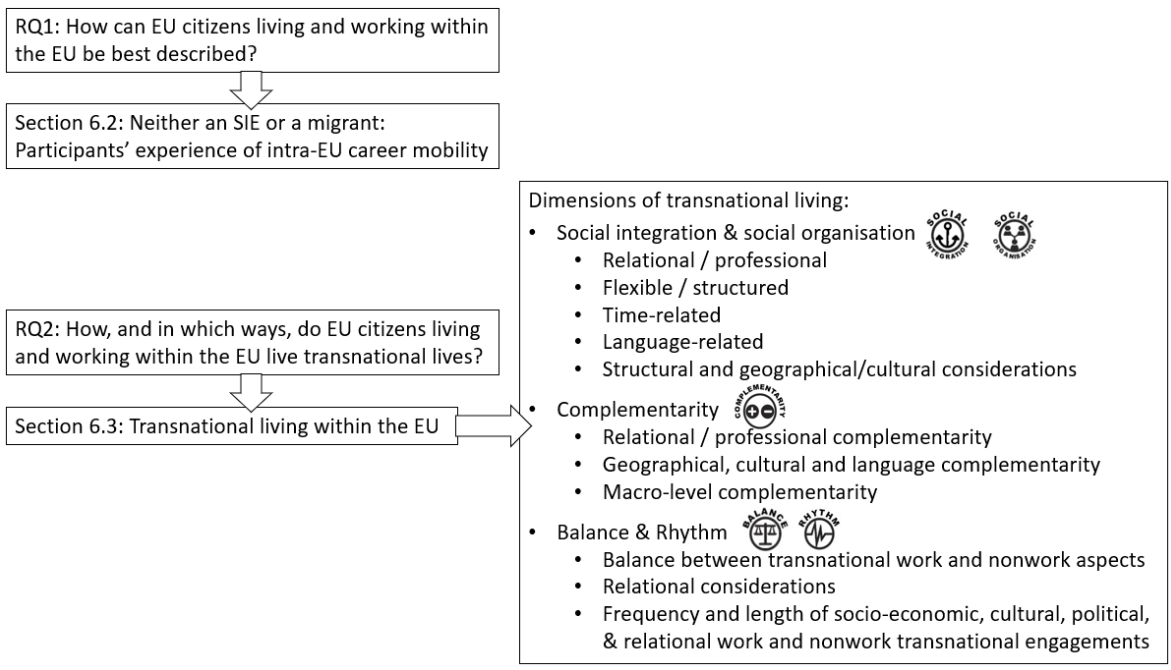
The scholarly research examples shared above once again illustrate the interrelation between the happiness, health, and employability indicators of career sustainability. Indeed, career-individual fit – which underscores knowing-why competencies – will contribute to career satisfaction over time, thus satisfying the happiness indicator of a sustainable career. However, knowing-why competences may also help regulate career expectations in order to avoid burnout, maintaining workability [the ability to work] (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015b) and thus contributing to the individual's overall health (i.e. wellbeing). In sum, for individuals to maintain and enhance employability they need to be happy and healthy, therefore, in practice the happiness, health and productivity [employability] indicators of a sustainable career are interrelated and occur across the three broad dimensions of person, context and time (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020) (see Figure 5.2).

# Chapter Six – Findings: Transnational Living

## 6.1 Introduction

The focus of this study is two-fold. First, the research undertaking explores how EU citizens living and working within the EU may live transnational lives; then focusing on how the sustainable career parameters are enacted [or not] in transnational living. As detailed in the literature reviewed in Chapter Four, the study is situated within the intersection of the interdisciplinary concepts of transnationalism and transnational living, and the contemporary career focus of sustainable careers. This chapter specifically considers transnationalism and transnational living as an alternative to more fixed international worker categories examined in the literature. While this dissertation does not present a process study, but rather a cross-sectional, once-off research study, the narratives collected reflect a temporal narrative series of recollections from the sample in relation to their decision to move, their move to and their current lives in the host country – incorporating their ongoing relationships across international borders – thereby encompassing a more temporal overview of their mobility. Thus, this chapter applies a transnational living lens to determine if, and how, the participants in this study live transnational lives. The whole-life perspective of careers (Litano and Major, 2016; Hirschi *et al.*, 2020) taken in this study considers the interplay of structural barriers and/or opportunities that influence international mobility and transnationalism (see Chapter Four, section 4.4) and the influence of transnational living in terms of career decisions. Please refer to Figure 6.1 for a visual illustration of the chapter's structure.

***Figure 6.1: Visual overview of the Chapter***



As a prelude, this chapter first shares the findings regarding participants' self-identification in relation to nomenclature pertaining to international careers (see Figure 6.1 above). The literature shared in Chapter Four reveals definitional confusion and boundary blurring regarding the most common terminologies to designate forms of global staffing – assigned expatriates (AE), self-initiated expatriates (SIE) and (skilled) migrants. As citizens of the EU, this study cohort are also found to have blurred national self-identification boundaries. EU citizens are entitled to live and work in any country in the EU retaining the same citizen rights as the nationals of that country (see Chapter Three). Therefore, the experiences of EU citizens as SIEs/migrants within the EU may be different to that of other SIEs/migrants who are non-EU nationals.

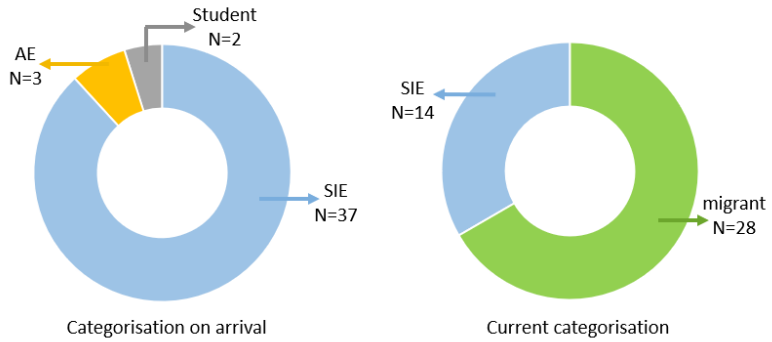
Considering this peculiarity, the first section of this chapter empirically addresses the nomenclature reviewed in Chapter Four. Drawing upon international management and international mobility literature (see Chapter Four, section 4.2), and given the particularities of intra-EU mobility, the first research question this chapter aims to answer is: (i) How can EU citizens living and working within the EU can be best described and categorised? The second part of this chapter, addressing the second research question of this study, explores (ii) How, and in which ways, do EU citizens living and working within the EU live transnational lives? The third and last research question of this study, (iii) 'How are the diverse elements of a sustainable career balanced, enacted, and experienced across [intra-EU] borders?' will be covered in Chapter Seven.

## 6.2 Neither an SIE nor a migrant: Participants' experience of intra-EU mobility, and self-identification

This section considers the findings in relation to the adequacy of extant nomenclature pertaining to global mobility populations in the specific socio-political and regulatory context of the EU. It examines how transnationalism, which is manifested in ways of being and ways of belonging (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1992), may provide a better framework to describe the population in this study. In particular, the focus is on transnational living, which, as shared in Chapter Four, implies having ***simultaneous*** engagements and presences [physical and virtual] in both home and host country societies, spanning transnational social, economic, cultural, and political contexts (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). Figure 6.1 below shows the assigned category [according to management definitions] of the participants in this study at the time of their initial move, as well as the assigned category they would currently fall under. As will be detailed next, the participants' current assigned category is given in relation to their plans to remain in their host country or eventually return to their home country, which is the main

differentiation contemplated in the literature (see Chapter Four) between the migrant and SIE categories of international workers.

27. ***Figure 6.2: Participants' categorisation (as per literature parameters) on arrival to the host country and currently.***




Of the three categories detailed in Chapter Four – AE, SIE and migrant – only SIE and migrant could be relevant terms to designate this study cohort. Of the 42 participants in this study, 39 self-initiated and self-funded their international move (see Figure 6.2 above). Of these 39 self-initiated moves, two were students (*Laura* [DE1-IE] and *Patri* [ES5-DE] – see Table 6.1 below), and therefore not initially working in the host country, and are currently SIEs. As detailed in Table 6.1, only three participants (*Carmen* [ES2-IE]*, Fred* [IE4-DE] and *Moritz* [DE1-ES]) would have been classified as AEs at the time of their move. However, *Carmen*'s case is representative of the blurred lines between categories, as she applied for a position in her home country (Spain) but was offered instead a role in Ireland. Although *Carmen* was offered some level of organisational support – such as a flight to Ireland, temporary accommodation (for three months) and assistance with finding permanent accommodation – she was hired on a local contract.

*Laura* [DE1-IE] and *Patri* [ES5-DE] were under-graduates at the time of the initial move, and therefore would have been categorised as students. Upon completing their degree in the host country, both have extended their (open-ended) stay. Therefore, these five participants changed their initial category from AE to SIE and student to SIE respectively. All other participants would have been initially categorised as SIEs, as their international move was self-initiated, they did not receive organisational support for the same, they were working in the host country, and they did not intend to stay permanently (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). However, 60% of the participants initially categorised as SIEs have lived in the host country for over decade (see Table 6.1 below) and have not expressed an immediate desire to return, which according to the literature will put them in the migrant category (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; McNulty and Brewster, 2017), as reflected in the 'current assigned category' column in Table 6.1 below.

*8. Table 6.1 Category at initial move, years in the host country, and self-identification of participants in the study.*

| Code | Pseudonym | Assigned Category Initial Move | Years in Host Country | Current assigned category | Self-categorises as | Self-identifies as |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE1-ES | Moritz | AE | 30 | migrant | neither | Bavarian |
| DE2-ES | Karl | SIE | 22 | migrant | neither | German |
| DE3-ES | Helga | SIE | 18 | migrant | neither | German |
| DE4-ES | Rupert | SIE | 18 | migrant | neither | German |
| DE5-ES | Anika | SIE | 28 | migrant | expat | German & European |
| DE6-ES | Nina | SIE | 23 | migrant | immigrant | German & European |
| DE7-ES | Alex | SIE | 23 | migrant | neither | German |
| DE1-IE | Laura | Student | 9 | SIE | neither | Bavarian |
| DE2-IE | Doris | SIE | 20 | migrant | fluent migrant | German & European |
| DE3-IE | Tania | SIE | 17 | migrant | neither | German |
| DE4-IE | Melina | SIE | 3 | SIE | International ^ | German & European |
| DE5-IE | Feli | SIE | 12 | migrant | neither | German-Irish |
| DE6-IE | Simon | SIE | 25 | migrant | neither | European |
| DE7-IE | Bettina | SIE | 14 | migrant | neither | German |
| | | | | | | |
| ES1-DE | Jose | SIE | 8 | SIE | expat | Spanish & European |
| ES2-DE | Andres | SIE | 8 | SIE | migrant | Catalan & European |
| ES3-DE | Elena | SIE | 3 | SIE | migrant | Canarian-Spanish |
| ES4-DE | Nano | SIE | 6 | SIE | expat | Spanish & European |
| ES5-DE | Patri | Student | 10 | SIE | neither | Spanish & European |
| ES6-DE | Maite | SIE | 7 | SIE | neither | Spanish & European |
| ES7-DE | Cari | SIE | 6 | SIE | neither | Spanish & European |
| ES1-IE | Susana | SIE | 15 | SIE | neither | Spanish |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ES2-IE | Carmen | AE* | 14 | migrant | neither | Spanish |
| ES3-IE | Arturo | SIE | 16 | migrant | migrant | Spanish & European |
| ES4-IE | Sandra | SIE | 27 | migrant | migrant | European |
| ES5-IE | Peter | SIE | 4 | SIE | neither | Spanish |
| ES6-IE | Bruno | SIE | 10 | migrant | neither | European |
| ES7-IE | Robert | SIE | 4 | SIE | neither | Spanish & European |
| | | | | | | |
| IE1-DE | Noel | SIE | 6 | migrant | immigrant | Irish |
| IE2-DE | Ivan | SIE | 9 | migrant | immigrant | Irish |
| IE3-DE | Oliver | SIE | 10 | migrant | expat | Irish |
| IE4-DE | Fred | AE | 4 | SIE | neither | Irish & European |
| IE5-DE | Fintan | SIE | 15 | migrant | neither | Irish-European |
| IE6-DE | Luke | SIE | 24 | migrant | neither | European |
| IE7-DE | Liz | SIE | 28 | migrant | neither | Irish & European |
| IE1-ES | Conor | SIE | 9 | migrant | neither/both * | Irish & European |
| IE2-ES | Clare | SIE | 22 | migrant | neither/both * | European |
| IE3-ES | Jason | SIE | 18 | migrant | immigrant | Irish |
| IE4-ES | Kathy | SIE | 16 | migrant | Guiri^ | Irish |
| IE5-ES | Sam | SIE | 6 | migrant | immigrant | European |
| IE6-ES | Gerry | SIE | 3 | SIE | neither | Irish & European |
| IE7-ES | Emmet | SIE | 26 | migrant | immigrant | Irish & European |

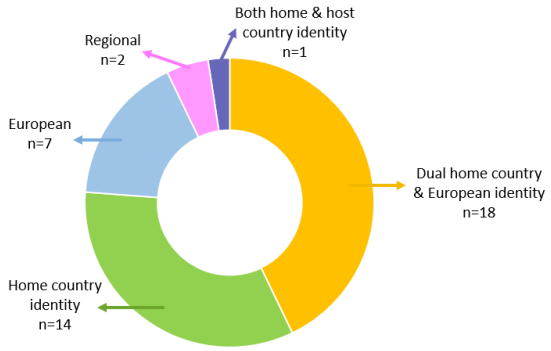
***The first two letters in the code indicate participants' home country and the last two letters their host country. (i.e. DE=Germany, ES=Spain [España], IE=Ireland). The numbers indicate the order in which participants were interviewed.***

As detailed in Table 6.1 above, in conversation, or when specifically asked, most participants self-identified as neither an expatriate nor a migrant (n=27). Of those 27, two have self-identified with both the expat group and the migrant group at times (*), and two chose a different term to categorise themselves (^). *Conor* [IE1-ES] has decided to stay permanently in Spain, and in that sense classifies himself as a migrant. However, in conversation he mentions it

is important for him to socialise with other 'expats', as they share similar concerns. *Clare* [IE2-ES] admits that since her child was born (6 years ago) she feels more like a migrant, but up to then, she would have put herself in the 'expat' category. *Kathy* [IE4-ES] chose to define herself as she is referred to by the locals in her Spanish town – '*guiri*', a term generally used by Spanish people to refer to English-speaking, white foreigners – while *Melina* [DE4-IE] chose 'international', a term used by the 'IT (international) crowd' she socialises with. Eleven participants self-identified as migrants, although some added a further qualification, such as 'immigrant' or 'fluent migrant' (see Table 6.1). Only four participants referred to themselves as 'expats'. However, this self-reference was related to belonging to certain professional or social groups of mainly foreigners, as opposed to following definitional conventions.

Nonetheless, the participants themselves are in general reluctant to be classified using the extant nomenclature pertaining to global mobility populations (e.g. expatriate or migrant), rather identifying themselves (see Figure 6.3 below) as either home-country nationals (n=14), with regional sub-groups within their home countries (e.g. Catalan or Bavarian), Europeans (n=7), or a combination of home country and European (n=18) identity categories (e.g. Catalan-European, Irish-European, etc).

***Figure 6.3: Participants' self-identification.***




As detailed in the following, the participants in this study report feeling connected to, and simultaneously engaging (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021) with both their home and host countries, although to different degrees and intensities of connection/engagement throughout different stages of their lives and careers. It transpires from the data that dual host-home country allegiance may be one of the reasons why most participants found it difficult to self-identify as either [self-initiated] expatriates or migrants. Another reason, as expressed in the quotes below, relates to the connotations assigned to these terms, either personally or by their home and/or host country cultures and societies. For *Ivan*, [IE2-DE] for example, the image these terms conjure does not reflect his self-image:

> *"I must admit, I've never liked the 'expat' term because I always see it as… the kind of people who are using it are white privileged people… yeah, who are just full of themselves. Like the British or even Irish who go and live in the South of France and South of Spain… they don't learn a WORD of the language and they just complain about everything… these people call themselves expats because sounds better than immigrants… because they tend to be looking at people coming over from POOR backgrounds as immigrants… and that really gets… it annoys me. So that's why I would never USE the term expat... I would say I'm an immigrant"* (*Ivan* [IE2-DE], IT programmer)[2]

It is interesting that *Ivan*, by not using – and even openly disliking – the term expatriate, seeks to disassociate himself from people that have low host-country language identification. He mentioned a few times that, even though his German girlfriend tells him his German is good, and despite of constantly seeking opportunities to speak German and thus differentiating himself from 'expatriates', he believes he lacks fluency and confidence, as well as opportunities to practice the language. This, in his opinion, has slowed down his host country integration. As an IT programmer, *Ivan* works through English, therefore his work-related social interactions are also English-language-based. Through his German girlfriend he has made some German friends. However, *Ivan* confides that he wishes he knew more German people socially, so he could socialise more in German and be better integrated in the German society.

Language conventions, and the meaning (both explicit and implicit) or the social connotations of these terms, also have a part to play in participants' self-identification as either expats or migrants, or neither of those terms. The term expatriate is not generally used either in traditional German or Spanish vocabulary. In these two languages the term 'migrant' (*migrante* [ES], '*Personen mit Migrationshintergrund*' [DE]) is more commonly used, although generally these terms are used to refer to Global South to Global North migration (Fischer-Souan, 2019; Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020). Thus, the term migrant tends to be used colloquially, as expressed by *Ivan* [IE2-DE] above, to designate 'poor' or less privileged people. Indeed, while for *Ivan* the term 'expatriate' conjures socially undesirable images, for *Rupert* [DE4-ES], 'migrant', or immigrant', are equally charged terms. When filling-in paperwork before his move, *Rupert* recounts the German public servant asked him if he was emigrating to Spain, to which he replied:

[2] Words in all capitals in the quotes are used to signal emphasis as expressed by participants

> *"No! (shaking his head and smiling) … I'm* ***not emigrating****… I'm just going to where my wife is from… to work there."* (*Rupert* [DE4-ES], qualified lawyer currently working as an estate agent).

*Rupert* shares that the question reminded him of a painting called '*The Immigrants' Ship'* (Figure 6.4 below) which depicted poor people on a deck of a boat, with all their possessions in small bundles, obviously escaping some terrible fortune. He remarked that he felt *those* people were immigrants, not *THEM* [him and his wife], as they are [as EU citizens] in a much more privileged position. For Rupert this international move did not have to be *permanent*, he felt he had *chosen* to move to Spain, and he [they] had the *possibility* to return if he and his wife decided to. For the first couple of years in Spain, Rupert maintained his professional connections in Germany, paying his law society membership, collaborating with German colleagues, and even occasionally attending hearings in Germany if required by his Germany-based clients. However, when his children arrived, he gave up his Germany-based clients, as both the travel and the extra expense of practicing in Germany became unsustainable.

29. ***Figure 6.4: The Immigrants' Ship (1884), by John Charles Dollman***

However, *Rupert*'s compatriot *Nina* [DE6-ES] proudly used the term immigrant to refer to herself, when a work colleague in Spain made derogatory comments in relation to immigrants, rebelling against what she interpreted as the classists and racists connotations of the term:

> *"I was working side to side with the secretary of this magazine… and she was complaining about all the IMMIGRANTS… these DIRTY people… all the time!... and I was…emmm… I'm an immigrant too! (laughing)… and she was like 'No, no… it's different'... but, you know, it isn't! … and I stopped working there. Because… of course I'm an immigrant!* (*Nina* [DE6-ES], freelance travel writer).

*Noel*, an Irish researcher living in Germany, agrees with *Nina* in that the use of the terms often implies and perpetuates a class or (perceived) power divide:

> *"I think it's possible and very desirable to be European and Irish and… a little bit German as well. I don't know if it's a… feeling, but I think that certainly is a cultural debate around… you know… the difference between expats and immigrants… seems to me there's a kind of… colonial and CLASS aspect to it sometimes… but I think that is not so much in the definition, but in the use of the words"* (*Noel* [IE1-DE], researcher).

As white Europeans, however, the participants do not report any experiences of racism or stigma in relation to their nationality. As presented in Chapter Four, the stigma attached to the word migrant is also referred to in the literature (e.g. Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010; Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013). Both from a scholarly and institutional perspective there is an understanding that, in practice, societies need to move beyond these stigmas and focus instead on the contribution of individuals that gain and maintain paid employment in a host country, rather than on labels on the degree of their foreignness (c.f. Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss, 2018; de Haas *et al.*, 2019). Apart from the suggestion of an economic push for mobility, the term migrant, as shared in Chapter Four, implies the desire or objective of acquiring a permanent or settled status in the host country (Tharenou, 2015), whereas the sample in this study operates on a more fluid basis. The participants' condition of being EU citizens, and the geographical closeness and easy/cheap travel, facilitate regular travel between host and home countries. In reflecting on the reason for her own move to, and subsequent stay in Spain, *Anika* [DE5-ES] shares:

> *"Maybe we are the first generation that have left our home countries WITHOUT emigrating, in that sense… you didn't leave your country because there was no work, we left because we wanted to…"* (*Anika* [DE5-ES], translator).

*Liz*, an Irish data protection officer living in Germany agrees with *Anika*, explicitly admitting her move was not due to economic reasons, but rather prompted by a desire to experience other cultures:

> *"Most of my close school friends are abroad as well… I mean, it's not like we're the generation where you had to emigrate… to FIND something… it's just that we all quite fancied it (laughing). We all quite fancied living abroad!"* (*Liz* [IE6-DE], data protection officer).

As detailed in Chapter Four, AEs, SIEs and migrants are believed to have different drivers for international mobility. AEs are deemed to move mainly for career reasons, while SIEs' motives are broader, including a desire for a foreign experience, a better lifestyle and/or personal relationships (Doherty, Dickmann and Mills, 2011). Migrants, instead, are assumed to

have mainly economic drivers for mobility (Tharenou, 2015; de Haas, 2021). Table 6.2 below shares the reasons behind the initial motivation for mobility for the participants in this study, and their current motivation to remain in their respective host countries.

*9. Table 6.2 Motivation for initial move to and subsequent stay in the host country*

| Code | Pseudonym | Initial Motivation for Mobility | Motivation to remain |
|---|---|---|---|
| ES1-IE | Susana | break/learning English | good working conditions / 'made a life' in the host country |
| ES2-IE | Carmen | job opportunity | good working conditions / formed a family in the host country (one child) |
| ES3-IE | Arturo | adventure/learning English | good working conditions / feeling of freedom |
| ES4-IE | Sandra | adventure/learning English | formed a family in the host country (two daughters) |
| ES5-IE | Peter | job opportunity | career advancement |
| ES6-IE | Bruno | adventure/improving English | formed a family in the host country (one child) |
| ES7-IE | Robert | job opportunity/English-speaking country | opportunity for entrepreneurship |
| DE1-IE | Laura | education/adventure/love of English language | affinity to host country / relationship |
| DE2-IE | Doris | adventure | formed a family in the host country (one child) |
| DE3-IE | Tania | relationship | career advancement/satisfaction |
| DE4-IE | Melina | international work experience | international work experience |
| DE5-IE | Feli | family ties / career change | affinity to host country / family ties |
| DE6-IE | Simon | further education (PhD) | career advancement/satisfaction |
| DE7-IE | Bettina | relationship | host country attachment |
| | | | |
| IE1-DE | Noel | job opportunity | specific job / formed a family in the host country (one child) |
| IE2-DE | Ivan | relationship | relationship |
| IE3-DE | Oliver | relationship | specific job / formed a family in the host country (2 children) |
| IE4-DE | Fred | AE assignment | relationship / new job opportunity (SIE) |
| IE5-DE | Fintan | relationship | formed a family in the host country (2 children) |
| IE6-DE | Luke | job opportunity | relationship / socio-economic conditions and social protections |
| IE7-DE | Liz | adventure / love of language | socio-economic conditions and social protections |
| ES1-DE | Jose | job opportunity | career advancement/satisfaction |
| ES2-DE | Andres | further education (PhD) | job opportunity |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ES3-DE | Elena | host country recruiting drive | career advancement/satisfaction |
| ES4-DE | Nano | work & adventure | socio-economic conditions and social protections |
| ES5-DE | Patri | education (undergraduate) | opportunities in her field<br>career advancement/satisfaction |
| ES6-DE | Maite | further education (PhD) | career advancement/satisfaction |
| ES7-DE | Cari | work & adventure | career advancement/satisfaction |
| | | | |
| IE1-ES | Conor | relationship | lifestyle and career satisfaction |
| IE2-ES | Clare | adventure | lifestyle and social protections |
| IE3-ES | Jason | further education (Masters) | formed a family in the host country (2 children) |
| IE4-ES | Kathy | adventure | lifestyle & formed a family in the host country (one child, 3rd country partner) |
| IE5-ES | Sam | adventure | lifestyle |
| IE6-ES | Gerry | partner's health / quality of life | partner's health / quality of life |
| IE7-ES | Emmet | relationship | formed a family in the host country (1 child) |
| DE1-ES | Moritz | AE assignment / adventure | career satisfaction |
| DE2-ES | Karl | relationship | formed a family in the host country (2 children) |
| DE3-ES | Helga | interest in host country / job | relationship |
| DE4-ES | Rupert | relationship | formed a family in the host country (2 children) |
| DE5-ES | Anika | interest in host country | affinity to the host country |
| DE6-ES | Nina | (partner's) family ties | family ties (own kids growing up as Spanish) |
| DE7-ES | Alex | learning the language | formed a family in the host country (2 children) |

***The first two letters in the code indicate participants' home country and the last two letters their host country. (i.e. DE=Germany, ES=Spain [España], IE=Ireland). The numbers indicate the order in which participants were interviewed.***

As shared in Table 6.2 above, of the three different nationalities examined, the Spanish participants were the most likely to cite the more favourable working conditions either in Germany or Ireland as their initial motivation for mobility. For some participants (n=14) the initial move was strictly driven by professional opportunities available in the host country. For others (n=26), the reason for the initial move was more personal, with some participants quoting a desire for adventure, language learning, and taking time to think and reflect on what to do with their lives as the driving motivations for their intra-EU move. In general, regardless of their initial motivation for mobility, the participants in this study do not have the sense of having emigrated, but rather simply 'moving' somewhere else:

> *"For me it was like… moving. It wasn't like emigrating. It was just like moving to a place that's kind of faraway… but I never felt like… like I was emigrating"* (*Melina* [DE4-IE], sales and business development [social media MNC]).

> *"I never LEFT Germany. I never said 'I don't want to live in Germany'. It was just… I wanted to live in Barcelona, I wanted to give it a go and try my luck… and I was lucky, and it worked, so (shrugs her shoulders, smiling) here I am!"* (*Anika* [DE5-ES], translator).

The feeling of not emigrating, but rather 'just moving' is common in participants' accounts. Regardless of the reason prompting their move (see Table 6.2), due to the geographical closeness, reasonably priced travel and (regulatory) ease of movement within Europe, all participants have the opportunity – and felt free – to move back and forth from their respective home and host countries regularly, rendering a fixed identity as an expatriate, or SIE, or migrant, inaccurate in their ongoing transnational navigation over time. As verbalised by *Doris* [DE2-IE] and *Sam* [IE5-ES], the participants are aware of the privileged position EU membership affords them:

> *"I'm very conscious of… I'm an EU citizen and I can move between two countries… or other European countries, so, that's a privilege that… yeah… that keeps me happy. Like, to be a 'fluent migrant'* (*Doris* [DE2-IE], community radio programme manager [outreach])

> *"Having a European passport which allows you to go from one country to the next... to teach, and work and live... now, that's something different... that's very specific, and it's not vague at all. I'm very PROUD to have that European passport... to be part of a BIGGER project... absolutely!* (*Sam* [IE5-ES], English-language teacher)

As presented in the contextualisation of the study (Chapter Three), EU citizens retain the same rights (and obligations) as they have in their (EU) countries of origin. As per the quotes shared above, the participants are aware of their EU privileges, and this is one of the reasons why they do not fully accept the categorisation of expatriate or migrant (commonly used in the management literature) as they perceive these as rigid or stigmatised categories. Even though some participants, like *Doris* above, do use these terms occasionally from a linguistic and/or historical/cultural standpoint. Aside from the regulatory benefits of being an EU citizen living in the EU, the geographical and cultural proximity of EU countries facilitates the participants' fluid connection – physical, relational, and cultural – between both home and host countries. This fluid connection adds to the participants' feeling of dual identification with both home and host

countries (n=1), or self-identifying as European (n=7) or dual home country and European identification (n=18), rather than either SIEs or migrants (see Figure 6.3). However, some participants also shared their feeling of not belonging in either their home or host countries. For example, *Sandra* [ES4-IE], a community radio producer who has lived in Ireland for 27 years, self-identifies as European, but doesn't subscribe to an identity exclusively attached to a geographical location:

> *"When you're a migrant, you live in a 'third dimension'... because your home, where you come from… is not your home anymore. The home where you are living… or you have made your living… or you are staying at the moment, is not your home either... ok? So, you live between these two worlds… it's kind of… I like that concept… so now it's very difficult for me to define myself from a kind of… 'geographically-attached identity', if you want to call it that"* (*Sandra*, [ES4-IE] Community Radio producer)

Both the literature and popular convention refers to migrants as having, acquiring, or desiring to acquire a permanent or settled status. This settled status is tied into geographically attached identities (of either origin/destination countries, or both). However, Sandra expresses her reluctance in being defined or classified in geography-related terms. In this sense, she uses the term migrant for a lack of a better word to describe her feeling of 'living in a third dimension'.

*Anika* echoes *Sandra*'s feeling of not really belonging or 'fitting' in her home country anymore, yet still self-identifying as German, at least when being abroad:

> *"When I'm in Germany I notice I don't 'fit' anymore… I feel more European... Germany now is not the country I used to live... or grew up in... anymore (sad smile)… but of course HERE I can't NOT be German"* (Anika [DE5-ES], translator).

Some participants (n=11) used the term migrant to define themselves for lack of a better word (as per *Sandra* above), or when asked to do so, once the literature-assigned boundary conditions were explained to them. This self-assignation was mainly due to temporality considerations and/or linguistic conventions. Three of these 11 participants – *Clare* [IE2-ES], *Noel* [IE1-DE] and *Fintan* [IE5-DE] – had decided to stay in the host country indefinitely (therefore choosing the conventional definition applied to long-term non-national residents) because of having formed their own families in the host country. National identity versus transnational identity considerations were also reported in relation to participants' children's self-identification and/or their transnational role, as voiced by *Fintan*'s quote below.

*"With the creation of our own small unit here… which is very bi-cultural, and which is, I suppose, DEFINITELY German-Irish."* (*Fintan* [IE5-DE], academic; two children, German wife).

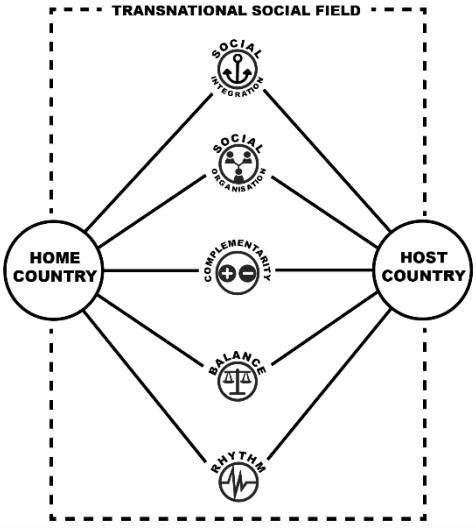
Bi-cultural/bi-national self-identification was confirmed by 25 out of 42 participants, either explicitly (like in *Fintan*'s case above) or implicitly in their self-identification as Europeans (n=7) or dual home country and European identification (n=18). Table 6.1 shows that rather than identifying themselves with the classification pertaining to global mobility populations assigned by the management literature, participants self-identified (1) as home-country nationals, (2) with regional sub-groups within their home countries (e.g. Catalan, Canarian or Bavarian), (3) as Europeans, or (4) a combination of categories (i.e. home country and European). The quotes shared in this section with regard to participants' self-identification sum up the complications in applying narrow definitions and categories of international mobility without considering the context(s) in which individuals are embedded in. As previously mentioned, this study is positioned within the specific context of the EU, which allows the free movement and equal rights for EU citizens within and across EU member countries (see Chapter Three). Intra-EU connections are further facilitated by cheap transport and easy communications that support living **simultaneously** – whether physically or cognitively – in two countries. The interview extracts shared in this section have illustrated how the conceptual boundaries assigned to the SIE and migrant categories are blurred for this study's population. The next chapter sections explore if and how the more fluid concept of transnational living may be a better fit to represent the reality of intra-EU mobility for this cohort.

## 6.3 Transnational living within the European Union (EU)

As detailed in the interdisciplinary literature reviewed in Chapter Four, transnationalism has been defined as 'the process by which immigrants forge and sustain ***multi-stranded*** social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 1994, p. 7 – emphasis added). Living transnational lives, then, requires '**sustained** and **similarly significant** attachments, interactions and presences in two or more societies separated by national borders' (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p. 2). Chapter Four detailed the five dimensions of transnational living – namely social integration, social organisation, complementarity, balance, and rhythm (see Figure 4.5, Chapter 4, reproduced below) – which indicate the dynamism of transnational living. Temporality, of course, equally affects self-identification and the extent of participants' home and host country attachments, interactions, and presences. The findings presented in this chapter illustrate how (in which ways) participants' host and home country attachments, interactions and presences develop and are maintained as

their time in the host country advances. This study's cohort have lived in their respective host countries for an average of fourteen years (see Table 6.1 in the previous section), with most participants (n=39) considering their time in the host country to be 'open ended'. While this is not a longitudinal study, the retrospective accounts of participants' intra-EU lives and careers highlight the variations of the dimensions of transnational living (see Chapter Four, section 4.4) as their lives and careers evolve.

***30. Figure 4.5 (*duplicate, reproduced from Chapter Four): Schematic representation of the five dimensions of transnational living: Social integration, social organisation, complementarity, balance, and rhythm (as shared in Chapter Four).***




***Source: Developed by the author (Suarez-Bilbao, B., 2023). Created from Carling, Erdal and Talleraas (2021)***

This study addresses a nomenclature fit question considering intra-EU mobility, specifically, what existing terms in the literature in relation to international mobility best represent intra-EU mobile individuals. The previous section (section 6.2) shared how and why this study's cohort do not self-identify and do not completely fit the rigid SIE or migrant category parameters as described in the literature (e.g.(Cerdin and Selmer, 2014; McNulty and Brewster, 2017). In line with the literature (see Chapter 4, section 4.3.4), the present section explores how and in which ways the EU regulatory and socio-economic context – as well as the participants' own proactive behaviour – may influence transnational living for this cohort. The interplay between EU structures facilitating intra-EU mobility (see Chapter Three), and the participants' own proactivity in maintaining simultaneous home/host country engagements is reflected in the five dimensions indicating the simultaneity, intensity and scope of transnational living (see Figure 4.5 above), namely social integration, social organisation, complementarity, balance, and rhythm (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). These five dimensions of transnational living will be

detailed next, relating them to the experiences of this sample's cohort, in order to assess and evidence whether transnational living best describes the mobility of this internationally mobile population. The dimensions of social integration and social organisation, as well as balance and rhythm, are grouped together for ease of analysis, as they are closely related [to each other]. However, all dimensions of transnational living interact with each other as they reflect, as previously stated, simultaneous, sustained and similarly significant transnational engagements.

### 6.3.1 Dimensions of Transnational Living: Social integration and Social Organisation

The social integration and social organisation dimensions of transnational living are grouped together in this section (Figure 6.4) because they closely interact with and relate to each other, evidencing conceptual boundary blurring for this sample. As shared in Chapter Four, social integration pertains to the extent in which transnational living is *rooted* in the different national and transnational contexts, while social organisation refers to *the ways* in which transnational living might be embedded in social relationships (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p. 8). Therefore, together, social integration and social organisation reflect the individual's simultaneous socio-economic, cultural and/or political engagement with the home and host counties within their transnational fields. In this dissertation, social integration is represented as an anchor, and social organisation with a social network icon (see Chapter 4, and Figure 6.4 below).

31. ***Figure 6.4: Visual representation of social integration and social organisation***


As all participants are currently working in their respective host countries (and have been for at least three years, average of 14 years – see Table 6.1, Section 6.2), their social integration in relation to the host-country has been both through work-related (i.e. with colleagues, clients, suppliers, and business partners) and social engagements (e.g. with friend and family). Therefore host-country social organisation can be both structured – in the form of legal contracts, schedules, work-related conventions, etc – and flexible (e.g. participation in group leisure activities or hobbies). On the other hand, home-country related social integration and social organisation are, for most EU-transnationals in this sample (n=22), mainly restricted to the social/family realm, as per *Liz*'s account below. *Liz* shares that her family network in Ireland is still strong, as are her professional and social networks in Germany. Apart from displaying

professional social integration, *Liz* is politically and socially involved in her host country. She is an active member of the German green party and does voluntary work with refugees (in Germany), showing structured/institutionalised social organisation in the host country, while her social organisation in Ireland is through home-country family, and thus flexible rather than structured**.**

> *"I have two homes. So, when I'm here [in Germany], I tell people I'm going HOME [to Ireland]… and when I'm at home, over THERE [in Ireland], I tell people I'm going HOME to come here (smiling). So yeah, I'm very much… in BOTH countries, really. I have my family there [in Ireland]… a few friends… I mean, I have a BIG family… I only have one sibling, but I have an awful lot of cousins I'm pretty close to, so I have a FAMILY network [in Ireland]… but not an awful lot of my peers. I mean, a LOT of people emigrated when I did (makes a face)… there wasn't a lot REALLY happening… and they've moved back since, but they've all kind of gone different roads to me… moved back and bought a house and had kids and all the rest of it and… I didn't (makes a face, laughing)"* (*Liz* [IE6-DE], data protection officer).

Despite having lived in her host country for 28 years, *Liz* maintains her home-country attachment, reflecting her social integration in both Germany and Ireland, the two countries comprising her transnational field. *Liz*'s quote above evidence the psychological attachment she feels to both her home and host countries. She reflects on her social interactions and on how her international mobility (and that of others in her home-country social circle) has meant her Irish social networks have weakened, admitting she only keeps in touch with a few select friends.

*Liz*'s account can seem contradictory to *Sandra*'s [ES4-IE] feeling of "living in a third dimension" (as shared in section 6.2) or not really feeling she belongs in either her home or host countries. However, on close inspection, *Sandra*'s job in a community radio firmly positions her as an active member in the host country society, while her collaboration with a newspaper in the Basque country [Spain], gives an indication of her home-country social integration and social organisation, and intellectually positions her between Irish and Spanish [transnational] political and societal debates. *Sandra* has lived in Ireland for 27 years (see Table 6.1). Due to her interest in politics, and her knowledge of Ireland's resolution of the [IRA] terrorism issues the country faced, as a qualified journalist *Sandra* [continuously] collaborates with a newspaper in the Basque country [Spain].

> *"I write, from time to time, for a paper in the Basque Country… about the situation in Ireland and… sometimes the UK also, or Britain."* (*Sandra* [ES4-IE], producer, Community Radio)

Therefore, in *Sandra*'s case, home-country social organisation has both flexible [in terms of socio-cultural engagements] and structured/institutionalised [in terms of cross-border employment or project work] elements. These elements of [work-related] structured social organisation are also apparent in the accounts of 19 of the 42 participants in this study. For some – like *Sandra* [ES4-IE], *Jason* [IE3-ES] and *Fintan* [IE5-DE], who regularly collaborate with news and current affairs outlets (i.e. newspapers, magazines, podcasts) in their respective home countries – these socio-economic transnational engagements are 'side projects' and thus not related to their main employment or source of income in the host country. For some participants, however, work-related transnational engagement is an aspect of their current employment in the host country. For example, *Karl* [DE2-ES], a mechanical engineer who works in one of the Spanish plants of a German car manufacturer, is in constant communication with his German colleagues in relation to production targets and specifications.

> *"When I started, in Vitoria [Spain], in '99... quite a few of the bosses were German... but nowadays everything is much more EFFICIENT... and the Germans no longer come here... My job is production and of course, we assemble the cars that are designed in Stuttgart. The development is in Stuttgart. Some things are designed here in Vitoria, but it's very little. Here we are more involved in the practical part... I like my job very much because I help the workers in the factory and I talk... on the other hand I talk to the Germans who are also a little bit DISCONNECTED from production, because they are already a year ahead. So, it's a job that changes a lot, that is very practical... and they are grateful to you, on both sides."* (*Karl* [DE2-ES], mechanical engineer)

Equally, *Moritz* [DE1-ES], *Anika* [DE5-ES], *Nina* [DE6-ES] and *Alex* [DE7-ES], while based in Spain also serve German clients. *Melina's* [DE4-IE] sales role necessitates her to travel frequently to Germany (and Austria), as she oversees part of her organisation's German-language client relationships.

Host country social integration may be influenced by the time that participants have lived in their respective host countries, as well as their proficiency in the host country language (signalling to their ability to communicate with host country natives and thus their facility to integrate in the host country society). *Liz*'s comment above of having 'two homes' points to the

psychological (feeling of belonging) aspect of participants' transnational social integration. *Liz* has lived and worked in Germany for 28 years (see Table 6.1), which speaks to her social integration in the host country society. In contrast, *Elena* [ ES3-DE], who had been living in Germany only three years at the time of the interview, reflects on the difficulty of integrating into German society when having a low-level of German language.

> *"Most of my friends are Spanish. I attempted to make German friends, at yoga classes, for example... I met a good friend there... or trying to organise a tandem to practice German (and the other person Spanish). I've also some friends I met at the language school, but these are foreigners. Basically, after three years here I only have a handful of German friends."* (*Elena* [ES3-DE], Geriatric nurse).

Aside of taking German language lessons, *Elena*'s quote demonstrates proactivity towards social integration, in terms of joining yoga classes and organising tandem German-Spanish language practice. However, the quote also indicates the difficulties in integrating with the host country natives, especially when not speaking the host country language. *Jose* and *Nano*, both also Spanish citizens living in Germany, share that they too have joined sport teams (*Jose* plays football and *Nano* ultimate frisbee) as a proactive measure aimed at meeting more German people and practicing the language, thus facilitating their host country social integration in non-work-related circles.

*Bettina* [DE7-IE], a nurse and graphic designer who has lived in Ireland for 14 years, is very active in the cultural scene in Limerick (Ireland). *Bettina*'s host country social integration was facilitated by the fact that she could speak English fluently, and her (at the time) husband had already a network in Ireland when they moved. She is a member of a jazz band that performs regularly in the region and an active member of the regional jazz society. Thus, *Bettina*'s host country socio-cultural organisation, in this regard, is both flexible and structured. Simultaneously, she maintains her (physical and virtual) presence in, interactions with, and attachment to her home country, as she is planning her relocation to Germany in a few years to set up a graphic design studio in partnership with her best friend. In preparation for this move, *Bettina* has reduced her nursing hours to work on graphic design projects (with clients based in Germany, Ireland and internationally) on a self-employed basis. Going forward, she plans to divide her time (physical presence) between Ireland and Germany, remarking that:

> *"I have gained friendships… I have music connections… so there is a couple of things I'm very familiar with and very connected to which would make it HARD to just GO,*

*you know… and leave it all behind."* (*Bettina* [ DE7-IE], nurse and [freelance] graphic designer).

*Jason* [IE3-ES], an entrepreneur and lecturer living in Spain, makes the point that the geographical proximity and the easiness of travel between Spain and Ireland makes him feel connected (or socially integrated) to his home country, and, because of this simultaneous social integration, less inclined to return to Ireland. *Jason's* quote below illustrates how it is relatively easier to live a transnational life within the structures of the EU.

*"Listen, it's not all great, you know… but the big thing is that that I don't FEEL far away. The money is the same, the time zone is almost the same… so I don't feel as if I was in Australia or something like that. You know, the temptation to come back would be a lot stronger then, but the temptation to come back when you're in Spain is much less." (Jason* [IE3-ES], entrepreneur and university lecturer).

*Jason*'s quote illustrates how transnational living is facilitated by the ease of using the same currency, not having to adhere to maximum stay rules, and the availability of direct, and often cheap, flights between his host and home countries. *Maite* (Spanish biochemist living in Germany) shares *Jason*'s feeling of connection – a sustained and significant attachment (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021) – to both Spain and Germany, and how the geographical proximity and the structures (regulatory framework, frequent and cheap air travel connections, and a flexible job that allows her to work from home in Spain from time to time) within and between her home and host countries facilitate her transnational living:

*"Going back home over Christmas, I would always think, wow… this is a REALLY GOOD life here in Spain… but I never MISSED it so much that… I've never SUPER missed it. I mean, I think about Spain and it's… I'm lucky that it's very easy to travel between Berlin and Madrid… so if I'm very homesick and want to see my sister and the baby and whatever, then… I can be home in two hours, and stay for two weeks (smiling)." (Maite* [ES6-DE], biochemist).

*Fintan* [IE5-DE], has a similar view to *Jason* and *Maite*, adding that technological advances allow him to live a transnational life, grounded in a European geographical and intellectual space, and be socially integrated – from both a personal and professional perspective – in both Germany and Ireland.

*"I think the technological capabilities that we have now, have reduced the, I suppose, homesickness… and it has definitely reduced the sense of isolation that I*

*possibly would have otherwise felt. Because, I mean, I've been very, VERY involved often in Irish debates… with Ireland, intellectually… ALWAYS from a European perspective, I mean, this is also my intellectual position… one of social Europeanism. I would always have brought, I suppose, this perspective, and this perspective does feed into my personal life."* (*Fintan* [IE5-DE], academic).

It is noticeable that Fintan and other participants (see Maite's [ES6-DE] quote in Table 6.3 below) have remarked on the impact of cheap airfares and communication technologies in facilitating translational living. Without direct routes to and from various European cities, at reasonable prices, maintaining dual social integration and organisation may have been more of a challenge. The quotes and comments shared in this section, summarised in Table 6.3 below, clearly evidence participants' social integration (relational, professional or both) and social organisation (whether structured, flexible, or both) between home and host countries.

10. ***Table 6.3 Transnational social integration and social organisation – section sample***

| Example quote / comment | Pseudonym | Social Integration | Social Organisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| "I have two homes... I'm very much in BOTH countries, really. I have my family there… a few friends…" | Liz [IE7-DE] | Home country: Relational<br>Host country: Relational, professional | Home country: Flexible (relational)<br>Host country: Structured (work, political party membership, volunteering) |
| "Most of my friends are Spanish... Basically, after three years here I only have a handful of German friends." | Elena [ES3-DE] | Home country: Relational<br>Host country: Relational, professional | Home country: Flexible (relational)<br>Host country: Structured (work) and flexible (language school, yoga classes) |
| Joined sport teams as a way to socially integrate in the host country | Jose [ES1-DE]<br>Nano [ES4-DE] | Home country: Relational<br>Host country: Relational, professional | Home country: Flexible (relational)<br>Host country: Structured (work) and flexible/structured (playing sports) |
| "I'm lucky that it's very easy to travel between Berlin and Madrid… so if I'm very homesick and want to see my sister and the baby and whatever, then… I can be home in two hours, and stay for two weeks" | Maite [ES6-DE] | Home country: Relational<br>Host country: Relational, professional | Home country: Flexible (relational)<br>Host country: Structured (work) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| “I write, from time to time, for a paper in the Basque Country… about the situation in Ireland and… sometimes the UK also, or Britain.” | Sandra [ES4-IE] | Home country: Relational, professional<br>Host country: Relational, professional | Home country: Flexible (relational) and structured (professional side project)<br>Host country: Structured (work) |
| “I help the workers in the factory, and I talk... on the other hand, to the Germans who are also a little bit DISCONNECTED from production” | Karl [DE2-ES] | Home country: Relational, professional<br>Host country: Relational, professional | Home country: Flexible (relational) and structured (professional collaboration)<br>Host country: Structured (work) |
| “I have gained friendships… I have music connections… so there is a couple of things I'm very familiar with and very connected to which would make it HARD to just GO, you know… and leave it all behind.” | Bettina [DE7-IE] | Home country: Relational, professional<br>Host country: Relational, professional | Home country: Flexible (relational) and structured (graphic design work)<br>Host country: Structured (work, member of jazz band & jazz society) |
| "I don't feel as if I was in Australia or something like that. You know, the temptation to come back would be a lot stronger then, but the temptation to come back when you're in Spain is much less.” | Jason [IE3-ES] | Home country: Relational, professional<br>Host country: Relational, professional | Home country: Flexible (relational) and structured (collaboration with news outlets / podcasts)<br>Host country: Structured (work) |
| "I've been very, VERY involved often in Irish debates… with Ireland, intellectually… ALWAYS from a European perspective" | Fintan [IE5-DE] | Home country: Relational, professional<br>Host country: Relational, professional | Home country: Flexible (relational) and structured (collaboration with news outlets / guest lectures)<br>Host country: Structured (work) |

***The first two letters in the code indicate participants' home country and the last two letters their host country. (i.e. DE=Germany, ES=Spain [España], IE=Ireland). The numbers indicate the order in which participants were interviewed.***

This section has detailed the social integration and social organisation elements of transnational living for this study's cohort. All the participants are employed in or (as self-employed) conduct their main economic activity from their respective host countries, with most (n=26) having lived in the host country for over 10 years. Therefore, host-country social integration and social organisation is dominant in relation to their transnational living. In particular, the data highlights the relational aspect of these participants' transnational lives in

terms of home-country engagement, although a few participants, as detailed above, also show some elements of work-related social integration and social organisation in the home country.

### 6.3.2 Dimensions of Transnational Living: Complementarity

The desire to be close to family and friends (in both home and host countries) is not the only aspect that motivates (or even necessitates) transnational living. Apart from the relational aspects, other considerations for living a transnational life include the desire to follow educational or professional opportunities abroad – reflecting the different opportunity structures/provision in home and host countries (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021) – and health or well-being management while abroad, for example. These aspects represent the complementarity dimension of living a transnational life. Because complementarity looks at the aspects of each country (home and host) that influence, drive or necessitate transnational living, it is depicted here with a plus/minus icon (see Figure 6.5).

32. ***Figure 6.5: Visual representation of complementarity***


The participants in this study avail of the opportunity structures, complementary to both their home and host countries, that allow them to live a transnational life. As shared in Chapter Four, opportunity structures are structural conditions present in both home and host countries that affect individual's desires, drives and aspirations (De Haas, 2021). The different dimensions of transnational living allow individuals to fulfil these desires and goals by, for instance, complementing opportunities [or lack of] in home and host countries, and balancing home country visits. Complementarity refers to 'the aspects of each country that motivate or necessitate transnational living' (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p. 8), and thus relates to the reasons EU-transnationals gave for their initial move to and subsequent stay in the host country (see Table 6.4 below). As detailed in Table 6.4, of the three nationalities, the Spanish participants were the most likely to move for work-related reasons (n=9 out of 14), while most of the German (n=10 out of 14) and the Irish (n=11 out of 14) participants initially moved for personal [non-work-related] reasons.

*11. Table 6.4 Nature of initial motivation for intra-EU move and current motivation for transnational living while residing in the host country on an open-ended basis.*

| Code | Pseudonym | Initial motivation for EU move | | | Current reason for transnational living | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Work-related | Other | Combination | Work-related | Other | Combination |
| DE1-ES | Moritz | | | X | | X | |
| DE2-ES | Karl | | X | | | X | |
| DE3-ES | Helga | | | X | | X | |
| DE4-ES | Rupert | | X | | | X | |
| DE5-ES | Anika | | X | | | X | |
| DE6-ES | Nina | | X | | | X | |
| DE7-ES | Alex | | X | | | X | |
| DE1-IE | Laura | | X | | X | | |
| DE2-IE | Doris | | X | | | | X |
| DE3-IE | Tania | | X | | X | | |
| DE4-IE | Melina | X | | | X | | |
| DE5-IE | Feli | | X | | | X | |
| DE6-IE | Simon | X | | | X | | |
| DE7-IE | Bettina | | X | | | X | |
| | | | | | | | |
| ES1-DE | Jose | X | | | X | | |
| ES2-DE | Andres | | X | | | X | |
| ES3-DE | Elena | X | | | X | | |
| ES4-DE | Nano | X | | | | | X |
| ES5-DE | Patri | X | | | X | | |
| ES6-DE | Maite | X | | | X | | |
| ES7-DE | Cari | X | | | X | | |
| ES1-IE | Susana | | X | | X | | |
| ES2-IE | Carmen | X | | | | | X |
| ES3-IE | Arturo | | X | | X | | |
| ES4-IE | Sandra | | X | | | | X |
| ES5-IE | Peter | X | | | X | | |
| ES6-IE | Bruno | | X | | | | X |
| ES7-IE | Robert | X | | | X | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| IE1-DE | Noel | X | | | | | X |
| IE2-DE | Ivan | | X | | | X | |
| IE3-DE | Oliver | | X | | | | X |
| IE4-DE | Fred | X | | | X | | |
| IE5-DE | Fintan | | X | | | X | |
| IE6-DE | Luke | X | | | | X | |
| IE7-DE | Liz | | X | | | X | |
| IE1-ES | Conor | | X | | | | X |
| IE2-ES | Clare | | X | | | X | |
| IE3-ES | Jason | | X | | | X | |
| IE4-ES | Kathy | | X | | | X | |
| IE5-ES | Sam | | X | | | X | |
| IE6-ES | Gerry | | X | | | X | |
| IE7-ES | Emmet | | X | | | X | |

**** The table is sorted in order of nationality/citizenship, and alphabetically according to country initials.***

As an example of career-related [from a whole-life perspective] complementarity, *Simon* [DE6-IE] was able to access educational and professional opportunities in Ireland that, given the rigid structures in relation to education provision in Germany (see Chapter Three – Contextualisation of the Study), he believes were not available for him in his home country.

> *"I mean… doing that in Germany, you would always be looked down at… coming from that lower Junior Cert level, basically… and no one would actually think of 'Oh yeah, he actually made it to Professor' (smiling)"* (*Simon* [DE6-IE], academic).

*Simon* is evidently proud of his professional achievement, which, in his opinion was possible because of the educational opportunity he availed of in Ireland, allowing him to obtain a doctorate. He shares that due to the rigid and linear progression pathways in the German education system (see Chapter Three – Contextualisation of the Study) he was unable to aspire to or gain access to a PhD programme in Germany. For *Simon*, availing of this specific complementarity of transnational living was possible due to Ireland's geographical proximity to Germany, it's EU membership (with all the benefits this membership implies for EU citizens – see Chapter Three), and the fact that it is an English-speaking country (and *Simon* is fluent in English). *Simon* admits that living within a couple of hours flight to/from his home country family and friends was (initially) and remains an important consideration for his international move to and subsequent stay in Ireland.

> *"So, that's… one of the main motivations to come to Ireland, I think… was that is English speaking… still in EU (he laughs)… and that is basically close to… the continent. See, for example, Australia… would be an interesting experience, but it's REALLY far away, so… flying back would be… well… close to impossible. Yeah, so, in general… I would do that… travel home twice a year, ideally."* (*Simon* [DE6-IE], academic).

In general, for the participants in this study, transnational living is enabled by EU institutions – in the sense that, as EU citizens they are free to live and work in any EU country without needing a visa or having to adhere to maximum stay rules – close geographical proximity and access to affordable airfares and direct flights. The quotes by *Jason* [IE3-ES], *Fintan* [IE5-DE], and *Maite* [ES5-DE] in the previous section, and *Simon*'s quote above, illustrate how the possibility of frequent and cheap travel allows them to maintain a regular physical presence in and their

engagement with their home countries, availing of the complementary resources both countries provide them.

#### 6.3.2.1 Complementarity: Language and Culture

Learning and/or being able to speak the host country language was, for 14 of the 42 participants, an important consideration in the decision to move to a particular host country. Twelve of these 14 participants had previously been on an ERASMUS [or similar] programme that prompted them to return after their studies. ERASMUS and similar language/experiential programmes promoted by the EU (see Chapter Three) point to the complementarity of countries with different languages as providers of educational and experiential opportunities for intra-EU mobile individuals. Language and/or cultural complementarity was also quoted by participants that had formed families (n=19) in the host country. Having children and wanting them to grow up as bilingual and bicultural increased these participants' transnational engagement, highlighting the centrality of the temporal aspect (e.g. influence of life stages, such as motherhood) to transnational living. For example, *Doris* (German living in Ireland) highlights the importance of socio-cultural complementarity when recounting how she connected with the German community in Ireland because of her wanting her young daughter to be also exposed on a regular basis to her mother's home country culture and language:

> *"I wanted her to grow up with German, so I went to the Goethe Institute, and they pointed me to the German community that meets up in the Luther Church, and… I'm not... religious… I don't… practice religion, so I was a bit hesitant initially, but they're very open… they're not dogmatic so… the church is just… the institutional facility point, you know, the platform… so, I'm able to meet other parents there, other children… and I found that to be a very big bonus for my daughter… not only me speaking German to her, to show her that it is a language that's spoken by others as well (she smiles)"* (*Doris* [DE2-IE], community radio outreach coordinator).

The language and cultural immersion that *Doris* is providing for her daughter will allow her to communicate with her mother's extended home-country family and friends in their native language. Indeed, language/cultural immersion is one of the main reasons participants who have children (n=19) spend their holidays visiting family in the home country. This finding shows how the motivation to live a transnational life becomes stronger when individuals form families of their own in the host country, highlighting the importance of temporality and how different life stages (such as parenthood) influence home-host country engagement. The significance of the

temporal aspect in international careers is not sufficiently highlighted in the current categories used to describe international mobility.

#### 6.3.2.2 Macro-level Complementarity: Business Supports/Infrastructure and [Health] Service Provision

The fact that Ireland is an English-speaking country weighted heavy on *Robert*'s decision to take a job opportunity in Dublin, as he deemed it important to be able to speak the host-country language fluently to facilitate his social integration. *Robert*, who subsequently set up his own company with some ex-colleagues, speaks of how supported [by Irish institutions such as Enterprise Ireland] he feels as an entrepreneur in Ireland, as opposed to in his own home country:

> *"I'm CRITICAL with Spain… and very surprised… on the good side… with Ireland… but I'm sure that an Irish person could be the other way around. In Spain we have really good [health] services and stuff like that… a lot better than in Ireland… but in terms of support for building companies, it's ridiculous!... compared to what you have here [in Ireland]". (Robert* [ES7-IE], [tech] entrepreneur).

As evidenced in the quote above, for *Robert*, the availability of good job opportunities [at first] and the support he received from Ireland's institutions in setting up his company complement the superior quality of health service provision in Spain. *Doris*' [DE2-IE] and *Susana*'s [ES1-IE] cases present similar complementarity with regard to health service provision in their respective home countries. Both ladies undergo periodical health checkups in their home countries, which, as will be detailed in the following section, influences the balance of their transnational engagements.

Health-related concerns are also the source of complementarity for *Gerry* [IE6-ES] and *Nina* [DE6-ES]. *Nina*'s husband has a rare health condition, similar to Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). She reflects on the different approaches to treating his illness in her host [Spain] and home [Germany] countries:

> *"I think the Spanish system is MUCH better (serious face)… much, MUCH better… WAY better. Because you have a basic coverage for EVERYBODY. If you have something, you go to the doctor, and you will be treated… if you have a job, if you are poor, if you are rich… everything! you get EVERYTHING you need… you get it. In Germany it's already really in CONTROL of the market… private companies that are making money with health services. I don't think that this is correct (really serious),*

*because you never know if you are treated because of the problem, or because it's kind of an OPPORTUNITY for them to make money. My husband's disease… it's like… it's not ALS, but it's… it's like the same family… like MS. It's one of these RARE diseases… and there's no market for this… because they don't really do research for the pharmaceuticals or medicine… there's no market, because there's so few people ill. But here, at least… he is treated in [hospital] in Barcelona, he has access to the best doctors… they're doing all the tests they can do. In Germany… because we contacted other people with the same illness in Germany… they don't get even this basic… approach (shaking her head, looking sad).* (*Nina* [DE6-ES], freelance travel writer).

*Nina* shares that extreme heat negatively affects her husband's health, and, since the summers have become extremely hot in Barcelona, they are considering building a house in her mother's garden in Germany and spending three or four of the hotter months there. Thus, for *Nina*, the milder weather and family support in Germany complement the superior health treatment that her husband receives in Spain. The good weather in Spain [in Malaga specifically] was the decisive factor for *Gerry*'s move to his current host country. *Gerry*, an Irish self-employed project manager and consultant [automotive and finance] previously lived and worked in the UK for 12 years. When the Brexit referendum passed in 2016, he and his husband decided they had to move to a European country, for the sake of *Gerry*'s business. Brexit conditioned their open-ended move from the UK, but the good weather, along with the proximity to an international airport were decisive for the couple's choice of Spain, and specifically Malaga, as a host country/city to base Gerry's company in.

*"My husband and I had already been thinking about splitting our time 50/50 between the UK and Spain… for his health reasons and also because we'd found Malaga and really liked it.. and so… the best way of INSULATING myself against Brexit is to work overseas, so I'm not dependent on UK clients and I'm not dependent on the UK government. As things got worse in the Brexit sense through 2017… when we realized that splitting our time, 50/50 wouldn't work… so in 2018 we sold up in the UK and moved to Spain. Malaga was practical, because it's got really good connections to northern Europe... year-round." (Gerry* [IE6-ES], project manager and consultant)

#### 6.3.2.3 Complementarity: Industry/Service Reputation or Strength (influencing available opportunities)

Other sources of complementarity relate to the perceived strength of certain industries or professional services in participants' chosen host country, and the career opportunities this affords. The strong musical culture and the good reputation musical training has in Germany was the reason why *Patri*, a Spanish classical musician [wind instrument player] moved to Germany as an undergraduate to study music and has subsequently stayed.

> *"Because there's more opportunities to make a living as a musician in Germany. I mean, you can make a living also as a musician in Spain, but the conditions are worse. I wanted to… take a gamble."* (*Patri* [ES5-DE], classical musician).

*Patri*'s gamble seems to have paid off. After playing with different orchestras at regional level [as a wind instrument Master student], at the time of the interview *Patri* had secured her first fully professional job with a national orchestra. She is satisfied with the progress of her career so far and shares that, at some point, she would like to 'give back' and help Spanish music students in their professional journeys:

> *"I would like to… maybe to give some master classes in Spain. Master classes are generally a week-long… so I would like to do that every now and then. Or maybe I could give a concert there too… but not permanently or more long term."* (*Patri* [ES5-DE], classical musician).

Complementarity underscored the host country choice of participants and their decision to remain. *Tania* [DE3-IE] and *Peter* [ES5-IE] referred to the good reputation and strength of the aeronautical industry in Ireland, as a personal opportunity for career advancement. A similar argument was put forward by *Carmen* [ES2-IE], *Bruno* [ES6-IE] and *Melina* [DE4-IE] regarding the 'cluster' localisation of IT and social media multinationals in Ireland. However, *Oliver* [IE3-DE], who works for a multinational media group headquartered in Berlin (Germany), believes that he had to leave Ireland to avail of better and more interesting opportunities in 'Big Media', as (in his opinion) media-related industries and services are not as strong in his home country:

> *"Certain industries are probably stronger than others in Dublin [Ireland] and I'm generally passionate about media… it's what I'm interested in MOST, and I find that I'm able to fulfil that ambition here, whereas maybe I wouldn't have in Dublin."* (*Oliver* [IE3-DE], media/TV executive).

As evidenced by the quotes shared above, transnational living is enabled by the interplay or complementarity of localised (in either the home or host country) educational, experiential and/or professional opportunities, sources of physical and/or emotional well-being, social protections (or lack of), and/or proximity to loved ones. The following section refers to how the balance and rhythm dimensions in a sense 'correct' the asymmetries of transnational living.

### 6.3.3 Dimensions of Transnational Living: Balance and Rythm

Transnational balance refers to the role the home and host country play in participants' lives, reflecting the balance (or temporal imbalance) of the participants' attachment to and engagement with their home and host countries at different stages of their transnational lives and careers. The balance of attachment and engagement is often manifested in how the participants divide their time between transnational fields. The rhythm of transnational living also relates to the temporal dimension, in that it refers to how frequent or durable (in time) are the individual's presence and absence in their home and host countries (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021). Balance and rhythm are represented here as scales (balance) and a heartbeat (rhythm) – see Figure 6.6 below.

33. ***Figure 6.6: Visual representation of balance and rhythm***


As implied in the quotes shared in the previous section, the rhythm of transnational living can manifest in frequent short visits, longer holiday stays, dividing time [50/50, 30/70, etc.] between home and host countries, and/or the frequency of virtual presence/interaction. Balance and rhythm relate to complementarity in that, within the home/host country asymmetries that initially motivated international mobility and the physical/psychological limits of living in two countries (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021), individuals balance both their time [physical and virtual presence] in home and host countries, as well as the intensity of their transnational engagement and interaction.

#### 6.3.3.1 Balance and Rhythm: Work versus Non-Work (Relational) Aspects

Nevertheless, despite the regulatory and socio-economic context within the EU being favourable for transnationalism, living a transnational life is not without complication, as its balance and rhythm can fall out of synch on occasion. For *Peter* [ES5-IE] the geographical balance between

his personal and professional lives is complex, as currently his wife's 'permanent' residence is in Spain, while his is in Ireland (Dublin). Therefore, the balance of *Peter*'s transnational life currently hinges heavily towards Spain due to his close personal ties, and his having to travel to Spain most weekends. This is, he might be 'living' [in his mind, and emotionally] in Ireland to a lesser extent than his physical presence in the country would suggest (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021), even though his employment and fiscal residence is in Ireland. Peter's career is in aircraft leasing, an industry in which Ireland is a global leader. His move from London [where he previously resided] to Dublin was purely career-related, due to the opportunities Ireland's dominant position in aircraft leasing offers. Although his wife initially moved to Ireland with him, a career opportunity for herself recently brought her back to Madrid [Spain]. Both Peter and his wife are in their early forties and strongly ambitious, striving to progress in their paid work roles. Since the couple don't have children, *Peter* reflects on how the balance and rhythm of his transnational living might be altered if he and his wife decide to form a family in the future.

> *"I'm sure a lot of things will CHANGE when… that happens… one thing that I would say is that my family MIGHT be in Spain… but the good thing about aircraft being in the air all the time is that… I can live in Ireland… or work in Ireland and 'live' in Spain… kind of..." (Peter* [ES5-IE], sales manager [aero leasing]).

However, *Peter* shares that, regardless of geographical closeness, technological and (transport) communication advantages, COVID did represent a shock for the airline industry and thus for him at a professional as well as at a personal level. At the time of the interview, *Peter* had temporary relocated to Spain [working remotely for his Irish employer] to be with his wife, as, due to COVID travel restrictions, aircraft were mainly grounded and all staff in his company were working from home. Regardless of the impact of COVID on airlines and thus aircraft leasing, he appeared to be optimistic about the future of the industry and his own professional future. So much so that he had secured a new position with a different aircraft leasing company in Ireland – also working from home, initially, due to COVID restrictions – which he was starting shortly after our interview.

The rhythm of participants' transnational living varied regarding both frequency and length of home country visits, reflecting the heterogeneity of this cohort. All participants flew back to their home country at least once a year and reported being in contact regularly with family and friends 'back home'. Some participants, such as *Melina, Feli* [both German living in Ireland], *Fintan* [IE5-DE], *Jason* [IE3-ES], *Anika, Nina, Alex* [all German living in Spain], *Maite* and *Andres* [both Spanish living in Germany] favour frequent visits to the home country. These participants organise home country visits in combination with work-related travel, availing of

flexible work agreements that allow them to work from home [in their home countries] for a period of time, or to engage in home-country based collaborative work or side projects. For example, as *Melina's* [DE4-IE] role necessitates her travelling to Germany regularly, she organises her workload so she can extend her visits and spend quality time with their family and friends. Equally, as shared earlier, the flexible conditions of *Maite*'s [ES6-DE] job allow her to work from home [in Spain] periodically and spend time with her sister and her newborn niece.

#### 6.3.3.2 Balance and Rhythm: Socio-Cultural Engagement

Socio-cultural considerations were at the heart of the balance and rhythm of home-country engagement, especially for participants that had children, as mentioned in the previous section (Section 6.3.1) that examined this cohort's transnational social integration and social organisation. Participants with young children reported their desire for their children to grow up bilingual and bicultural, and those with older children (who are already growing up bilingual and bicultural) expressed their desire for their children to maintain the cultural/emotional connection with their parents' home country. Continued home-country engagement, especially in parenthood, strengthened these participants own bicultural identities, which they sought to extend through their own children. For this reason, notably parents with school-aged children, like *Alex* [DE7-ES], reported spending all the school holidays in their home counties.

> *"We go in the summer, and we stay for… it depends… for three weeks or five weeks"* (*Alex* [DE7-ES], Feng-Shui consultant).

*Alex* remarks that she often tries to combine these long visits with her consultancy work (servicing her Germany-based clients) and taking professional development courses:

> *"I normally try to do it in the five-week… summertime that we're in Germany, actually (laughing). I try to do it when I'm over there, in that time. I'm there, the kids are with their grandparents, so they have fun time. That's a good… you have to find, you know… your balance (gesticulating, laughing)"* (*Alex* [DE7-ES], Feng-Shui consultant).

#### 6.3.3.3 Balance and Rhythm: Virtual Engagement

Aside from the balance and rhythm of the physical presence in, and engagement with, the home country, participants reported significant virtual home-country interactions as part and parcel of their transnational living. For example, all interviewees professed regularly following home-country news online and/or reading home-country newspapers online. Indeed, *Alex* [DE7-ES] commented that she preferred watching the German news because, in her opinion, the German

press/TV had more accurate/objective reports of Spain-related news. However, transnational engagement transcended superficial current affair reports to include deeper socio-cultural identifications and engagement with home and host country cultures – such as popular music, politics, and social movements/trends – as evidenced by *Melina*'s [DE4-IE] comment below:

> *"I have a [German] podcast that I listen to that kind of… gives an overview over the political and economic state… I listen to the [German] radio, sometimes… I try to watch the [German] news once in a while… but that doesn't mean that I don't… like, I still watch the Irish news as well… it's a mix!* (*Melina* [DE4-IE], sales and business development [social media MNC]).

Indeed, *Anika*, a self-employed professional translator, reports keeping current with home-country news and language nuances is critical for her career:

> *"My area of translation is law, so I keep myself informed and tuned in to what is happening in the legal / political world. Also to do with legal terms, because language changes so much. That's why I try to be active on Twitter and LinkedIn… I read German newspapers, the specialised ones"* (*Anika* [DE5-ES], translator).

In this sense, social media was reported to be used not only to keep up with home-country friends and family, but also as a source of information on home-country news and political and socio-economic current affairs. As shared in Chapter Two, several of the Irish participants (n=9), a German and a Spanish participant were recruited on Twitter to take part in this study. The Irish participants in particular are quite active on Irish Twitter, regularly commenting on and getting involved in political, and socio-economic debates topical in their home country, as illustrated by *Jason*'s comment:

> *"You can see by my Twitter that I talk about Ireland as if I was LIVING in Ireland. I'm watching the same things, reading the same newspapers…" (Jason* [IE3-ES], entrepreneur and university lecturer).

This section shared the extent of the balance and rhythm of the division of participants' time between and engagement with their host and home countries. The fact that the participants are EU citizens who live transnational lives within the EU facilitates their socio-economic engagement in both host and home countries, as (due to EU freedom of movement rules – see Chapter Three) they do not have to contend with maximum stay rules. As evidenced by the quotes and comments shared in this section, the participants in this study manage the balance and rhythm of their in-presence transnational engagement between home and host countries

according to their individual circumstances. *Jose* [ ES1-DE], for example, shared that at the beginning when he moved to Germany he went back to Spain as many weekends as possible, but when he started making friends and socially integrating more in the host country, the frequency of his home-country visits decreased to twice or three times a year. In general participants tend to 'go back home' for special occasions, and typically summer and Christmas holidays.

As shared in this section, some participants, like *Melina* [DE4-IE], *Andres* [ES2-DE], *Jason* [IE3-ES], and *Fintan* [IE5-DE], travel (regularly or occasionally) to their home countries for work or work-related projects, and report extending these work-related visits to spend more time with her home-country family and friends. Others, like *Maite* [ES6-DE] and *Liz* [IE7-DE] avail of generous work-from-home arrangements with their employers to also work at times from their home-country homes. In terms of virtual transnational engagement, the intensity of virtual connections online and/or regular telephone conversations with personal and/or professional contacts in the home country can also vary. Social media use or content can be directed to either home or host country with different intensity in synch with contextual influences, like socio-cultural or political events taking place in either home or host countries.

## 6.4 Conclusion

In an era of globalisation and new ways of working, where geographical boundaries are re-imagined, the findings presented in this chapter evidence that international career movements are fluid and as such are not represented by rigid categorisations – such as SIE or migrant – emphasising territorial and/or temporal anchors to specific geographical locations and temporal frames. Instead, this chapter has presented an alternative way of looking at dynamic international career movements, sharing the various ways in which the participants in this study live transnational lives, facilitated by the regulatory and socio-economic context of the EU. In doing so, this chapter has addressed the first research question concerning the best concept to define and describe the intra-EU sample in this study.

It is evident from the participants' interviews that the terms expatriate and migrant have different connotations across cultures and individuals. In seeking to unpack this further, the interviews were analysed with regard to the elements of transnational living, and it was found that transnational living is a more accurate conceptualisation of the living experiences of this sample. Highlighting the dynamism of intra-EU career movements, the interviews show the fluid nature of participants' transnational engagements, which can become broad (i.e. less intense) or narrow (more intense) according to participants' personal and contextual circumstances, with

engagement intensity also varying over time and/or life stages. The inclusion of the temporal dimension with regard to individual differences in the social integration, social organisation, complementarity, balance and rhythm of transnational living allows for a more nuanced understanding and a more dynamic picture of the career experiences of this sample. The temporal aspect, which other definitions/terms in use in the management and migration literatures do not incorporate as extensively, is core to transnational living. As supported by the empirical data shared in this chapter, contemporary international career mobility is more fluid than the categories currently assigned to it. The inclusion of simultaneous home and host country engagement in career-related considerations is particularly suitable to the supra-context of the European Union (EU), as it allows for individuals to live their lives between two countries, and maintaining 'sustained and similarly significant attachments, interactions and presences' (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021, p.2) in both.

This chapter considers the findings in relation to the adequacy of extant nomenclature pertaining to global mobility populations in the specific socio-political and regulatory context of the EU, answering the first research question: (i) How can EU citizens living and working within the EU be best described? In the second part of the chapter, the narratives shared prove that the parameters and dimensions of transnational living – as shared in Chapter Four and in the current Chapter – coincide with this study sample. Therefore, the second research question was addressed: (ii) How, and in which ways, do EU citizens living and working within the EU live transnational lives?

In light of the findings, the term EU-transnational is put forward to designate the study participants. The parameters for applying this definition were developed from literature on transnationalism and transnational living, as shared in Chapter Four, as well as the findings of this chapter undertaking. Drawing from the definition of transnational living, EU-Transnationals are defined as EU nationals living transnational lives within the EU. Living a transnational life, as shared in Chapter Four, and presented empirically in this Chapter, implies having **simultaneous** engagements and presences [physical and virtual] in both home and host country societies. The data presented in this chapter supports the argument that the categorisation of EU-transnationals is a more fitting description of the participants of this study, as well as for intra-EU mobility.

# Chapter Seven – Findings: Sustainable Transnational Career

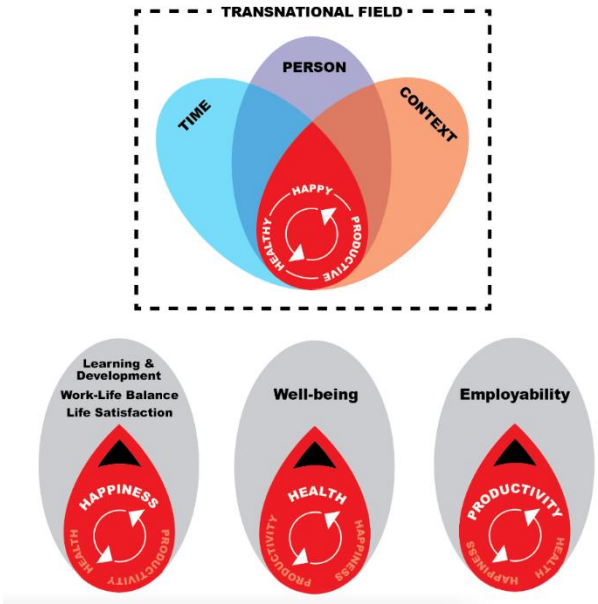
## 7.1 Introduction: The Sustainable Career of intra-EU Mobile Individuals

Chapter Six empirically explored a conceptual alternative that could best define and characterise the intra-EU sample in this study, putting forward a definition – EU-transnational – to better describe the group being studied in this research undertaking. The findings shared in Chapter Six answered the first two research questions of this study: (i) How can EU citizens living and working within the EU be best described and categorised; and (ii) How, and in which ways, do EU citizens living and working within the EU live transnational lives? In this chapter, the elements of a sustainable career that were shared in Chapter Five are unpacked. This chapter empirically explores how the forty-two intra-EU transnationals interviewed for this study balance the sustainable career indicators of happiness, health, and productivity (see Chapter Five) over time to achieve or maintain a sustainable career abroad. The whole-life perspective of the sustainable career concept highlights the importance of the three dimensions of a sustainable career – person, context, and time – in promoting and maintaining a happy, healthy, and productive career and life (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020). In this respect, it is argued that for the specific sample of this study, whose careers and lives span home and host countries, the elements of a sustainable career may interact across borders. Therefore, highlighting a whole-life perspective of career (including work and nonwork engagements and interactions) the third research question of this study, and the research question this chapter is set to answer is: (ii) How are the diverse elements of a sustainable career balanced, enacted, and experienced across [intra-EU] borders?

As detailed in Chapter Five, sustainable career is defined as 'the sequence of an individual's different career experiences, reflected through a variety of patterns of *continuity over time*, crossing *several social spaces*, and characterized by *individual agency*, herewith providing *meaning* to the individual' (Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015, p. 7). In the case of transnational careers, the diverse social spaces crossed when enacting a career span both the host and home country social fields. Consistent with the literature shared in Chapter Five (e.g. Mayrhofer, Meyer and Steyrer, 2007; Akkermans, Seibert and Mol, 2018; Andresen *et al.*, 2020), this study's findings highlight the significance of contextual influences for career actions and outcomes over time. The interaction of host and home country contexts, as well as their influence on how the careers of intra-EU transnationals unfold is paramount in this study to unpack [if] how a sustainable career is enacted and experienced for this cohort. This chapter draws on the multidimensional conceptualisation (see Figure 7.1) of sustainable careers put forward by De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020). This conceptualisation, which has been applied in recent empirical research (e.g. Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020; Richardson and McKenna, 2020; Curado, Gonçalves and Ribeiro, 2023 - see Chapter Five), encompasses the

evolving happiness, health, and productivity indicators of one's career over time (see Figure 7.1). The whole-life perspective of careers (Litano and Major, 2016) taken in this study highlights the individual motivations that may determine participants' career decisions and outcomes, beyond strictly work-related elements (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020).

34. ***Figure 7.1: Career sustainability – Dimensions and Indicators.***

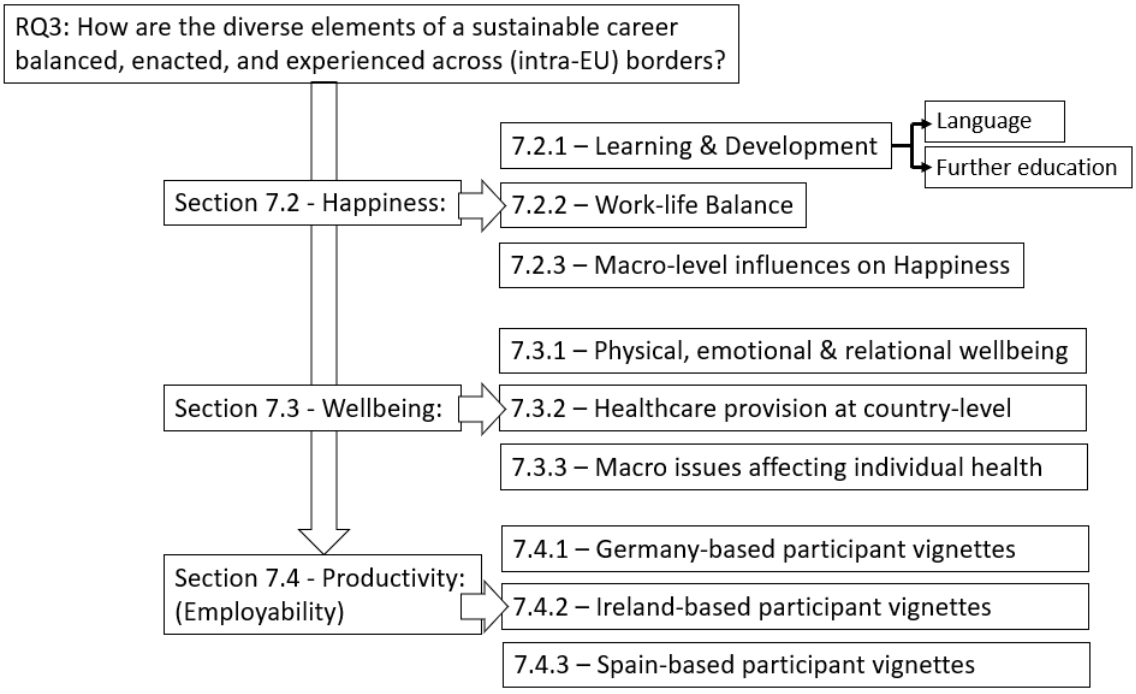



***Source: Developed by Suarez-Bilbao (2023). Adapted from De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020) in accordance with elements explored in this study (i.e. L&D, Work-life Balance and Life Satisfaction for Happiness; Wellbeing for Health; and Employability for Productivity).***

The findings are analysed in relation to extant literature (Chapter Five), with the discussion supplemented when/as needed with contextual data (from Chapter Three). Given that the career sustainability indicators are influenced by the person, the wider context in which the person is embedded and the time (e.g. stage of life) dimensions (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020), this chapter highlights the person, context, and time-related influences on individual's happiness, health and productivity over time (see Figure 7.1). Figure 7.2 illustrates the structure of the chapter, with the different elements highlighted in each section and subsection also depicted in Figure 7.1 under the happiness, health, and productivity indicators respectively. The chapter is structured (see Figure 7.2 below) as follows: First, the happiness indicator of career sustainability is analysed for the sample in terms of Learning and Development (L&D), work-life balance, and macro elements influencing general life satisfaction. Then, the health indicator of a sustainable career is examined in relation to participants' general wellbeing, encompassing both physical and psychological/emotional health. Given the three diverse national contexts (i.e. Germany, Ireland and Spain) present in this study, this section also

highlights the influence of the different healthcare provision systems [at macro level] on the participants' wellbeing. Next, selected vignettes are used to illustrate the influence of the time dimension on the productivity indicator of career sustainability, in terms of the participants' past, current and [indication of] future employability. Acknowledging hard choices made in relation to the decision to focus on key elements of career sustainability due to the vast amount of data collected, these selected vignettes are also an attempt to convey a more complete, whole-life picture of the transnational career trajectories of the participants. The chapter concludes pointing out that, although the three indicators – happiness, health, and productivity – of career sustainability are presented separately, in practice the dimensions and indicators of a sustainable career are interrelated and the boundaries between them are blurred.

35. ***Figure 7.2: Visual overview of the chapter***



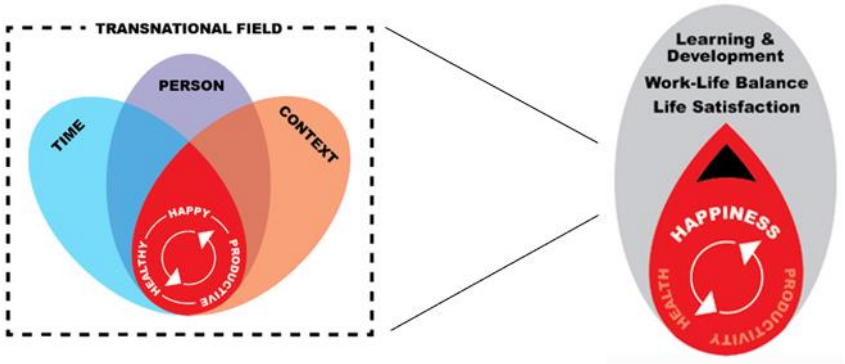

## 7.2 Happiness

Following from the different operationalisations of happiness in empirical research to date, explicitly in relation to a sustainable career (see Chapter Five, Table 5.2), this section analyses participants' narratives to explore how happy [or unhappy] the participants felt and currently feel in their transnational lives and careers. Happiness, however, is an ill-defined construct, as it is subjective in nature and therefore means different things to different people. As detailed in Chapter Five, in the sustainable career literature happiness has mainly been referred to as a 'fit' between personal values and career goals, from a broader life perspective (De Vos, Van der

Heijden and Akkermans, 2020), with proxies for happiness including job/career satisfaction and related measurements of objective and subjective career satisfaction (see Chapter Five).

Given the cross-cultural nature of the sample (see Chapter Three) including three different [EU] host countries and three different [EU] nationalities, the present section focuses on two cross-cultural indicators of SCS (see Chapter Five), namely L&D, and work-life balance (Briscoe *et al.*, 2021). However, as will be detailed, it is evident in the narratives in this section that the participants judge their happiness both in subjective terms, and more objectively at times – or as a combination of objective and subjective career satisfaction (i.e. better salaries in their host countries allowing them to travel frequently to their home country to see friends and family). Since the sample comprises employees and self-employed individuals in a variety of professions/occupations, and organisation types (see Table 7.1 below and Table 7.4-section 7.4), this section also explores the participants' general satisfaction with their life abroad in relation to work and nonwork roles (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020). Figure 7.3 below visually shows the structure of this section, which focuses on the happiness indicator of a sustainable career, examined in terms of L&D, work-life balance (as indicating OCS and SCS) and general life satisfaction.

36. ***Figure 7.3: Happiness: Learning & Development, Work-life Balance, and Life Satisfaction. Visual representation of section structure.***




Both formal and experiential learning, and work-life balance were topics that appeared repeatedly in interview narratives, and best represent the whole-life view of careers portrayed in this dissertation, as will be detailed next. Given the richness of data gathered from the individual participants and their lived experiences pertaining to their own happiness, the diverse elements highlighted as influencing individuals' happiness are considered at both micro-level and macro-level in relation to the person, context, and time dimensions of a sustainable career (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). As there is no homogeneous organisational context within this study sample (see Table 7.1 below), the context dimension is generally explored in relation to nonwork domains, specifically the influence of the person's relational and social environment, as well as the wider macro (national and transnational) context on individual

happiness. At a macro contextual level, the focus is on the influence of host and home country structural – within the supra-structures of the EU – and macro-level issues (such as different national regulations) on the happiness indicator of a sustainable career, as per participants' transnational career experiences. Underscoring the heterogeneity of the sample, Table 7.1 below shares details regarding participants' current job roles, participants' age and how long have they lived in the host country.

12. ***Table 7.1 Participants' employment details***

| Code | Pseudonym | years in host county | Age | Industry / Area (role) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE1-ES | Moritz | 30 | 60 | Consultancy (consultant/business coach) |
| DE2-ES | Karl | 22 | 51 | Automotive (production line) |
| DE3-ES | Helga | 18 | 53 | Education (primary school teacher) |
| DE4-ES | Rupert | 18 | 46 | Law (estate agent – legal team) |
| DE5-ES | Anika | 28 | 53 | Translation (economics & legal translator) |
| DE6-ES | Nina | 23 | 54 | Hospitality publishing (travel writer) |
| DE7-ES | Alex | 23 | 46 | Lifestyle Consultancy (Feng-shui consultant) |
| DE1-IE | Laura | 9 | 27 | Music (digital communications manager [opera]) |
| DE2-IE | Doris | 20 | 46 | Community radio (outreach coordinator) |
| DE3-IE | Tania | 17 | 42 | Aero Leasing (database manager / technical team) |
| DE4-IE | Melina | 3 | 29 | IT (Social Media - sales) |
| DE5-IE | Feli | 12 | 51 | Non-for-profit /Charity (national coordinator) |
| DE6-IE | Simon | 25 | 45 | Academia (tenured professor) |
| DE7-IE | Bettina | 14 | 52 | Nursing & Graphic Design (nurse & designer) |
| | | | | |
| ES1-DE | Jose | 8 | 37 | Academia (professor – department head [Chair]) |
| ES2-DE | Andres | 8 | 34 | Architecture (architect & researcher) |
| ES3-DE | Elena | 3 | 48 | Nursing (geriatric nurse) |
| ES4-DE | Nano | 6 | 33 | Engineering (roads engineer) |
| ES5-DE | Patri | 10 | 28 | Music (Oboe player [orchestra]) |
| ES6-DE | Maite | 7 | 29 | Healthcare/Scientist (Biochemist) |
| ES7-DE | Cari | 6 | 30 | Architecture (set designer) |
| ES1-IE | Susana | 15 | 42 | Legal firm (administrator/secretary) |
| ES2-IE | Carmen | 14 | 42 | IT (sales manager) |
| ES3-IE | Arturo | 16 | 44 | Higher Education (sales/admin) |
| ES4-IE | Sandra | 27 | 54 | Community radio (producer) |
| ES5-IE | Peter | 4 | 40 | Aero Leasing (corporate finance manager) |
| ES6-IE | Bruno | 10 | 43 | IT (sales & customer service manager) |
| ES7-IE | Robert | 4 | 34 | Technology (entrepreneur/company director) |
| | | | | |
| IE1-DE | Noel | 6 | 36 | Research (researcher-conflict) |
| IE2-DE | Ivan | 9 | 44 | IT/eCommerce (frontend engineer) |
| IE3-DE | Oliver | 10 | 41 | Media / TV (manager) |
| IE4-DE | Fred | 4 | 38 | IT (data analyst – hospitality/mobility) |
| IE5-DE | Fintan | 15 | 42 | Academia (professor/researcher) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| IE6-DE | Luke | 24 | 47 | Translation (translator [English, French, German]) |
| IE7-DE | Liz | 28 | 50 | Data Protection (officer) |
| IE1-ES | Conor | 9 | 44 | IT (Inside Sales Manager) |
| IE2-ES | Clare | 22 | 44 | Academia (assistant professor) |
| IE3-ES | Jason | 18 | 49 | Higher Education (Innovation lecturer / entrepreneur) |
| IE4-ES | Kathy | 16 | 43 | Insurance (customer service) |
| IE5-ES | Sam | 6 | 54 | Education (English teacher / entrepreneur) |
| IE6-ES | Gerry | 3 | 55 | Engineering / Project management (project manager) |
| IE7-ES | Emmet | 26 | 53 | Publishing/Education (English teacher/publisher) |

***The first two letters in the code indicate participants' home country and the last two letters their host country. (i.e. DE=Germany [Deutschland], ES=Spain [España], IE=Ireland). The numbers indicate the order in which participants were interviewed. The table is sorted by nationality.***

Most participants (n=19) were between 25 and 30 years of age when they moved to their host country. Fourteen participants were over 30, and only nine participants were under 25 at the time of their move (see Table 7.1). Most participants (n=33) had previous experience of employment outside their host countries. Twenty-six participants have resided in their respective host countries over 10 years (see Table 7.1). As shared in Chapter Six, for most (n=20) of these 26 participants, their main reason for moving to the host country was not work-related. However, for the participants who have been in their host country between 3 and 9 years (n=16), the motivation for the move was mainly work-related (n=10) (see Table 6.2, Chapter 6). Seven of these 10 participants are Spanish - five living in Germany and two living in Ireland. This data points to the effects of the diverse economic (national) landscapes within the EU, as Spanish participants report finding better work opportunities outside of their home country, as will be detailed below.

In general, the participants report being satisfied with their work-related progression, as well as their subjective career progress since their arrival in their respective host countries. However, unlike the case of home-country-based careers, as will be detailed in the next section, the participants had to contend with language barriers and/or the lack of [host-country] social and cultural capital. Some participants, like *Andres* [ES2-DE], who is an architect, found creative ways to navigate host-country language shortcomings:

> *"The first job I had... it was a bit difficult because I had lots to do with construction sites… and obviously communication wasn't my strong point at the beginning. But I kind of… turned it around… in the sense that I can DRAW, so at the beginning I was drawing a lot… to let the workers know what they shall do or shall not… and that*

*was kind of fun. But, slowly, I got into the language… so that is not a problem anymore." Andres* [ES2-DE]

While acquiring career competencies – such as foreign language proficiency – is related to employability, it also influences career satisfaction (i.e. a proxy for happiness). Becoming proficient in the host country language (or striving to) contributes to the participants' feeling of pride and satisfaction in overcoming an initial career barrier, and in doing so availing of better jobs. Equally, being able to communicate in the host country language facilitates host country social integration. Thus, language learning is one of the areas where the two indicators of happiness and productivity intersect for this study's population, as will be detailed in the next section.

### 7.2.1 Learning and Development (L&D)

A learning disposition underscores a future orientation, which is essential for achieving a sustainable career (Lawrence, Hall and Arthur, 2015b). In particular in the early years of their transnational living, participants were constantly in 'learning mode' (Heslin, Keating and Ashford, 2020), as they had to contend with different cultural conventions and macro-level national rules and regulations, as well as communicating in a language other than their own native language. Twenty-five out of 42 participants had a self-reported very limited (n=18) or limited (n=7) knowledge/command of the host country language on arrival (see Table 7.2 below), which obviously was a significant barrier to overcome, and, in *Moritz*'s [DE1-ES] words, a cause of frustration (unhappiness) at times:

"My Spanish was not good enough. So, I was… VERY frustrated. I had VERY little Spanish." *Moritz*'s [DE1-ES]

The participants' accounts denote proactivity and creativity – as displayed by *Andres* in the previous quote – in learning and slowly mastering the host country language (HCL). Mastering the HCL not only granted them access to better jobs and more interesting career opportunities (i.e. career satisfaction), but also has contributed [or is contributing] to their social integration, and therefore to their happiness, in the host country.

#### 7.2.1.1 L&D: Language

Learning [and mastering] the host country language satisfies both objective and subjective career satisfaction indicators. In terms of work roles, objective career satisfaction was reported in relation to access to better jobs and/or better salaries in the host country, at a higher hierarchical level. Personal pride and satisfaction were reported as subjective career satisfaction

indicators – both for work and nonwork roles. Table 7.2 below gives details on participants' level of host country language proficiency (HCLP) on arrival, their current HCLP, and their working language. The lowest level of HCLP on arrival is listed first and the highest level of HCLP last. Then, each level is sorted by nationality, highest number for each nationality on top. Five participants quoted learning (*Susana* [ES1-IE], *Arturo* [ES3-IE], *Sandra* [ES4-IE], *Liz* [IE7-DE], and *Alex* [DE7-ES]) or improving (*Liz* [IE7-DE]) their host country language (HCL) skills as the reason for their initial move. For 18 participants, the HCL is their working language, nine participants use both their home and host country languages at work, and five participants use their home (own language = OL) and host country languages, plus another language at work (see Table 7.2).

13. ***Table 7.2 Self-rated participants' Host Country Language Proficiency (HCLP) on arrival, current level of HCLP, and working language.***

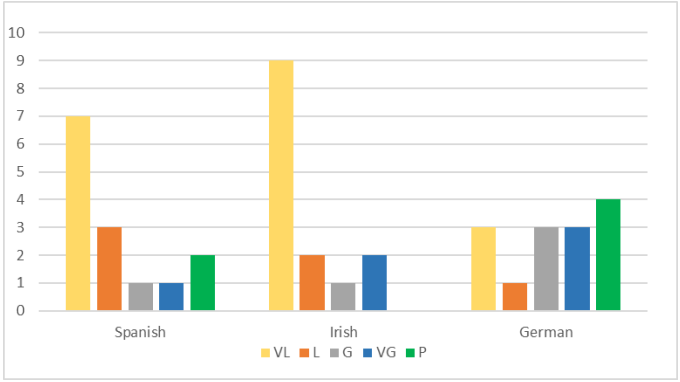
| Code | Pseudonym | HCLP on arrival | Current level of HCLP | Working Language |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| IE1-ES | Conor | very limited | good | English (OL) |
| IE2-ES | Clare | very limited | proficient | HCL & English (OL) |
| IE3-ES | Jason | very limited | proficient | HCL & English (OL) |
| IE4-ES | Kathy | very limited | good | HCL & English (OL) |
| IE5-ES | Sam | very limited | limited | English (OL) |
| IE6-ES | Gerry | very limited | limited | English (OL) |
| DE1-ES | Moritz | very limited | proficient | HCL, English & German (OL) |
| DE2-ES | Karl | very limited | very good | HCL & German (OL) |
| DE7-ES | Alex | very limited | proficient | HCL, English & German (OL) |
| | | | | |
| ES1-DE | Jose | very limited | limited | English |
| ES2-DE | Andres | very limited | good | HCL & English |
| ES3-DE | Elena | very limited | limited | host country language (HCL) |
| ES5-DE | Patri | very limited | proficient | HCL & English |
| IE2-DE | Ivan | very limited | good | English (OL) |
| IE3-DE | Oliver | very limited | limited | English (OL) |
| IE4-DE | Fred | very limited | very limited | English (OL) |
| | | | | |
| ES1-IE | Susana | very limited | very good | HCL |
| ES3-IE | Arturo | very limited | very good | HCL |
| ES4-IE | Sandra | very limited | good | HCL |
| | | | | |
| ES4-DE | Nano | limited | very good | HCL |
| ES6-DE | Maite | limited | proficient | HCL & English |
| ES7-DE | Cari | limited | very good | HCL & English |
| IE1-DE | Noel | limited | good | English (OL) |
| | | | | |
| IE7-ES | Emmet | limited | proficient | HCL & English (OL) |
| DE4-ES | Rupert | limited | very good | HCL, English & German (OL) |
| | | | | |
| DE2-IE | Doris | good | proficient | HCL |
| DE3-IE | Tania | good | proficient | HCL |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE6-IE | Simon | good | proficient | HCL |
| | | | | |
| IE7-DE | Liz | good | proficient | HCL & English (OL) |
| | | | | |
| ES6-IE | Bruno | good | proficient | HCL & Spanish (OL) |
| | | | | |
| IE5-DE | Fintan | very good | proficient | HCL & English (OL) |
| IE6-DE | Luke* | very good | proficient | HCL, English (OL) & French |
| | | | | |
| DE3-ES | Helga | very good | proficient | HCL |
| DE6-ES | Nina | very good | proficient | HCL, English & German (OL) |
| | | | | |
| ES7-IE | Robert | very good | proficient | HCL |
| DE7-IE | Bettina | very good | proficient | HCL |
| | | | | |
| DE1-IE | Laura | proficient | proficient | HCL |
| DE4-IE | Melina | proficient | proficient | HCL & German (OL) |
| DE5-IE | Feli | proficient | proficient | HCL |
| DE5-ES | Anika* | proficient | proficient | HCL, English & German (OL) |
| ES2-IE | Carmen | proficient | proficient | HCL |
| ES5-IE | Peter | proficient | proficient | HCL |
| | | | | |

***The first two letters in the code indicate participants' home country and the last two letters their host country. (i.e. DE=Germany [Deutschland], ES=Spain [España], IE=Ireland). The numbers indicate the order in which participants were interviewed. The table is sorted fist by HCLP on arrival, and then by participants' nationality.***

Table 7.2 shows that Spain-based participants were the most likely to have self-rated their command of the HCL at the time of the move as very limited (n=9, six Irish and three German), followed by the Germany-based participants (n=7, four Spanish and three Irish). The 'very limited' (VL) category comprises participants' who self-rated their HCL knowledge as 'none' or 'very little' (i.e. a few words). Only three Spanish participants – *Susana, Arturo* and *Sandra* – reported having very limited (VL) English when moving to Ireland. Figure 7.4 below graphically represents the HCLP on arrival to the host country by nationality.

37. ***Figure 7.4: Host Country Language Proficiency (HCLP) on arrival by participants' nationality***




***HCLP Codes (*self-rated): VL= Very Limited, L=Limited, G=Good, VG=Very Good, P=Proficient***

Six out of the 14 Irish participants speak English (exclusively) as their working language – *Noel* [IE1-DE], *Ivan* [IE2-DE], *Oliver* [IE3-DE], *Fred* [IE4-DE], *Sam* [IE5-ES] and *Gerry* [IE6-IE]. For *Conor* [IE1-ES] and *Emmet* [IE7-ES], English is the predominant language they use in work, alongside Spanish. The use of English as a working language (n=23) in non-English-speaking countries (i.e. Germany and Spain), either exclusively or alongside the HCL, is widespread across all professions (see Table 7.2). Only five participants – *Karl* [DE2-ES], *Helga* [DE3-ES], *Elena* [ES3-DE], *Nano* [ES4-DE] and *Cari* [ES7-DE] – are not required to speak English in their work capacity. However, as evidenced in the quote below, *Cari* also speaks English (unofficially) at work, and reflected on how working in Germany made her realise that being able to communicate in different languages will be beneficial for her career going forward:

> *"In the theatre and opera 'world'... I have now realised... LANGUAGES are SO important... to be able to move... to be able to communicate with visiting scenographers... to be able to quickly change from Spanish to English, to German (gesticulating – fast-pace). I think this understanding of HOW it works in other places will help me a LOT" Cari* [ES7-DE].[3]

Apart from the personal satisfaction that for *Cari* represents being able to communicate in three languages, her HCL and English language proficiency refers also to future employability – as will be detailed in the productivity section – and therefore points to the interconnection between happiness and productivity in the pursuit of a sustainable career. English language dominance in many professions (e.g. IT-related roles, academia and research) gives English speakers an advantage over non-English speakers. *Jose* [ES1-DE] shares that he learnt English [his working language] alongside German when he first took an academic position in Germany:

> *"Even my English… when I moved for the first time… I mean, it was absolutely… CATASTROPHIC. I didn't speak German either. I mean, it was difficult, in that sense. Also, I'm not, let's say, from a rich family, so all my studies were through the public school system… and the English teaching, back then, was really bad. So yeah, basically I learnt German and English here."* Jose [ES1-DE]

*Jose's* comment evidence that language learning is also conditioned by the personal, and wider context. The socio-economic position of his family and the reported poor English-language offering in the Spanish public school system (i.e. a macro-level institutional/systemic issue) conditioned the opportunities *Jose* had for learning English at an adequate level in his home country. However, Jose's self-diagnosed HCLP deficiency has not hindered his career in the eight

[3] All capitals are used in all verbatim quotations to signal emphasis as expressed by the participants.

years he has lived in Germany. Although self-rating his HCLP as 'limited' [while using several German words in the interview], at the time of the interview *Jose* reported to be very proud to hold the Department Chair position in his university, indicating both OCS and SCS.

*Susana, Arturo,* and *Sandra* – all Spanish living in Ireland – confirm *Jose's* assertion regarding the poor English-language offering in public schools in Spain, which relates to the national-level context. Learning English was one of the main reasons these three participants moved to Ireland in the first place, and all report working in all sorts of jobs – mainly low-level hospitality jobs – until they learnt English well enough to be able to be considered for a role that was in line with their qualifications and/or interest. This, again, points to the interaction between the happiness – in terms of the satisfaction of learning to communicate at an adequate level in the host country language – and the productivity indicators of career sustainability. Of the 42 participants in this study, only four report to have worked low-level jobs below their qualifications at the start of their host country careers. Of these four, *Susana, Arturo,* and *Sandra* (all Spanish in Ireland) did so only until they were able to properly communicate in the HCL, and *Cari* [ES7-DE] worked in retail to supplement her income while she was doing a Master's degree.

Learning English was the reason behind *Susana's, Arturo's,* and *Sandra's* move to Ireland. Both *Arturo* and *Sandra* attended a language school in order to learn the HCL, but *Susana* learnt her English while working and 'living':

> *"Years ago, it was like… whoever had English had it all, that's what people were saying around me. So, I decided, you know, instead of learning it in an Academy… go somewhere where I had to speak in English instead… so I decided to come here. I was quite motivated… I was watching TV in English all the time. I love reading. I didn't have a clue about what I was reading… but I was reading books in English. I worked in restaurants and canteens… I don't know how I even got a job! But my co-workers were really nice, everyone helped me with my English. Like… my intention was actually to attend an English school, but… you know, one thing led to another thing, and I never did! And, little by little I learnt my English" Susana* [ES1-IE]

*Arturo* [ES3-IE] reports working part-time in a canteen and attending an English-language school in the evenings. He remarks that the dynamic worked for a while because he was earning more in a part-time low-level job in Ireland that what he was earning in Spain as a journalist – an indication of OCS. Having enough money – and time – to socialise and attend English classes was essential for *Arturo* to improve his English faster. However, *Arturo* admits there was a point in

which he knew that, at his age, he needed to consider a more gratifying life and career plan in the long term, something that will make him happy [SCS]:

> *"I was… I AM very eager and open to learn. I didn't have a WORD of English. I mean, you needed to speak English to look for a job at the time, so at the beginning I worked in very RANDOM things. But after a while, I mean, I was 31, so… I knew I needed to do something else, and I knew my English wasn't good enough to work as a journalist in Ireland, so… I decided to do a Masters in Media Studies. The Masters was… I always did what I HAD to do… and this time I wanted to do something I really would LOVE to do... I WANTED to do that."* Arturo [ES3-IE]

As will be detailed below, two other participants, *Kathy* [IE4-ES] and *Sam* [IE5-ES] appear to be underemployed, although they report to be satisfied with their current jobs in the host country. The low number of [current] underemployment reported in this study highlights the specificity of this [pre 1995 enlargement] intra-EU sample, given that EU citizens retain the same working rights and social protections in another EU country as they have in their own country (see Chapter Three). In line with recent studies of highly educated Portuguese emigrant populations (Costa e Silva and Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė, 2019), the characteristics of this study sample, consisting of highly qualified and/or experienced professionals (see Table 7.1) substantiate the reported low occurrence of skill underutilisation.

*Kathy* [IE4-ES], who also had very limited HCLP on arrival, worked with her husband in the technical support (IT) business they set up when they moved to Spain. However, currently *Kathy* works as a customer service representative, a job that is not strictly related to her qualifications [languages and IT], but that she says suits her better at this stage in her life and career. *Kathy* shares that her and her husband spent too much energy and time at the beginning of their move in making their IT business work, and now, as she has a young child, a more stable and less demanding work environment suits her better:

> *"It's just customer services, so I'm just basically authorizing people's doctors' appointments… dealing with people, face to face… and I really love it. To be honest, I was fed up with computers anyway, so… a change was… MORE than welcome. This job is just… it's away from the computer side of things and it suits me." Kathy* [IE4-ES]

*Sam* [IE5-ES] has a science degree, which has served him in offering English-language technical writing services to medical organisations in Spain. While he is not a qualified language teacher, *Sam* also has been employed by a multinational to teach technical English to executives. Sam

maintains that life as an English teacher suits him. However, as shared in Chapter Five, in line with previous research on the relationship between objective and subjective career satisfaction, Sam's OCS and SCS are intertwined:

> *"I went from getting €12 an hour to €50 an hour... ultimately it means that I can dedicate myself ONLY to this company, and I'm not going out having to get 10-15 euro an hour jobs, teaching kids" Sam* [IE5-ES]

*Doris* [DE2-IE], who had a good level of English when she moved to Ireland, also initially worked in a call centre customer support job which was not related to her pedagogy qualification. However, *Doris* did not consider this job as being underemployed, but rather as a 'sidestep' that allowed her to pursue a different professional orientation in Ireland, which made her happier. Like *Arturo* and other participants (see next section), *Doris*' strategy for professional development and thus increasing career satisfaction was to further her education and obtain a university qualification in the host country.

#### 7.2.1.2 L&D: Further (formal) education

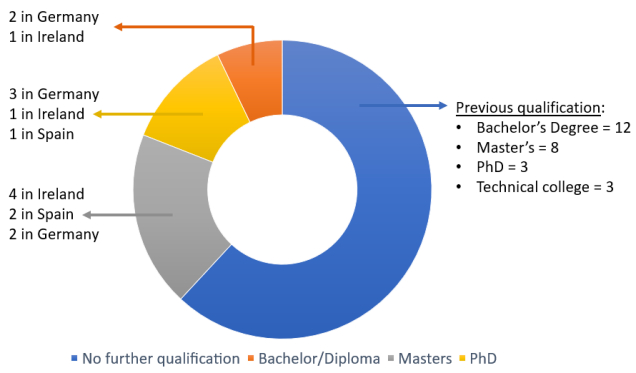
*Doris* [DE2-IE] was able to pivot from her original technical qualification, which was related to pedagogy, to her current role as an outreach coordinator in a community radio station by obtaining first a Bachelor's and then a Master's in Ireland. *Doris* entered the Bachelor's programme as a mature student, and she shares that, while it was a challenge to go back to being a student given the budgetary constraints of leaving a full-time job, the experience for her was immensely gratifying [SCS]:

> *"I did a five-year undergraduate course in [a regional university in Ireland] as a mature student... and as part of the third year I moved to Bologna for one year because you had to pick a language… like, another language. I loved it… and you know it's funny… just from an identity point of view… it was lovely to be in Italy, as an Erasmus student because here I was… enrolled as an Irish person, but I wasn't Irish, obviously, and I wasn't sure… 'could I do this?... there was a lot of self-doubt at the start… You know, studying a degree through another language and then initially… even though I got over it… But it took me some time to get the confidence… I suppose to realise… 'Oh yeah, I can do this!'… It was a great bonus to be able to do that." Doris* [DE2-IE]

Sixteen participants report L&D in terms of furthering their education in the host country at either undergraduate/diploma level (n=3), Masters (n=8) or PhD (n=5) level (see Figure 7.5

below). Of these sixteen participants, seven are based/living in Germany, seven in Ireland and three in Spain. *Laura* [DE1-IE], *Doris* [DE2-IE] and *Patri* [ES5-DE] obtained both their Bachelor's and Master's degrees in their respective host countries, and *Maite* [ES6-DE] and *Clare* [IE2-ES] obtained both a Master's and a PhD in Germany and Spain respectively. As previously mentioned, *Doris* [DE2-IE] already had a technical qualification when she moved to Ireland, but both *Laura* [DE1-IE] and *Patri* [ES5-DE] moved to undertake their undergraduate studies in their respective host countries. Both *Laura* [DE1-IE] and *Patri* [ES5-DE] undertook music degrees [and subsequent Master's] in Ireland and Germany respectively. As detailed in Figure 7.5, seven participants obtained further qualifications in Germany, six in Ireland, and three in Spain. Of the participants who did not further their education in the host country, 13 have a Bachelor's degree, seven a Master's, three a PhD, and three a technical qualification from their respective home countries. As can be inferred from this information, all participants are very highly educated.

38. ***Figure 7.5: Further qualification obtained in the host country.***




Apart from contributing to personal growth and the acquisition of career capital (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi, 1995), obtaining further qualifications in the host country was a strategic career decision for some participants, as it represented a 'way in' to a profession or specific professional networks in the host country (see Table 7.3 below). Overall, it was apparent that the participants knew and/or had learnt the 'rules of the game' in their respective host countries, with regard to the accepted qualifications (or networks) required to pursue their chosen professional occupations in the host country and in doing so obtaining career satisfaction.

Of the 16 participants that furthered their education in the host country, seven participants quoted availing of what they considered to be better offerings in the host country, in terms of the university (e.g. *Jason* [IE3-ES]), the programme chosen (e.g. *Laura* [DE1-IE], *Andres* [ES2-DE], *Patri* [ES5-DE] and *Maite* [ES6-DE]), or simply the possibility to benefit of an opportunity that

wasn't available for them in their home country (see Table 7.3). For example, *Elena* [ES3-DE] availed of a nurse-training course offered by the German government in collaboration with geriatric hospitals and residences in Bavaria [Germany] to cover macro-level skills deficiency in the nursing profession in Germany. *Simon* [DE6-IE] was able to join a PhD programme in Ireland when he maintains the German school system (see Chapter Three) wouldn't have allowed him to do so.

14. ***Table 7.3 Strategy for pursuing further qualification in the host country.***

| Strategy | Example quote |
|---|---|
| Better offering in the host country | I actually think that I learned a lot more in my degree here than I would have if I would have stayed in Germany. For the Master's... I wanted to do something that would give me kind of a broad spectrum of doing management and administration for the arts because it's hard to just make a living just singing, or, you know, playing an instrument… so you need something else that you can do on the side as well. (Laura [DE1-IE]) |
| | I basically went to the middle level of the German school system and… usually people from that middle school would be sent to… mainly to factories. Getting into the position where I'm now... that would be largely limited to the... sounds weird… to the TOP level of the schools. Having gone to middle school… getting to… pursue a PhD would have been REALLY difficult in Germany. In Ireland, it was just down to your potential, basically. So, when I did my project here my supervisor basically saw what I could do and so… being promoted to go on to the PhD was not a problem (Simon [DE6-IE]) |
| | I came to Madrid to do an MBA… and, why did I come to Madrid? Because that's where the best schools are. I mean, Spain has two of the top business schools in Europe, so that was why I came here. (Jason [IE3-ES]) |
| | I found the structure of the Masters in Germany was really good and really interesting, and multidisciplinary… and when I finished the Masters, they gave me opportunities for jobs and projects… so I stayed. (Andres [ES2-DE]) |
| | That's the point of this project... because in Germany they urgently need qualified nurses... and it doesn't seem to be a very popular profession amongst Germans. In fact, in my nursing school over 50 percent of us are *Ausländer* [foreigners]. So, yes... there's considerable demand for nurses… which is the OPPOSITE to Spain. In Spain there are MANY nurses, and very FEW nursing jobs. (Elena [ES3-DE]) |
| | I decided to do my Master in Dresden… I got a substitute place in Dresden Philharmonic, and that was a two-year contract. It was, like… it was kind of a 'student' place in the orchestra. For two years I was playing there and doing my masters, at the same time. (Patri [ES5-DE]) |
| | I studied biochemistry in Madrid, but I realised that… let's say I was missing a bit of PRACTICAL stuff. So, I applied for a Masters in molecular medicine in Berlin. I took a year break [in Madrid] and came back [to Germany] to do a PhD. Now I'm working on chronobiology… so, understanding biological rhythms. (Maite [ES6-DE]) |
| | |
| Way in | I found this Media course… through the adult education scheme. I had tried, unsuccessfully, sending letters requesting employment to different media in Ireland at that time… so, I guess maybe what happened was that, at the time… and, I don't know, maybe even now… any Bachelor Degrees or certain |

| | |
|---|---|
| | education certification from other countries wasn't really valued in Ireland at all. (Sandra [ES4-IE]) |
| | I enrolled on a Master's on management of Health and Non-profit Organizations… because I was determined I wanted to continue working in the health sector and also in the non-profit sector… so I felt this… Masters… would be beneficial. (Feli [DE5-IE]) |
| | I suppose my chances in Germany are definitely better because I've gone through the German system, and I've done a German PhD and did the German '*habilitation*' and that sort of thing. I think if I were to go back to the English-speaking system, it would have made better sense to try and do my PhD in Cambridge or Harvard or some of the 'big name' universities, to be honest. (Fintan [IE5-DE]) |
| | The training course I did… that did sort of help me. I didn't want to do translation or teaching, or any the typical things you would do with my degree… so basically the EASIEST way to get my foot in the door at the beginning… on the job market… was to go and do a course like this… because it's a dual system… so, you work three and a half days a week and have school one and a half days a week. That was GOOD, because that brought me up to SPEED on my German as well as giving me two years of work experience (Liz [IE7-DE]) |
| | I thought about applying to a Master for something more CREATIVE... because I didn't see any other way to get into the more CREATIVE architecture world in Germany ... because I didn't have any contacts. So that's when I decided to study a Master in scenography... but it was an arbitrary decision... I guess because of the FRUSTRATION of not knowing where to start... but the Master did help a LOT. In the Master we did many projects in small theatres... I did a PRAKTIKUM at the Deutscher's Theatre... and then they hired me there for two years, as an assistant. (Cari [ES7-DE]) |
| | |
| Personal growth | I enrolled in the Master in Media Studies… it was not really professionally-oriented… which was a little bit of a luxury, considering that I didn't have money… and I didn't have a proper job… yet. But... I always did what I HAD to do… and this time I wanted to do something I really would LOVE to do... I WANTED to do that. (Arturo [ES3-IE]) |
| | I continued to do a Masters, straight away, and… because I thought 'OK, I'm in the rhythm now, I'm back to learning - I can do this!... and did an Intercultural Studies Master's. Compared to my undergraduate, I felt I didn't gain that much extra knowledge, so that course wasn't right, but maybe it was just because it wasn't right for me, you know… (Doris [DE2-IE]) |
| | Doing the PhD was kind of provoked in terms of… the University was looking for people who could come in and get involved… so somebody I worked with made that connection. Then I started giving a couple of courses which I really, really enjoyed… and then from there I thought, right… why not do the PhD. But I hadn't quite decided I wanted to move into academia when I decided to do the PhD… that kind of came gradually. (Clare [IE2-ES]) |

***Note: Quotes are grouped according to host country. Words in all capitals signal emphasis as per participants' accounts.***

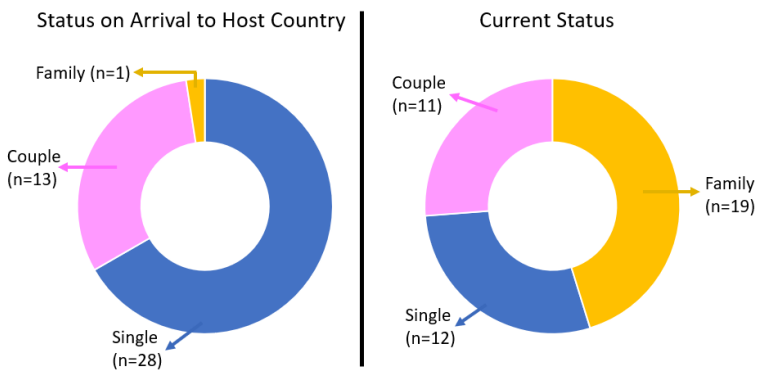
As per the sample quotes shared in Table 7.3, obtaining further qualifications in the host country represented for some participants (n=5) a 'way in' to the host country's labour market or a

particular area/profession in the host country. For *Sandra* [ES4-IE] and *Liz* [IE7-DE], obtaining a host country qualification was their means to get around qualification recognition issues; *Feli* [DE5-IE] and *Cari* [ES7-DE] used their Master's to augment their professional networks and social capital in a specific area; and for *Fintan* [IE5-DE] obtaining a German PhD meant inclusion, or recognition as 'part of the system'. *Doris*' [DE2-IE] Master's secured her a job in an organisation in which she has been for over ten years, eventually moving to the role in which she is currently in and which she is extremely satisfied with, in both objective and subjective terms. However, she reports that the personal satisfaction [SCS] she felt when she completed her undergraduate in Ireland (see quote in section 7.2.1.1) was unparalleled.

### 7.2.2 Work-life Balance

As shared in Chapter Five, happiness is connected to personal values and life priorities. Therefore, when the individual prioritises the people in their life, individual happiness may be influenced by the happiness [or unhappiness] of spouses and family members (c.f. Elo and Leinonen, 2019; Hajro *et al.*, 2019). Balance between work and nonwork roles (e.g. role as a spouse, parent or community member) can contribute to a sustainable career (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020). As found in Chapter Six, forming a family in the host country is related to host-country social integration in terms of participation in school systems and activities, parent-teacher groups, etc. Eight Irish participants, seven German participants and four Spanish participants [out of 14 in total of each nationality] have children (see Figure 7.6 below). Of these 19 participants, *Nina* [DE7-ES] was the only one who moved to the host country as a family (see Figure 7.6), in other words, she was the only participant who needed to balance her work and mother roles from her arrival to the host country. The happiness of their loved ones in the home country – or the worries they might cause (e.g. parents getting older) – is also a current consideration for the participants, who connected work-life balance with transnational balance, in terms of continued visits to their home country to see their loved ones.

***Figure 7.6: Participants' civil status on arrival to their respective host countries, and current civil status.***



The participants often compared home and host country both in terms of macro-level regulations and cultural norms or conventions influencing work-life balance, which indicates transnational complementarity. In terms of family-friendly macro-level regulations influencing work-life balance, *Nano* (ES4-DE), a road engineer who was on paternity leave at the time of the interview, praises the family-friendly regulations [from a macro perspective] in Germany. On the other hand, *Nina* (DE6-ES), remarks that because part-time employment opportunities, specifically ones targeted at mothers, are very common in Germany, she was very surprised [and frustrated/unhappy] that she was not able to find similar opportunities in Spain. As a result, *Nina* was not able to join the workforce until her children started to go to school, which adversely affected her professional development and satisfaction. *Carmen* [ES2-IE], who has a young child, remarks that the Irish working day is much more conducive to family life than the long [traditional] working hours in Spain (see also Chapter Three):

> *"The rhythm, right, in the day… you start at 9 am, you finish at 5 / 5:30 pm… … in Spain is more 'old fashioned'... you know? Meetings might start at 5 /5.30 and they run for two hours… and I think it's very difficult to have family life balance in Spain." Carmen* [ES2-IE]

*Susana* [ES1-IE] and *Peter* [ES5-IE], who don't have children, agree with *Carmen* that the 'nine to five' working convention in Ireland affords them time for leisure and for 'doing their own thing', as opposed to the long traditional Spanish working day, which starts at 8 or 9 AM and finishes at 8 or 9 PM, with a long (3 hr) lunch in-between (see Chapter Three). *Susana* [ES1-IE] shares that finishing work at 5 PM makes her feel that she still has a few hours to dedicate to herself, which encourages her to pursue leisure activities, such as playing volleyball. She belongs to a volleyball club and plays regularly with her teammates, displaying both social integration and [structured] social organisation in her leisure time. Therefore, *Susana's* leisure-related host country social integration contributes to both her physical and emotional wellbeing, positively affecting both the happiness dimension (Kelly *et al.*, 2020) and the health dimension in her life and career. On the other hand, *Tania* [DE3-IE] points out that she was able to organise her worktime more flexibly in Germany than in Ireland.

> *"One of the things that I actually missed from home as well… is… you generally clocked in and out of work, and you would get your overtime back, so you were a lot more flexible in respect of your working hours… whereas here, it's nine to five and you're supposed to be sitting at your desk whether you have finished your work or not." Tania* [DE3-IE]

*Tania* shares that in her office employees feel the pressure to stay working late, or at least not deviating from the 9-5 schedule, as this is equated with hard work. This pressure to work until late affects not only *Tania's* work-life balance, but also her job satisfaction.

As shared in Chapter Five, work-related career success spills over to happiness in social and family-related realms, and vice versa (Heslin, Keating and Ashford, 2020). Host-country social integration and social support are also important for single participants like *Jose* [ES1-DE], who don't have a family network or a host-country partner. *Jose* is a Spanish academic who has been living in Germany for 8 years, and currently lives with his girlfriend who is also an '*Ausländer*' [non-German]. Not having a 'ready-made' group of host-county family and friends, like other participants who are in relationships, or have formed a family, with host-country nationals, is emotionally difficult for the participants at times. As previously mentioned, despite of *Jose's* relatively young age (37) and the fact that he self-rates his German-language level as low, *Jose* has secured his university department's chair, an achievement he is immensely proud of. Although *Jose* explicitly expressed being happy in his work, he remarks that, if his happiness is exclusively work-related, his career in Germany may not be sustainable in the long term:

> *"I'm really happy here. I think it's clear in this interview that I'm really happy in Germany. But, in the end, if WORK is the main reason… that is not either… I mean, it's not a strong reason to stay here, because maybe tomorrow they offer me even a better position in… Denmark. I don't know." Jose* [ES1-DE]

*Ivan* [IE2-DE], who has lived in Germany for 9 years, has a long-term German girlfriend, but nevertheless agrees with *Jose* in the difficulties of making German friends and integrating fully into German society. Social integration in Spain has not been easy for *Helga* [DE3-ES] either, despite speaking perfect Spanish, having a Spanish partner, and having lived in Spain for 18 years. *Helga* engages in different leisure activities and seems to have good work-life balance. However, she shares that she doesn't feel well-integrated, which makes her unhappy, as well as nostalgic for her friends in Germany:

> "I don't have the feeling of being well integrated... and I don't like it! I've been THINKING about this for many years because... well, between the fact that work requires a lot of energy, and a lot of time... it's always a bit... We went dancing a lot, and so, yes... of course you meet people. Of course, I know people... but I don't consider them my friends. I miss my friends in Germany... but I know that their life has gone on... that they are not waiting for me either." *Helga* [DE3-ES]

Environmental influences, such as the weather, the geographical location of their chosen home-country city, and/or general (urban, cultural and leisure) offerings in their chosen host country city, can also affect participants' happiness at times. For example, *Arturo* [ES3-IE], who is from the south of Spain, is happy to have a job that necessitates him travelling often, as this minimises the adverse effect the Irish weather has on him. For *Arturo* the weather in Ireland represents only one aspect of work-life balance and general happiness, and for the moment, due to his role requiring frequent travel, does not affect the sustainability of his transnational career:

> *"I don't miss the weather that much because of the fact that I travel a lot for work, so I enjoy good weather all year round in other countries. But if I had to stay in Ireland, working in Ireland all the time, I would find that hard… I'd miss that. Also, it involves many other social aspects as well… more, the life outdoors." Arturo* [ES3-IE]

In terms of work-life balance, *Arturo's* work-related travelling allows him to enjoy a more outdoor lifestyle in the countries he travels to. The opportunity to enjoy the sun when travelling abroad as part of his role increases Arturo's satisfaction with his career in Ireland, and at the same time minimises the adverse effects the Irish weather could have in his emotional/psychological wellbeing. As shared in Chapter Five, and illustrated by *Arturo*'s experience above, the wellbeing construct can relate to both the happiness and health indicators of a sustainable career (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). This interrelation will be further explored in section 7.3 (Health). *Arturo*'s quote also shows the complementarity of transnational living and its relevance to transnational sustainable careers where individuals make trade-offs to better balance their professional and personal lives while living between countries.

### 7.2.3 Macro-level (contextual) influences on general happiness

As previously mentioned, the micro-level and macro-level influences – in other words, the person and context dimensions of career sustainability (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020) – are interrelated. Applying a transnational living lens, this section highlights the macro-level influences on the happiness indicator of a sustainable career, as experienced by the participants in this study. These macro-level influences – which have an impact on both OCS and SCS, from a whole-life perspective of career – are explored in terms of the diverse education, political-regulatory and socio-cultural aspects that affect [both positively and negatively] the participants' happiness in the host country.

For example, *Simon's* [DE6-IE] happiness and sense of freedom stems not only from the opportunity to pursue and objectively excel in his academic career in Ireland – a feat that in his opinion would not have been possible in his home country – but also from the personal satisfaction [SCS] that his refusing to conform to Germany's education system has brought him. *Simon* shares that Germany's three-tiered system for public secondary education ranks students by 'ability' in fifth grade, right after elementary school. Ten-year-old children are then 'sorted' into two different school paths: 'top tier' schools are restricted to children deemed to be 'fit' for university, while the rest are encouraged instead to follow more practical, technical, or vocational training (see also Chapter Three). *Simon* believes Germany's education system is deterministic and unfair. Therefore, he reckons that had he stayed in his home country his career would not have been satisfactory:

> *"In Germany I would potentially still have ended up in an office somewhere… working on something. Getting into the position where I'm now would have been relatively difficult in Germany. It goes back too… yeah, freedom to… actually be able to achieve this position here. In Germany that would be largely… limited to the... sounds weird… to the TOP level of the schools… pretty much only those people… are 'permitted' to go to university… whereas we used to have something like IT's [Institutes of Technology], and everyone else would only be allowed to go to the IT's, and initially there was… quite a separation." Simon* [DE6-IE]

Systemic issues – at a macro level – regarding the different host countries' political and regulatory systems can also influence the participants' level of happiness with their careers in their respective host countries. For example, a systemic issue that is cause of frustration and unhappiness among Spain-based participants is the perceived lack of protection afforded to workers in Spain. This was such a shock to *Alex* [DE7-ES], that she completed a HRM Master's to try to understand the 'hiring and firing' practices when she worked as a buying manager in the shoe industry in Alicante, a job she held for ten years:

> *"The company really doesn't give a shit if you work well… if you're really good at your job… if you do extra time… because when it's time to give you a permanent contract… I mean, they'd just fire you, and will get some other person so that they don't have to PAY that much (sad, serious tone). So, you REALLY don't have this extra...incentive... to be BETTER. I think you DO have this support in Germany." Alex* [DE7-ES]

EU labour law directives, while designed to ensure the equal treatment and protection of EU workers across the EU, give discretion to the Member States in relation to worker-employer relationships in accordance with national law and practice (see Chapter Three). *Alex* remarks that, upon completing her Master's, she realised that employee protections were indeed contemplated in Spanish law at a macro level, but not implemented – at least in the company that employed her – at organisational level. Coming from Germany, a country with a strong trade union tradition, *Alex* was surprised to find that the employees themselves were not organising and claiming their rights. This frustration, paired with the amount of travel she had to do prompted her to quit her management job and set up her Feng-Shui business. *Nina* [DE6-ES] also reported being frustrated with her Spanish colleagues for not standing up for themselves when they found out that the France-based employees of the MNC she used to work for had higher salaries than Spain-based employees for performing the same roles and responsibilities:

> "The Spanish... they didn't… whatever the boss told you to do, they just did. They didn't DARE to… propose new things, or to ASK for something. It was really VISIBLE, not only to me, but to all my international colleagues… because all of us… had one or two moments where we would question the boss… or… maybe we could argue that there was a better way to do something. But the Spanish don't complain… it was like, really... I wasn't expecting THAT!… and I found it HARD to cope with." *Nina* [DE6-ES]

*Nina's* frustration [unhappiness] with her co-worker's inaction and lack of proactivity when fighting for their rights eventually resulted in her quitting her job and setting up a travel writing business. The propensity of the Spanish citizens living within the Spanish system to accept unfavourable work conditions surfaced in the interviews as a macro-cultural characteristic that was difficult for non-Spanish participants to understand and deal with. This evidence the relevance of the macro context, in terms of cultural norms of expectation and behaviour, when examining international careers. Indeed, the attitudes and expectations of Spanish participants based in Germany and Ireland have reportedly changed, once they experienced and compared these cultural norms and expectations of behaviour in their home and host countries. Once again, this demonstrates the complementarity of transnational living and its relevance to transnational sustainable careers.

*Anika* [DE5-ES], who is likewise self-employed, was also unhappy with the salaries and work conditions on offer when she was an employee, in the first couple of years of her arrival in Spain. *Anika* shares that, when she was an employee, she used to officially get paid only half her salary, with the other half paid in cash to minimise both her employer's and her own employee

tax contributions. *Anika* remarks that these practices, apart from being harmful to the country (in terms of reduced tax take), are detrimental to the employees in the long run, in terms of pension contributions. Anika's account relates to the extent of corruption [as reported by participants] at a systemic level in Spain, which is particularly difficult to deal with for individuals from home countries with low levels of corruption. For example, *Emmet* [IE7-ES], who has lived in Madrid for 26 years and is fully socially integrated into and politically interested in his host country, acknowledges that corruption is a considerable reason of discontent (unhappiness) for him in recent years:

> *"Right now [in Madrid] the big thing is just... the level of CORRUPTION at ALL levels. That's AMAZING (sad voice). That's still... from the TOP down, you know... from the king all the way down! It seems to me to be a kind of... almost a class system. There's a certain LEVEL at which Spain is COMPLETELY and utterly corrupt. So, that's annoying." Emmet* [IE7-ES]

According to Transparency International (2024), Western Europe and the European Union are top scoring regions in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which scores the perceived level of public sector corruption in a country. However, CPI in the EU fluctuates between Denmark's top score of 90 and Hungary's low score of 42 (Transparency International, 2024). Germany, at 78, is the top-scoring country in this sample, followed closely by Ireland (77). Spain, with a 60 CPI score, has the lowest ranking of the sample (Transparency International, 2024). This, once again, underscores the importance of the macro context when researching international careers.

Living abroad has allowed the participants in this study to compare institutional/systemic, socio-economic and cultural issues or peculiarities that affect working and living conditions in their home and host countries, and are a source of transnational complementarity. The quotes shared above and in the previous sections (7.2.1 and 7.2.2) have illustrated how living and working in their respective host countries has influenced participants' L&D and work-life balance, as indications of SCS, as well as their emotional and relational happiness, from a whole-life perspective of career. L&D – including language learning/improvement – and work-life balance are considered as indicators of happiness [SCS] in accordance to the literature, in particular in relation to cross-cultural indicators of SCS (see Chapter Five).

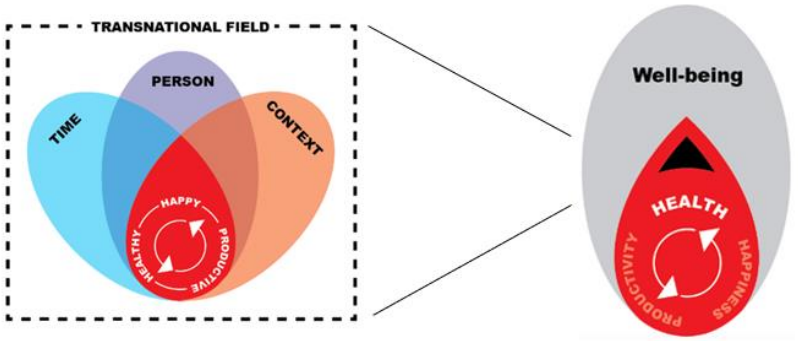
This section's findings have shown how the participants feel proud and happy to be able to master the host country language, in doing so contributing to their own professional advancement and host-country integration. Apart from the language learning aspect, the

participants opted to further their formal education in their respective host countries (1) taking advantage of an opportunity not available in their home country, (2) as a 'way in' to specific host country networks or work-related openings, or (3) for personal growth/betterment. The findings demonstrated that these L&D strategies contributed to the participants' career satisfaction, both objectively and subjectively. The self-motivated nature of these strategies highlights the need for proactivity when embarking on transnational careers. As shown in this section, apart for signalling career satisfaction, L&D can also be considered in relation to productivity/employability in terms of competence attainment/deployment, as will be detailed in section 7.4. Equally, work-life balance can influence wellbeing as well as career satisfaction [happiness]. The following section will explore the participants' health and wellbeing, which together with happiness and productivity are the key indicators of career sustainability, as shared in Chapter Five.

## 7.3 Health (Wellbeing)

Consistent with a whole-life view of careers, all three indicators of career sustainability – happiness, health and productivity – should be considered from a multi-level perspective and a future orientation [as well as being grounded in the present], as they are interrelated. This multi-level perspective includes the person, context, and time dimensions (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). Therefore, the influence of the personal and wider context on an individual's career should be acknowledged (c.f. Mayrhofer, Meyer and Steyrer, 2007; Andresen *et al.*, 2020). As with the previous section, the participants' engagement in both home and host countries is examined in exploring the interplay of different levels and influences on career sustainability (see Figure 7.1), where individuals' wellbeing – including physical and mental/psychological health – is concerned (see Figure 7.7 below). The present section explores how participants cope with health-related issues such as, for example, feelings of loneliness that may affect their psychological health, and the stress and/or anxiety resulting from not being physically near friends and family [in the home country] in times of psychological need. As shared in Chapter Five and the sections above, aspects of wellbeing relate both to the happiness and health indicators. The narratives explored in this, and the previous section, highlight this interrelation.

40. ***Figure 7.7: Health: Wellbeing. Visual representation of section structure.***




This section is divided into three sub-sections. First, the health indicator of career sustainability is explored at the person and context levels in terms of whole-life wellbeing, physical and psychological wellbeing, as well as relational wellbeing. Then, the macro context is considered in analysing participants' wellbeing at the national level. The time dimension, as with the happiness indicator of a sustainable career, is implicit as the narratives shared comprise home-host country career transitions and indicate career progression/development throughout the time the participants have spent in their respective host countries. The time dimension also reflects the circumstances over time that punctuate the participants' interactions in their respective home and host countries regarding their health and the health of their significant others.

### 7.3.1 Physical, emotional and relational wellbeing

In living transnational lives, with relational ties in both home and host countries, the study's participants manage both their physical and emotional wellbeing in alternating within and between their home and host countries social fields. For example, as shared in Chapter Six, for *Maite* [ES6-DE] it was important to be with her sister when her baby was born, so she negotiated working from home (in Spain) to coincide with her niece's birth, thus maximising the time with her family and contributing to her emotional wellbeing. While being allowed to work from home (from Spain) points to work autonomy and career satisfaction (i.e. happiness), if this had not been the case, *Maite* may have not been able to participate in important family milestones in the home country. Not being physically present for these important occasions may have elicited feelings of guilt, stress and/or anxiety, negatively affecting *Maite*'s health. *Carmen* [ES2-IE] and *Nano* [ES4-DE], who have children of their own, also expressed the need for [emotional and practical] family support, especially while the children were young. For *Doris* [DE2-IE] it was equally emotionally important to introduce her child to her home country culture through language, and to keep that bond to her home country through her child, facilitated by home-country structures – such as the German Lutheran Church – in her host country:

*"I go to the German community meetups in the Lutheran Church. I'm not religious, but I'm able to meet other parents there, other children… and I found that a very big bonus for my daughter… so she sees is not only me speaking German to her…. it is a language that's spoken by others as well. That's helping me… in this area… for us, as a family - for me and my daughter... and also my partner would come to some meetups as well." Doris* [DE2-IE]

*Doris*' account highlights the cultural support from institutions in the host country that bridges cultural familiarity with the home country.

As with personal happiness, concern for family members influences personal wellbeing. As shared in Chapter Six and in the previous section in this chapter, the physical and psychological health of the participants [or their loved ones] can be affected by the host country weather. The weather, as macro-level phenomenon, can affect individual health. Indeed, the effect the weather has on their partners was a major reason for both *Gerry* [IE6-ES] and *Nina* [DE6-ES] to originally move to (in *Gerry*'s case) and stay in (in *Nina*'s case) their host country. *Gerry* and his husband moved from the UK, where *Gerry* had lived for over 20 years, to Spain. The move was triggered by *Gerry's* need to isolate his business from the effects of Brexit (see Chapter Six), but the choice of host country was due to *Gerry*'s husband's illness:

*"The CLIMATE thing is... the winters are TERRIBLE... and my husband has got multiple sclerosis, so he CAN get around with a walking stick... as long as the weather is decent. The bad weather in winter... slows him down and causes him a lot of pain... and it's not NICE to look at your husband suffering through that (sad smile)."* Gerry [IE6-ES]

*Nina*'s situation, weatherwise, is the opposite, as extremely hot weather makes her husband's condition worse. *Nina,* half-joking, half-serious, says that her and her Spanish husband may become 'climate refugees' to Germany because of her husband's illness:

*"Right now, we are thinking of actually… maybe going back… not because we want to… but… the summer's so HOT, so hot, so hard… my husband has a disease now… it's not ALS, but something like that… so he can't walk… and the heat is making it harder for him. My mother [in Germany] has a big house and a big 'terreno' [land]… but… we don't WANT to go there… now our kids are here. Maybe we are kind of… TEMPERATURE refugees to Germany (laughing)… I don't know. We are STILL planning how we can manage. Yeah, we are actually thinking about it… if there's*

*any option to do, maybe, the summertime over there… and then come back home here." Nina* [DE6-ES]

For both *Gerry* and *Nina*, a climate that is favourable or non-favourable for their partners' illness in their host and/or home countries facilitates [in the case of *Gerry*] or hinders [in the case of *Nina*] a sustainable career in Spain, in regard to its health indicator. However, while their careers may not be sustainable in their adopted countries in the long term, the intra-EU mobility of these EU transnationals allows them to consider and realise a sustainable career back in their home countries or in another EU country, showing how close the ties [and engagement] between home and host countries are for this population.

The adverse effect the weather can have in their own state of mind was mentioned by participants such as *Arturo* [ES3-IE], *Nano* [ES4-DE] and *Maite* [ES6-DE], who all mentioned missing the light in Spain, especially during the winters in Ireland (for Arturo) and Germany. As an Irish person living in Spain, *Emmet* wholeheartedly agrees:

*"The weather is a MAJOR issue for me. I really did SUFFER in Ireland from... from the DARK and the rain... and I know it's part of it... and it's lovely in Ireland... it's GREEN and it's all gorgeous and stuff like that... but these three months of BLAZING sunshine [in Spain]... you know, even in January when you open the blind and... it's FREEZING cold but the sun is BLAZING... that just SAVES my life." Emmet* [IE7-ES]

The different stages of participants' lives and careers also affect their health-related considerations, both in relation to their own wellbeing and that of their loved ones in both home and host countries. For example, *Moritz* [DE1-ES] shares that spending time with his parents in the home country before they died of cancer made him realise that he had to slow down and consider his own wellbeing:

*"My parents had cancer and that brings you in contact with different aspects of life... and you see that you know a lot, but you know very little… of life. So, I said, I need time… because the consultancy work is… is not 24/7, but always almost so. I said, I need time. I'm getting OLDER and I have to make a harsh break. So, I talked with my partners, and we agreed a leave. I sold my shares… so I have a bit of a cushion… and I do a bit of consultancy work 50% of my time and the other 50% of my time I'm trying to do OTHER things." Moritz* [DE1-ES]

*Moritz*'s account illustrates how familial health and health-related concerns also influence career decisions in terms of priority re-alignment and work-life balance considerations. The

quote exemplifies another instance where the interrelation of the health, happiness and productivity indicators of career sustainability can be appreciated.

Most participants (n=24) explicitly mentioned that being away from their loved ones in the home country is difficult and may cause them stress and anxiety at times; especially for those whose parents are getting older or have become ill. However, living within the EU seems to ease the worry somewhat, as the participants can travel back to their home countries at short notice if they need to, as evidenced by Liz's [IE7-DE] account:

> *"The fact that my parents are getting older… my dad has some stuff going on at the moment, and I told my boss about it, and he said I could work from home… in Ireland. Again, it's a great thing… you're in the EU, you have that possibility."* Liz's [IE7-DE]

Despite the geographical closeness, the ease of travelling back and forth, and the fact that new technologies facilitate constant communication with loved ones in the home country (see Chapter Six), *Cari* [ES7-DE] felt her family's emotional pressure at the beginning, increasing the stress [and guilt] she felt, because her family didn't quite understand why she decided to extend her time in Berlin [Germany] instead of going back 'home':

> *"It is true that when I went home the PRESSURE was STRONG... They asked me what I was doing HERE, if I wouldn't prefer to get a job there... even if I was earning less, but I would be at home... that was HARD." Cari* [ES7-DE]

It seems that the pressure [and the related anxiety] exerted by loved ones trying to convince the participants to move 'back home' it is not limited to Spanish participants, as *Laura* [DE1-IE], a German musician who has been in her host country three years longer than *Cari* (see Table 7.1) shares:

> *"My sister was very supportive of me staying because she thinks I fit in here quite well. My mother… she constantly tries to convince me to move back home. Every phone call: 'I saw this article in the newspaper and there's new jobs going… wouldn't you want to move back home?" Laura* [DE1-IE]

Living transnational lives, although enriching due to the many new experiences and opportunities for L&D and competency building, can also affect the participants' mental and emotional wellbeing. Indeed, some participants, like *Nano*, recount how living abroad can bring

about feelings of isolation from time to time, which can affect participant's psychological/mental health:

> *"In this small village... suddenly I found myself in a place where there were almost no YOUNG people... and I arrived on January 7th... it was FREEZING! It was really hard to find an apartment... and I suddenly felt very LONELY... all of the sudden... I felt very ISOLATED. It really was my DETERMINATION what kept me going." Nano* [ES4-DE]

*Nano* speaks of determination, which implies he was able to overcome the negative emotions of isolation – due to lack of social support/connection – that could have adversely affected his mental health. *Nano*'s resilient attitude helped him get over a 'low' period, in terms of the health indicator of a sustainable career. As shared in Chapter Five (section 5.2.2.2), resilience has been connected to positive mental health, although in terms of adaptability and proactivity, resilience can be equally linked to happiness and productivity, evidencing once again the interrelation of the three indicators of a sustainable career.

However, fighting off feelings of isolation can be energy-depleting, and can escalate into more serious health concerns, as did for *Bettina* [DE7-IE]:

> *"I fell into a MAJOR depression. I'm suffering from depression for a long time, but it was on and off… I never really… ACKNOWLEDGED it as such, you know… over the last ten years… then I knew… OK, that's that. I think I was fine when I came here. I mean, I didn't have any major problems… but then [on arrival] I didn't have a job... I had a new husband… I lived in the middle of NOWHERE. There were a lot of triggers." Bettina* [DE7-IE]

Both *Bettina*'s and *Nano*'s accounts point to the participants' need for social connections and social integration – one of the five dimensions of transnational living – which can be harder when moving to a different country at the beginning, due to the participants' lack of host-country social capital (see Chapters Four and Six). As shared in the happiness section (section 7.2), a low-level of HCLP can make integration difficult, exacerbating feelings of loneliness – in particular once the working day is over, as *Elena* [ES3-DE] shares:

> *"The problem is that you also live outside of work... you have to go out and buy bread, you have to understand your neighbours... and hope that they understand you. So, in that sense it doesn't matter... integration takes longer. I have been told*

*that to start feeling COMFORTABLE with the language you need at least 5 years. I'm at three and a half." Elena* [ES3-DE]

*Nano's, Bettina's* and *Elena's* accounts show how happiness and health are interrelated, and how happiness/unhappiness can blend or develop into healthy/unhealthy states. Feelings of isolation, lack of social connections – in particular for sociable people/cultures – can signal unhappiness in [or with] a particular situation. However, unhappiness, when serious, can develop into more concerning health-related issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression.

*Elena* [ES3-DE] and *Bettina* [DE7-IE] are both nurses, a profession that is physically and emotionally demanding. They both talk about how nursing staff shortages at national level in Germany and Ireland have resulted in work shifts that – according to them – are longer than they should be. In order to preserve her physical and mental health, *Bettina* has reduced her work hours, only working three consecutive days per week, dedicating the rest of the week to her graphic design work. Since *Elena* [ES3-DE] is on a work-training programme, she does not have the luxury of being able to choose her own working hours. However, she seeks solace in the group of friends who started the programme at the same time as her and work in different healthcare organisations in the same town she lives in. *Elena* mentions that these friends have become 'her family in Germany'. Both accounts show a relationship between the social integration and social organisation [whether flexible or structured] indicators of transnational living, and the health, as well as the happiness indicators of a sustainable career.

This section has shared how the physical, emotional, and relational wellbeing of the participants intersects the person, context, and time dimensions of career sustainability across two countries. These intersections were explored in terms of personal and macro contexts (i.e. loved ones in home and host countries), and time. The role of time in relation to a sustainable transnational career was shown in connection to specific events or situations, for example the birth of a child or the illness of a family member making participants' more aware of geographical distances – and the complementarity of home and host countries – exacerbating feelings of isolation or loneliness, as well as related to life stages. The following section will delve in more detail on the influence of the macro context on the participants' wellbeing.

### 7.3.2 Wellbeing: Healthcare provision at national [country] level

At a macro level, as shared in Chapter Three (Context), Germany, Ireland and Spain have different health and social protection systems, which influence participants' career sustainability in terms of the health dimension. The three national healthcare systems differ in terms of funding (i.e. private insurance or universal healthcare funded through taxation), as well as the

level of service on offer and the requirement [or not] of additional payments for the services offered (see Chapter Three). In this sense, some participants (n=19) reported their health being affected by the protection [or lack of] that they experience in their host country's healthcare system. As was detailed in Chapter Six, both *Susana* [ES1-IE] and *Doris* [DE2-IE] balance the perceived inadequacy of healthcare provision in Ireland with periodic visits to their respective home countries for yearly check-ups, enacting transnational healthcare management. As intra-EU transnationals, participants can compare the healthcare provision in their home and host countries and when deemed inadequate [as in *Susana*'s and *Doris*' cases] can opt for the country/system that best satisfies their individual health-related needs. The enduring home-host country transnational connection and complementarity is evident here, where the focus is on receiving the best medical care possible between the home and host countries, with sustained engagements over time and space.

The German and Spanish participants miss their home-country healthcare provision, and the security it meant for them. In particular, the Irish participants appreciate most the healthcare provision in their respective host countries, and this appreciation increases the longer that they live abroad. While the Irish participants are happier with their health management abroad, German and Spanish participants acknowledge that, although a macro level issue, health provision is a consideration in their everyday lives. There is consistency among participants in placing Ireland as the least favourable country in this regard, even though German and Spanish participants acknowledge that the provision of health services might have deteriorated in their respective home countries too, as voiced by *Bettina* [DE7-IE] and *Arturo* [ES3-IE]:

> *"I know that it [the health provision] has changed in Germany as well. But I would still say that the German medical system is kind of more accessible and more straightforward… gives more support… in many ways. Maybe because [as a nurse] I'm familiar with it, but… I would say the medical system is definitely a STRONG point for Germany and a WEAK point for Ireland." Bettina* [DE7-IE]

> *"The health system, even though in Spain lately it has been deteriorating a little bit too fast… in Ireland you feel less protected." Arturo* [ES3-IE]

In differentiating the German and Spanish systems, *Anika* [DE5-ES] mentions her preference for the Spanish healthcare system and highlights the differences between the German (home country) and Spanish (host country) healthcare systems.

> *"In Germany you need to have insurance… you're obliged to have it… you can choose which one, but then you go to these clinics that only accept private... paying clients or that are insured with a specific company. I don't think this is an efficient system, is quite costly… and still is unequal. Here [in Spain], the system is that everyone pays through taxation and healthcare is free and universal, for everyone. I think that's a good idea. It's true that it doesn't work as well everywhere in Spain… but that's a different thing." Anika* [DE5-ES]

A health system such as the Spanish takes the financial stress out of healthcare management for individuals, promoting proactive healthcare via regular GP visits and checkups that will not have an impact on individuals' financial resources. *Nina* agrees with *Anika* that the Spanish system is fairer than the German system, adding that for rare medical conditions like the one her husband has (see Chapter Six), it is invaluable to be able to be treated without worrying about the cost of the treatment:

> *"I think the Spanish system is MUCH better… much, MUCH better… WAY better. Because you have a basic coverage for EVERYBODY. You go to the doctor, and you get EVERYTHING you need. My husband's disease… it's like ELA… one of these RARE diseases… and here, at least… he is treated in [hospital] in Barcelona, he has access to the best doctors… they're doing all the tests they can do. In Germany… because we contacted other people with the same illness in Germany… they don't get even this basic approach."*

The intra-EU transnationals in this sample, by living and having used the different health provisions in both their home and host countries can better appreciate their strong and weak points. Health – including the health of their loved ones – is a major consideration for the participants, if not currently, for the future. In particular, the participants based in Ireland admit that, in terms of health system coverage, they worry about the perceived lack of protection on offer in their host country. As detailed in Chapter Six, participants like *Susana* [ES1-DE] and *Doris* [DE2-IE] proactively enacted transnational healthcare management by opting to avail of yearly health checks in their respective home countries. For others, like *Tania* [DE3-IE] and *Robert* [ES7-IE], although admitting the perceived inadequacy of healthcare management and provision in Ireland is a concern for the future, for the moment their strategy seems to be to ignore the issue while they are healthy, focusing on the positive aspects [complementarity] of their host country careers.

Aside from influencing individuals' physical health, the different health provision systems also affect individuals' psychological health, as many participants (n=19) quoted health provision [or lack of] as a major concern currently or in the future. The quotes above illustrate how protected [or not] these different systems make participants feel. Stressing about these macro-level issues has a tangible effect on the participants' wellbeing. For example, *Tania* [DE3-IE], after 17 years living in Dublin, acknowledges she doesn't feel as 'safe' [psychological safety] in Ireland as she did in Germany regarding social protection.

> *"For me it was quite easy to find a job. What I found very… what I had to get used to… was the fact that my salary dropped significantly by moving… the whole insurance system is not as… SAFE as the German version… where like… I really like health insurance! (she smiles)... It's part of the 'being German '… that you want to be insured for unemployment and health and… what's the third one? Health, unemployment… oh, pension!... very important!" Tania* [DE3-IE]

*Tania*, although satisfied with her career in Ireland, is concerned that as she gets older and healthcare and health insurance becomes more important, the sustainability of her career in Ireland [in terms of the health indicator] might decrease. For *Robert* [ES7-IE], the concern is more immediate, in terms of day-to-day healthcare management:

> *"The health system here in Ireland… you have to pay for everything and when you end up paying every time you need to go to the doctor… you end up thinking… is it worth it to go in or not? When I was in Spain, I would just GO… I don't like those type of things… paying for that." Robert* [ES7-IE]

The analysis of the health indicator in this section focuses on the individual health management and macro level health provision/expectations the participants have indicated. The section has also illustrated how the participants compensate and complement health-related elements with the availability of professional opportunities, relational aspects, or life-style considerations.

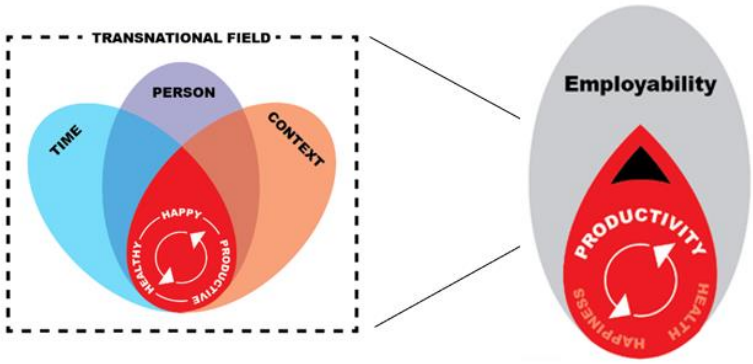
The occupations and employing organisations of the participants of this study are varied (see Table 7.1, and Table 7.4 next section). For this reason, specific organisational measures and systems designed to protect employee's health are not included in this inductive analysis. Distinct host-country related regulations perceived by the participants to contribute to their individual [and their families] wellbeing are included instead in this section's findings. From an individual perspective, the findings have shown that participants' emotional wellbeing has a strong relational component, which is linked to both home and host countries. The findings have also highlighted the positive aspect of intra-EU living, in relation to facilitating travel between

home and host countries, easing the participants' concern for being away from their families in the host country, which may be the cause of stress and anxiety. In terms of the macro-level context, health concerns are related to previous experiences of health provision in the home country, which conditions the expectations of the different national-level health provision in the participants' chosen host country.

## 7.4 Productivity [Employability]

As shared in Chapter Five, productivity, as an indication of current and future employability, relates to career capital and managing career competencies that render individuals employable at different stages of their lives and careers (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020). As with the happiness and health indicators, this section explores how and in which ways transnational living influences employability, as an indicator of career sustainability (see Figure 7.8 below). As previously mentioned, the personal, contextual and time dimensions, which are inextricable from each other, are essential in understanding career sustainability (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020; Heslin, Keating and Ashford, 2020).

41. ***Figure 7.8: Productivity: Employability. Visual representation of section structure.***




This section examines how the participants acquire, develop and deploy career capital – knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom competencies (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi, 1995) – in their international careers (see Chapter Five, Section 5.2.2.3), and how these competencies contribute to their employability currently and in the future. Given the characteristics of the sample, which does not include a homogeneous organisational context, the focus in this section, as in the previous sections, is on the individual, as well as the national-level context. To best illustrate the participants' acquisition and deployment of career capital along their transnational career journeys, this section shares chronologically structured vignettes of two Ireland-based, two Germany-based and two Spanish-based participants.

Consistent with a whole-life view of careers, the time dimension detail has been considered in terms of the number of years participants have lived in their respective host countries, as well as their age at the time of the interview (see Table 7.1). Both participants' age and the amount of time they have lived in the host country reflect the stage they are at in their professional occupations (i.e. early, mid or late profession), as well as their related career experiences, which will influence their employability, and thus their international career sustainability. For example, Moritz [DE1-ES] is 60 and, as previously mentioned, has recently re-considered his work/life priorities, and has quit his very demanding consultancy job, reducing his working hours and serving (as self-employed) only a few selected clients. On the other hand, *Patri* [ES5-DE], one of the youngest participants (28 years old), prioritises her work as a musician. *Patri* believes that basing herself in Germany is, and will be, beneficial for her professional development (in terms of employability) in the long term:

> *"Germany is one of the best countries in Europe [for music]… and if you compare it to Spain.. it's in a different league… it's another world. It's like really… well set-up for culture. So, I'm happy with my choice of country." Patri* [ES5-DE]

For some participants, like *Fred* [IE4-DE] in the mid-career stage at 38 years of age, moving countries represented an opportunity for exploring related or transversal professional paths. Fred was offered a promotion by his (Irish) employer which entailed moving to Germany for a couple of years. He has since left this job, but his previous work experience as data analyst in the hospitality industry (acquiring knowing-how competencies) has allowed him to pivot to a related field, which he is passionate about:

> *"I'm SUPER excited about this job. It's also in data analytics, but it's... mobility analytics. So, they do smarter mobility. Basically, I'm analysing mobility data of people... transport patterns, for example. So, coming up with solutions to... and I'm a COMPLETE transport nerd myself... so, this is like a DREAM." Fred* [IE4-DE]

These quotes illustrate the knowing-why and reflective career competencies displayed by the participants at different stages in their lives and careers. As shared in Chapter Five, reflective career competencies refer to the awareness of the individual's' own career values and strengths, as well as the resources needed to achieve their career goals. The quotes also demonstrate the changing priorities according to participants' life and career stages. Table 7.4 below gives details in relation to participants' type of employment and the type of organisation in which they are employed, thus highlighting the person and (organisational) context dimensions.

15. ***Table 7.4 Participants' employment data***

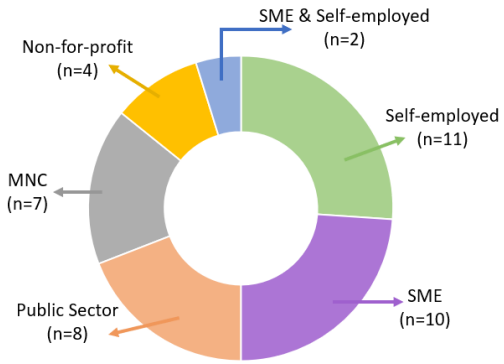
| Code | Pseudonym | Industry/Professional area | Type of employment/Function | Organisation type |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ES1-IE | Susana | Legal firm (administration) | FTE - senior admin | SME |
| ES2-IE | Carmen | IT (sales) | FTE – senior management | MNC |
| ES3-IE | Arturo | University (sales/admin) | FTE - senior admin | Public Sector |
| ES4-IE | Sandra | Community radio (production) | FTE - senior level | Non-for-profit |
| ES5-IE | Peter | Aero Leasing (corporate finance) | FTE – senior management | SME |
| ES6-IE | Bruno | IT (sales & customer service) | FTE - senior level | MNC |
| ES7-IE | Robert | Entrepreneur | FTE - director/founder | Self-employed |
| DE1-IE | Laura | Music (digital communications) | FTE | SME |
| DE2-IE | Doris | Community radio (outreach) | FTE - senior level | Non-for-profit |
| DE3-IE | Tania | Aero Leasing (admin) | FTE - senior level | SME |
| DE4-IE | Melina | Social Media (sales) | FTE | MNC |
| DE5-IE | Feli | NGO (Business development) | FTE – senior management | Non-for-profit |
| DE6-IE | Simon | Academia | FTE - professor | Public Sector |
| DE7-IE | Bettina | Nursing & Graphic Design* | PTE & self-employed* | SME & self-employed |
| | | | | |
| IE1-DE | Noel | Research organisation | FTE - researcher | Non-for-profit |
| IE2-DE | Ivan | E-Commerce (frontend engineer) | FTE - senior level | SME |
| IE3-DE | Oliver | Big Media / TV | FTE - management | MNC |
| IE4-DE | Fred | Hospitality (data analytics) | FTE - senior level | MNC |
| IE5-DE | Fintan | Academia | FTE - professor | Public Sector |
| IE6-DE | Luke | Translator | Self-employed | Self-employed |
| IE7-DE | Liz | Data Protection Officer | FTE - senior level | SME |
| ES1-DE | Jose | Academia | FTE - professor | Public Sector |
| ES2-DE | Andres | Architecture | Self-employed | Self-employed |
| ES3-DE | Elena | Nursing | FTE | SME |
| ES4-DE | Nano | Engineering (roads) | FTE | Public Sector |
| ES5-DE | Patri | Music (wind instrument musician) | FTE (orchestra) | Public Sector |
| ES6-DE | Maite | Scientist (Biochemist) | FTE - senior level | Public Sector |
| ES7-DE | Cari | Project management (set design) | FTE - senior level | Public Sector |
| | | | | |
| IE1-ES | Conor | IT (Inside Sales) | FTE – senior management | MNC |
| IE2-ES | Clare | Academia | FTE - lecturer | SME |
| IE3-ES | Jason | Lecturer & Entrepreneur* | FTE - lecturer & founder* | SME & self-employed |
| IE4-ES | Kathy | Customer service | FTE | SME |
| IE5-ES | Sam | English Language Teaching (ETL) | Self-employed | Self-employed |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| IE6-ES | Gerry | Project management (engineer) | Self-employed | Self-employed |
| IE7-ES | Emmet | Publishing & ETL | Self-employed | Self-employed |
| DE1-ES | Moritz | Consulting | Self-employed | Self-employed |
| DE2-ES | Karl | Automotive | FTE - senior level | MNC |
| DE3-ES | Helga | Primary Education | FTE - teacher | SME |
| DE4-ES | Rupert | Law (real estate sales) | Self-employed | Self-employed |
| DE5-ES | Anika | Translation services | Self-employed | Self-employed |
| DE6-ES | Nina | Tourism (writer) | Self-employed | Self-employed |
| DE7-ES | Alex | Lifestyle business (consulting) | Self-employed | Self-employed |

***The first two letters in the code indicate participants' home country and the last two letters their host country. (i.e. DE=Germany [Deutschland], ES=Spain [España], IE=Ireland). The numbers indicate the order in which participants were interviewed. The table is sorted by host country.***

It is noted in Table 7.4 above that only seven out of a total of 42 participants are employed by a multinational corporation (MNC) in the host country. Ten participants are employed by a small/medium enterprise (SME), with eight participants employed in the public sector and four participants in the non-for-profit sector. Eleven participants are self-employed (see Figure 7.9 below). *Bettina* [DE7-IE] and *Jason* [IE3-ES] are both employed by a SME (their main employment) and self-employed, which is reflected in Figure 7.9. *Bettina* works part-time as a nurse, and part-time as a freelance graphic designer. *Jason* [IE3-ES] teaches entrepreneurship (full-time) in a private higher education institution (SME), drawing from his experience as co-founder of an online travel-related business.

42. ***Figure 7.9: Type of employing organisations (including self-employment)***




The heterogeneity this study's sample brings an interesting perspective to studying the elements influencing and/or promoting a sustainable career in an international context. Given the diverse occupations and professions of the participants, this study shines light and considers the sustainable career conceptualisation and its applicability across occupations in a transnational setting.

Of the eleven self-employed participants eight are based in Spain, two in Germany and one in Ireland. The high number of self-employed participants in Spain suggests that self-employment was the mechanism the participants used to cope with perceived adverse macroeconomic conditions and cultural conventions in the country (as detailed in Chapter Six and the previous sections in this Chapter). In this way, these eight Spain-based participants were able to proactively take control of their careers in their chosen host country. The finding is in line with research on migrant transnational entrepreneurship (Saxenian, 2006; Stoyanov, Woodward and Stoyanova, 2018; Chand, 2019) and expat-preneurship (Selmer *et al.*, 2018), as detailed in Chapter Four (section 4.3). As shared in Chapter Six, as well as in this Chapter (section 7.2), the narratives of Spanish and Spain-based participants both highlight the traditional hierarchical structures [deriving in lack of autonomy and job ownership], long working hours and poor salaries as negative aspects regarding employment in Spain. The Spanish participants abroad mention these adverse employment conditions as one factor that hinders their return to their home country, as voiced by *Peter* [ES5-IE]:

> *"In Ireland you have your manager, and you report to whoever you report to… or consult with… but you're the OWNER of your own area... your whole work-stream. In Spain there is this culture of… I'm the boss and you report to me… and I TELL you what to do every day… and you have to do what I tell you… and it's CONSTANT… constant. The only way I would go back to Spain is if I'm at the VERY TOP… no one tells me what to do… so that I can implement that... working mentality downstream in my corporation… or the corporation that I lead." Peter* [ES5-IE]

In particular, the narratives of Spain-based participants evidence the importance of taking a whole-life perspective regarding a sustainable career. None of the 14 Spain-based participants moved to their host country for purely work-related reasons. Twelve moved for personal reasons, of which seven were relational (i.e. moved because of their partners). *Moritz* [DE1-ES] and *Helga* [DE3-ES] moved in part for work-related reasons and in part for feeling a cultural affinity with the country. In terms of their current knowing-why competence, thirteen of the 14 participants have remained in Spain for personal reasons [mainly relational], and *Conor* [IE1-ES] for a combination of work-related and lifestyle reasons. Especially for the Spain-based participants in this sample, nonwork-related motives greatly influence the balance between the happiness [SCS, work-life balance], health [wellbeing] and productivity [employability] indicators of a sustainable career. In balancing these elements, eight out of 14 Spain-based participants have opted for self-employment.

This section examines how the participants acquire, develop and deploy career capital – knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom competencies (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi, 1995) – in their international careers (see Chapter Five), and how these competencies contribute to their employability, currently and in the future. As can be appreciated in Table 7.1 (section 7.2, this chapter) and Table 7.4 above, the participant sample is heterogeneous. Therefore, the competencies and career capital the participants acquire and deploy to advance their professions [in other words, to be employable] will be equally diverse. However, at least at some point in their transnational careers, they all share an openness to opportunity and the propensity to be on 'learning mode' – a meta competence that provides them with the tools needed to achieve a sustainable career (Heslin, Keating and Ashford, 2020). In this sense, learning satisfies two of the sustainable career indicators, namely happiness [in terms of influencing career satisfaction] and productivity [employability]. To best illustrate the participants' acquisition and deployment of career capital along their transnational career journeys, the following sections share chronologically structured vignettes of two Ireland-based, two Germany-based and two Spain-based participants (see Table 7.5 below).

16. ***Table 7.5 Vignettes sample***

| Code | Pseudonym | Based in | No. years | Age | Gender | Industry / Area | Employer type |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ES7-DE | Cari | Germany | 6 | 30 | F | Architect (set design) | public sector |
| IE6-DE | Luke | Germany | 24 | 47 | M | Translator | self-employed |
| DE5-IE | Feli | Ireland | 12 | 51 | F | Management | non-for-profit |
| ES6-IE | Bruno | Ireland | 10 | 43 | M | Sales / IT | MNC |
| IE7-ES | Emmet | Spain | 26 | 53 | M | Teacher & Publisher | self-employed |
| DE3-ES | Helga | Spain | 18 | 53 | F | Primary school teacher | self-employed |

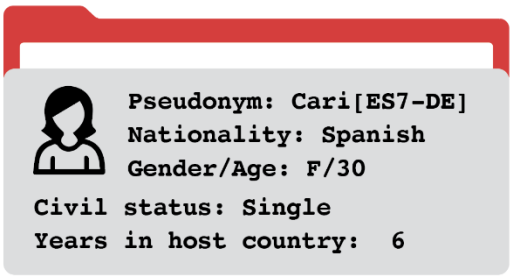
The criteria for selecting the participants featuring in the vignettes in this section was: (1) balanced representation of both female and male participants; (2) representation of all types of employment present in this study [and the most prominent form of employment in each country]; (3) a variety of professions/occupations, as well as educational attainment, in representation of the diversity of the sample; and (4) representation of all civil status, e.g. single (n=2, out of n=12), couple (n=1, out of n=11), and family (n=3, out of n=19). Civil status and age are indicative of the stage in which the participants are in their life/career.

Above all, these are participants whose narratives have not featured prominently in other sections/chapters. These vignettes will be supported by other participants' quotes to best

appreciate a whole-life perspective on the productivity indicator of career sustainability, understood as employability [currently and in the future], and its interactions with the happiness and health indicators. As shared in Chapter Five, employability implies being able to proactively prepare for future challenges, as well as the ability to react flexibly to both predictable changes and unforeseen events.

### 7.4.1 Germany-based participants

Germany has the highest representation of public sector employees of the sample – six out of the eight participants working in the public sector are based in Germany. Reflecting this peculiarity, the fist vignette in this section portrays *Cari*, a Spanish architect working in the culture/art public sector space. The second vignette features *Luke*, an Irish self-employed translator.




*Cari studied architecture in her hometown, Valencia [Spain], spending an ERASMUS year in Cologne [Germany]. When she graduated, she was offered a job in Valencia but decided to move to Berlin [Germany] instead, where she had some contacts that helped her get an intern/freelance job in an architect's studio. Cari's German wasn't bad but not good enough to get a full-time architecture-related job, so she had to work a series of 'mini-jobs' (as a boutique attendant, waitress, etc) to supplement her income. She completed a [self-funded, two year part-time] Masters in Scenography, because her goal was to get into the more creative side of architecture, and she thought this could be a good 'way in', given that, as an outsider, she didn't have a network that could facilitate her getting into more creative circles. During her Masters, Cari worked on a project for a reputable theatre in Berlin, where she was subsequently hired on a two-year contract. Then, through a contact she made at the theatre, she was offered a project management job, at a senior level, in a set design workshop that services Berlin theatres and the Opera. Cari has worked in this workshop for over two years, and is happy in her current role, which she finds challenging and rewarding. However, the relationship with her co-workers hasn't always been seamless. She thinks this might be because most of the workshop employees are middle-aged German men and Cari [who is organisationally 'above' them] is a young,*

*female Ausländer [foreigner], or perhaps because of her project management style, which she admits is more 'relaxed'. Either way, Cari's last two roles have given her an overview of the technical (i.e. managing costs and production process) and creative sides of set design. She has also realised the importance of foreign language proficiency in the world of set design, as she was able to communicate with visiting scenographers in English, German and Spanish.*

*Cari*'s [ES7-DE] account demonstrates the importance of the relational aspect, in terms of knowing-whom, in achieving and maintaining a sustainable [transnational] career. In *Cari*'s case, her network formation strategy paid off. While some participants had family or social connections in their respective home countries previous to their move, all found themselves 'outside' of business or professional circles, having to build their host country social and professional networks from scratch. *Cari*, as mentioned in section 7.2, was able to acquire both knowing-how and knowing-whom competencies by furthering her education in Germany. Building career capital in a country in which, initially, one is an outsider implies proactivity and, at times, can be especially hard, both in terms of penetrating 'insider' circles and emotionally. Some other Germany-based participants – such as *Ivan* [IE2-DE], *Fred* [IE4-DE], *Elena* [ES3-DE] and *Nano* [ES4-DE] – mentioned how, especially at the beginning, the lack of social connections made them feel isolated at times. Under these circumstances, the participants became more resilient, but also spent considerable amounts of energy in doing so. During energy-depleting times, the health and happiness indicators of career sustainability can drop, while the participants' employability can improve due to acquisition of knowing-whom [and knowing-how] competencies.

As per *Cari*'s [ES7-DE] vignette above, acquiring host-country language competencies [knowing-how] can also increase future employability, both in the host country and internationally. While *Cari* had some knowledge of the German language and culture [having previously been in ERASMUS in Germany] before moving to Berlin, *Elena* [ES3-DE] had none. *Elena*'s move was motivated by the practical training/work opportunity available to her in Germany (see Chapter Six, and section 7.2 above), which she believed would boost her employability both in her home country and abroad. Indeed, *Elena* [ES3-DE] shares that if the economic situation in Spain would have been different, she wouldn't have moved to a country in which she could not communicate in the local language and where she didn't know how the systems worked. According to *Elena*, because of nationwide staff shortages in the nursing profession in Germany, in her place of work they are often under-staffed and over-worked. *Elena* shares that her colleagues do not have the time [or the patience] to help her with her language, which contributes to her own stress and fear of getting things wrong. Both *Cari*'s and *Elena*'s

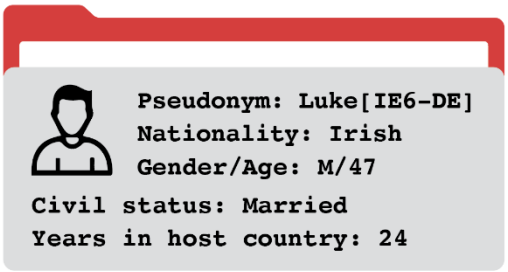
accounts are another example of how the health, happiness and productivity (employability) indicators of career sustainability are interlinked. Overall, the findings suggest that the current focus on happiness, health, and productivity as indicators of a sustainable career may be too blurred, and may require refinement as further empirical studies on sustainable careers are undertaken.

Even though *Elena*'s career in Germany hasn't been easy (with the happiness and health indicators of career sustainability being low at times), she is convinced this training will enhance her employability – both in Germany and other countries - and it will all be worth it:

> "*In Germany there's considerable demand for nurses… which is the OPPOSITE to Spain. In Spain there are MANY nurses, and very FEW nursing jobs. Here, I can call the shots… I can go wherever I want... I can ask for what I want... because there is SO much demand*". Elena (ES3-DE)

As previously detailed, a [professional] command of the host country language is necessary for availing of better job opportunities (i.e. enhanced employability in the host country). However, in certain professions, such as IT/engineering, academia and research, the use of English as a working/corporate language is prevalent (see Section 7.2, this Chapter). This, as was highlighted in Section 7.2, gives native English-speakers working in these professions an employability advantage over non-English speakers, even in non-English speaking countries such as Germany and Spain.

For *Luke*, an Irish freelance translator, his native language was an invaluable asset for his host-country employability, as will be detailed next. This study confirms that, even in the unifying context of the EU, where mobility barriers are minimised for EU citizens, certain occupations lend themselves more to transnational mobility and are more geographically mobile than others.




*Luke graduated in Ireland with a Bachelor's in international marketing and languages [French and German]. As part of his degree, Luke spent one year on ERASMUS in France. Previous to his year in France, Luke had got a taste of living abroad through a six-week*

*scholarship he won to attend a summer program in Bonn [Germany]. Straight after graduation, through a university connection, Luke got a project manager job conducting market research for an automotive company in Germany. This job, which he held for two and a half years, represented an opportunity for Luke to learn the language properly. He had a very good [self-rated] level of German, but he needed to practice the language and get some work experience. Then, when he was ready for a change, he used his clients' network to get a job in a translation agency, a job that was more suited to his interests. Luke ran the English department of this translation agency for over two years. He really liked this job and found it very rewarding. However, it came a point in which Luke decided to set up on his own as a freelance translator. His old colleagues in the translation agency continued giving Luke work on a freelance basis, which allowed him to maintain a [financial] 'safety net' until he built up his own customer base. Luke has been a freelance translator for twenty years now and is happy with the progression of his business and his career. He mentions that, although as a freelance in Germany he pays very high tax rates, he believes there's a good balance between tax take and public spending in the German system, and he's happy to contribute to a system that 'works'. His colleagues tell him the situation for freelancers is a lot better in Ireland, but he thinks he would miss out on certain social elements he can avail of in Germany. Also, as he specialises in German to English translations, most of Luke's customers are based in Germany, with a few customers also in Austria, Switzerland, and France – as he also does some French to English translations.*

*Luke* demonstrated proactivity and personal openness to opportunity (i.e. knowing-why competencies) in, first, looking for a job in Germany that would allow him to practice the language and gain some work experience [and contacts] and then in pursuing a job in translation, an area that he preferred. *Luke* was able to communicate his strengths to his professional community and potential clients, which allowed him to set up on his own. Luke's degree provided him with a good German-language base, which he proactively worked on by integrating himself in German society. However, it was his condition as a native English language speaker that gave him the advantage in the German to English translation space [as his degree was not in translation per se, but in international business with languages]. Once again, this indicates the importance of having or acquiring HCLP in terms of host-country employability. This confirms the relevance of language knowledge – and in particular the English language, as it is widely used worldwide – for successful objective careers.

*Luke*'s network formation ability [knowing-whom competency] also improved his employability in terms of knowing-how and local knowledge/experience. This, once again, highlights the

importance of relationships, either in the social or professional [or both] realm, for maintaining a sustainable transnational career, as also illustrated by *Noel* [IE1-DE]:

> *"I have a very good direct relationship with who was the head of department at the place I first worked at, and he became the Director of a Research Institute in Stockholm [Sweden] and was very keen for me to go with him, which I did… and then… yeah, we kind of… he came back to Berlin [Germany] and started his own organization and… I had said to him in Stockholm that I would work for him again if he started his own thing… and he called my bluff, so…" Noel* [IE1-DE]

*Noel's* network-formation ability, as well as his very specific expertise [knowing-how competencies], contributed to his employability. *Noel* is a researcher, who works in a non-for-profit in collaboration with international teams spread out in conflict zones all over the world. Because he works in an international environment, *Noel*'s working language is English. Therefore, having only school-level German was not a handicap for him [in terms of employability] when he first moved to his host country, and it isn't a problem in his day-to-day work. *Noel*'s specific expertise was sought after by the research organisation that first employed him. His particular skillset made him a perfect candidate for the role, but he reckons it was his proactivity and personal openness to opportunity (i.e. knowing-why, as well as knowing-how competencies) what enhanced his international profile.

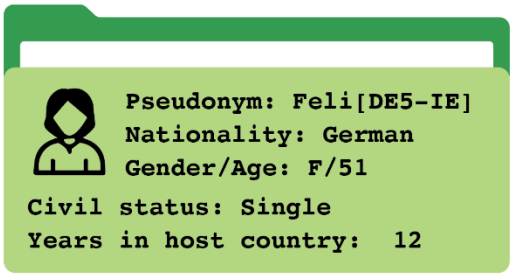
*Noel* moved to Germany originally to take up a post-PhD position. Out of the 14 participants based in Germany, five have PhDs. Two other PhDs are based in Ireland (Simon [DE6-IE] and Robert [ES7-IE]) and one (*Clare* [IE2-ES]) in Spain (see Section 7.2.1.1). Both *Noel* [IE1-DE] and *Jose* [ES1-DE] moved to Germany post-PhD, while *Andres* [ES2-DE] *Fintan* [IE5-DE] and *Maite* [ES6-DE] obtained their PhD in Germany. All these highly qualified participants coincide in thinking that the specific skills and experience gained in Germany, while contributing to their employability in the host country, might not 'travel well'.

For *Noel* [IE1-DE], future employability is not so much tied to the host country but rather to his very specific and specialised area of work. For *Fintan* [IE5-DE] instead, as shared in section 7.2, Table 7.3, employability [or as he refers to, his 'chances in academia'] is related to German academia specificity (see section 7.2). While both *Jose* [ES1-DE] and *Maite* [ES1-DE] agree their employability has augmented due to their experience working in Germany, and the achievements in their career so far, they both think that they could not move back to Spain and obtain similar positions [in terms of salary and working conditions]. *Andres* [ES2-DE] is self-employed, in the rather specific field of religious conservation architecture. He believes his base

in the south of Germany and the contacts he made in the region through the university in which he obtained his PhD and related conservation bodies 'anchor' his employability to his host country, at least in the near future. This confirms the professional complementarity most participants find in their host countries, in terms of both career satisfaction [happiness] and current/future employability.

### 7.4.2 Ireland-based participants

The Ireland-based participants employment is quite evenly distributed between SMEs (n=4), MNCs (n=3), non-for-profit (n=3) and public sector organisations (n=2). As previously mentioned at the top of this section (see Figure 7.9), Bettina [DE7-IE] divides her time between part-time employment with a SME and self-employment, and Robert [ES7-IE] is the only Ireland-based participant that is fully self-employed. Non-for-profit employment is featured in the first vignette in this section due to the high number of participants working for non-for-profits in Ireland (3 out of 4). The second vignette portrays *Bruno* [ES6-IE], who is employed in a technology MNC.

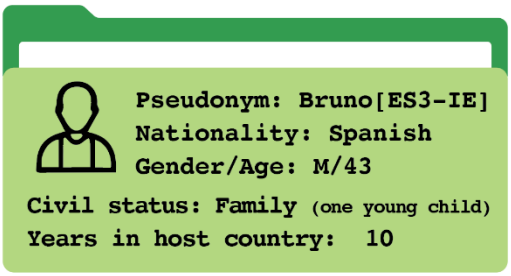



*Feli studied in the USA, where she completed her business degree. Upon her return to Germany, her international degree, and the experience she had gained working in a project within the automotive industry secured her a job with a car manufacturer. Within five years, she was internally promoted to business and competence development manager. When her father (who was Irish) died, after ten years working with this car manufacturer, Feli decided not only to move to Ireland but also to the non-for-profit sector. Her international, for-profit experience landed her a job as a CEO for a recently established French charity, where she worked for five years, until the charity was fully established. Although building up the company (and a social enterprise business network) from zero was very gratifying, it was also energy-depleting, and Feli was fearful to become too personally involved. She then took a part-time business development job with a different charity, and at the same time completed a Master's degree (Management of Health and Non-profit Organisations). Upon graduating Feli was offered an operations job with a different charity. This job represented a step back, but she decided to take it because it was very important to her personally, as it gave her the opportunity to work directly with*

*people providing services to Alzheimer patients on the ground. However, when a more strategic, high-level opportunity came along with her current employer, Feli didn't hesitate to take it. She has been in her current role for the last two years.*

*Feli's* case above illustrates how unexpected events in an individual's life can influence the direction, and sustainability, of one's career. *Feli's* father illness and death prompted her both to reconnect with her Irish roots – living a transnational life – and switch to a more meaningful career in the non-for-profit sector, in a charity related to her father's illness. *Feli*'s narrative evidence awareness of her values, competencies and strengths, in other words, knowing-why and reflexive competencies (see Chapter Five, Section 5.2.2.3). It also shows proactivity in seeking opportunities in the non-for-profit sector, as well as demonstrating communicative competencies (Akkermans and Tims, 2017) in the ability to transition from the for-profit [in her home country] to gaining employment in the non-for-profit sector in Ireland. *Feli* used her knowing-how, this is, her international education and home country experience, to pivot to the non-for-profit sector, building new business networks [knowing-whom] in her host country.

A health-related unexpected event was also (partially) the reason for *Susana*'s [ES1-IE] move to Ireland, as she decided to use the time she was on sick leave to take a break and learn English in Ireland. *Susana* believed she could avail of better jobs in Spain (i.e. be more employable in the future) if she could speak English fluently. As previously shared, learning English was also, in part, the motivation for *Sandra*'s and *Arturo*'s (both Spanish) move to Ireland. Unlike *Susana, Sandra*, and *Arturo*, whose job options were initially conditioned by their lack of English language proficiency (see section 7.2, this Chapter), the rest of the Ireland-based Spanish participants and all Ireland-based German participants (see Table 7.2) were able to communicate in English. Therefore, these participants' employability was higher from the start, as they were able to avail of job opportunities commensurate with their education and previous work experience. The participants' knowledge of host-country language on arrival, and subsequent progress on HCLP improved their host-country-related employability. This is confirmed not only with Ireland-based participants, but across the sample.




*Bruno went to college in the same city from where he is from, a small city in Galicia [Spain]. He knew that to avail of better and more diverse job opportunities he would have had to move to either Madrid or Barcelona [Spain], but rather than doing that he decided to try his luck in Ireland. Bruno's English was good enough to find a job in Ireland, because he has family in the UK, and had spent a few summers with them, learning English. Bruno moved to Ireland in the middle of a period of economic growth in the country, so it didn't take him long to find a job. In fact, as there was such a high demand for workers in Ireland at the time, he was in the privileged position to be able to refuse interviews and job offers that he didn't find suitable. Three years later, coinciding with the start of the country's economic recession, and due to his dissatisfaction with the working environment of the company he was working with at the time, Bruno decided to take a break and go back to Spain. He returned a year later to work in Cork [Ireland] and was subsequently referred to a role in a multinational in Dublin, which he preferred because it offered him the opportunity to upskill. He enjoyed the work environment and the training offered in this company, in which he remained for three years. He then moved to his current employer, also a multinational, for a better role and more beneficial economic conditions.*

*Bruno*'s case above illustrates how self-awareness, recognising available opportunities [knowing-why competencies] and proactivity can contribute to employability. Bruno preferred to work for an organisation in the host country that offered upskilling opportunities [within and outside a specific job/role]. He considered it a practical way of acquiring knowing-how competencies that would be transferable within the IT industry, making him more employable and eventually securing him a better role and salary. As previously shared, all participants are [or have been at some stage] in 'learning mode' (Heslin, Keating and Ashford, 2020) in their host countries, in terms of being curious and open to experiencing new languages and cultures, as well as learning and adapting to professional/organisational and societal conventions. This openness contributes to both their happiness – in terms of OCS and SCS – and employability.

In addition to gaining cultural agility (Caligiuri, 2012) and learning from experience, some participants availed of more structured learning, be it by furthering their education in the host country (see Figure 7.2 and Table 7.3) or by availing of company-sponsored training, thus

building knowing-how competencies. This, again, demonstrates the interrelation between the happiness [in terms of career satisfaction] and the productivity [in terms of employability, knowing-how competencies] indicators of career sustainability. *Bruno* [ES3-IE], *Tania* [DE3-IE] and *Melina* [DE4-IE] explicitly mentioned having availed of, and proactively seeking, on-the-job training and upskilling opportunities in work. *Tania* [DE3-IE] maintains that availing of in-company training, and having the management's backing and support, has helped her to develop her career in an area that she deems is 'above her [secretarial] qualifications':

> *"Up until late last year, I was still working in the same field as support staff… executive assistant, team assistant, office manager… and last year I joined the technical team in the leasing company I'm working in now… as a database manager… looking after the technical aspects of a leased aircraft, which is something I haven't really trained for... so I'm kind of 'swimming' at the moment... trying to keep my head above water… But I don't think I would have had the same options in Germany." Tania* [DE3-IE]

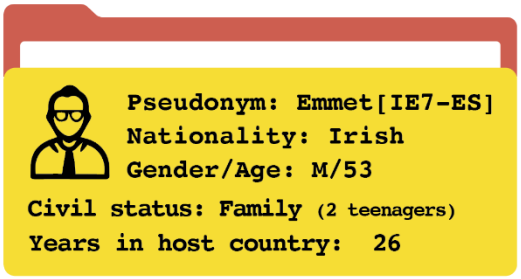
The feeling that their host country careers have boosted their employability, or have facilitated a faster career progression, is shared by many participants. For example, *Melina* [DE4-IE] shares that, compared with her friends that remained in Germany, her career progression has been '*probably three-times as fast*'. *Melina* works for a MNC [social media] and credits the more open and results-based organisational environment – compared to, in her opinion, the more traditional organisational structures in Germany – for facilitating her competency-building and thus her career progression. As an open economy, Ireland attracts considerable amount of foreign direct investment (FDI). The proliferation of European Headquarters of global technology corporations in Ireland – such as the one *Melina* [DE4-IE] works in – has contributed to the establishment of the country's tech ecosystem as fertile ground for talent and entrepreneurial support. This is a source of transnational complementarity, in terms of available professional opportunities in Ireland as a result of this tech-ecosystem, for the participants working on IT or IT-related roles in Ireland.

*Robert* [ES7-IE], a Spanish tech entrepreneur, credits this eco-system and macro-level institutions supporting entrepreneurship [such as Enterprise Ireland] for helping him set-up and grow his tech-related business (see Chapter Six). The strength of the IT industry in Ireland has also provided opportunities for career development and progression for both *Carmen* [ES2-IE] and *Bruno* [ES6-IE] who are employed in IT-related roles by (different) MNCs in Ireland. In total, 7 participants in this study were employed by MNCs, three of which were based in Ireland (as detailed above), two in Germany and two in Spain. However, as was detailed in this section (see

Figure 7.9), the main form of employment amongst Spain-based participants was self-employment (n=8 out of 11 self-employed participants), as in the case of Emmet, which will be shared in the following section.

### 7.4.3 Spain-based participants

Spain has the highest representation of self-employment of the sample – eight out of the eleven self-employed participants are based in Spain. Self-employment was also the highest form of employment of the participants in this study, followed by employment in SMEs (n=10). Accordingly, the first vignette in this section features an Irish self-employed English teacher and publisher (*Emmet*), and *Helga*, a German primary school teacher working in a private German school (SME) in Barcelona.




*Emmet has a degree in linguistics and German, and a Master's in applied linguistics. As part of his degree, he spent an ERASMUS year in Germany working at a Berlitz [language] school. On completion of his Masters, Emmet took a position as a director of studies of a summer [English language] school for teenagers in Dublin. However, he had the impression that finding a full-time job in his field [English language teaching] was complicated in Ireland, as the jobs available were very seasonal. He considered moving to somewhere like Saudi Arabia or Dubai, where he knew he could find work easily and make a lot of money very quickly. But he decided to move to Madrid instead, following a Spanish girl [who would later become his wife]. Emmet mentions that in the English language teaching world in Spain there's a preference or prejudice towards native English speakers, with most academies also favouring European citizens, because that eliminates visa complications for them. Therefore, as a native English speaker, and with his qualifications, finding work in Madrid was easy for Emmet. He was able to find very good work from the start, and soon got a job in the main public university in Madrid. The university outsourced the language teaching, employing Emmet on a freelance [contract] basis. In this way, he was able to circumvent the requirement for public employees to have obtained their positions through public contest. Through his work in the university, where they had a language lab, Emmet began writing self-study activities for students. His boss at the time put him in*

*touch with a publishing company, where they were looking for writers. This publishing company employed Emmet, first as freelancer, and then offering him a permanent contract. Emmet worked for the publishing company for seven years, but he missed teaching, so he decided to become self-employed again, setting up his own publishing company and teaching English, a mix that for him is ideal.*

*Emmet* started his working life in Spain as a freelancer, which, he says, is common amongst English teachers, as they can pick and choose where they want to work and how many hours they need. His condition as a native English speaker, his advanced qualifications (i.e. knowing-how competencies), and his EU citizenship gave *Emmet* a competitive advantage in his field in Spain. However, it was his proactivity and network formation ability (communicative and behavioural career competencies – see Chapter Five) which secured him first a contract in the university and, through his work there, a full-time position with a publishing company. Working in publishing was one of *Emmet*'s professional career goals, which he fulfilled with this move to full-time employment. However, once again demonstrating proactivity, *Emmet* decided to go back to self-employment in order to satisfy both his teaching and publishing professional goals, as well as his need for autonomy. According to Emmet's account, he was able to complement what he perceived as the seasonality of his specific occupation in Ireland with initially year-round work and subsequently a more satisfying career in Spain. As detailed in the health section, the good weather in Spain and the outdoor lifestyle he can enjoy because of it, were also sources of complementarity for *Emmet*.

As previously shared, being a native English speaker also helped *Sam* [IE5-ES] secure self-employment as corporate English teacher and technical English writer with a pharmaceutical MNC in Alicante [Spain], despite not having a professional teaching qualification. *Sam* was able to use his science-related Bachelor's degree – and the fact that he's a native English speaker – [knowing-how and communicative career competencies] to transition from initially being employed as an English teacher, teaching English to children in an English-language academy, to securing a lucrative contract [in exclusivity] with his current client. Although *Sam* is not a qualified English-language teacher, he was able to leverage his degree to offer quite specialised services:

*"I contacted big companies like Hoffman or Roche… and Ciba, these big pharmaceutical companies. I went to them and said, look, I have a degree in physics and chemistry and maths and you guys need to train your employees in how to write scientific papers [in English]. I knew that was a completely underserved market. I always knew that there was business, big money to be made by specialising in that*.

*Very few people can do that, and there's a HUGE demand for it… so I always knew I'd be fine*." *Sam* [IE5-ES]

Except from Emmet [IE7-ES] – who started his working life in Spain as self-employed, became a paid employee for a few years, and then returned to self-employment (see vignette above) – and Gerry [IE6-ES], who has been self-employed from the beginning of his move to Spain, all other self-employed participants based in Spain were initially full-time employees. *Rupert* [DE4-ES] termed the transition to self-employment, as well as the transversal move from working in a lawyer's office to the legal department of a real estate agency, as 'natural career progression' given his options. *Rupert* had very little Spanish when he first moved to Spain, but he had a good level of English. Since the law firm that employed him specialised in servicing foreigners, his lack of Spanish language skills was not a problem in terms of host-country employability. However, *Rupert* gave up on his original goal of applying for the bar exam and joining the bar association in Spain, because of his language deficiency. He shares that becoming a father made him reconsider his priorities, as he had less time to study for the bar due to his parental responsibilities:

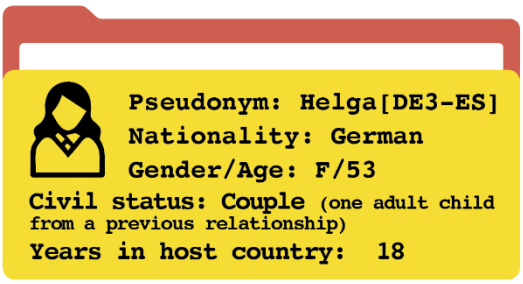
"I wanted to do the exam to apply to the *Colegio de Abogados*… I thought… well, in Germany it might take 3 years… so let's say it will take double-time here… but after six years and two kids later… and being kind of happy in the job… I just gave up." *Rupert* [DE4-ES]

*Rupert* [DE4-ES] maintains that not being member of the bar in Spain hasn't hindered his career in the host country, as his unique selling point is that he is registered with the German bar [signalling trustworthiness for German clients]. This allowed him to set up as self-employed, serving German citizens living or owning property in Spain. He displayed both communicative and behavioural career competencies in being able to tailor his skills and abilities to the market, applying them in an adjacent area. *Rupert* was proactive in looking for opportunities in Spain, despite his initial shortcoming with the language, which allowed him to pivot to his new role.

Two participants – *Bettina* [DE7-IE] and *Jason* [IE3-ES] are classed as both being self-employed and working for a SME (see Figure 7.9, top of this section). For these two participants, self-employment was a way to satisfy either competing or complementary career interests respectively. For six fully self-employed participants – Rupert [DE4-ES], *Gerry* [IE6-ES], and *Emmet* [IE7-ES] (all based in Spain), *Luke* [IE6-DE] and *Andres* [ES2-DE] (based in Germany), and *Robert* [ES7-IE] (based in Ireland) – self-employment was a natural career progression. However, it was the Spanish economic and cultural context, in terms of perceived unfavourable labour

conditions, which prompted *Anika* [DE5-ES], *Nina* [DE6-ES] and *Sam* [IE5-ES] to become self-employed. For *Alex* [DE7-ES] the decision was related to both the unfavourable work conditions, as well as wellbeing and life stage considerations (see section 7.2.1.3), while for *Moritz* [DE1-ES] self-employment was motivated by the need to slow down and enjoy life, in preparation to his planned retirement in a few years (see section 7.3.1).

All the Spain-based participants, as well as Spanish participants based abroad, consider the working conditions in Spain to be not as good as in other countries. As previously mentioned, out of the 11 self-employed participants, eight are based in Spain. Most Spain-based self-employed participants opted for self-employment as a strategy to circumvent the country's unfavourable working conditions and/or salary levels they experienced as employees, which demonstrates knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom competencies, as well as proactivity and adaptability. In other words, these participants have been able to react flexibly to the contextual conditions they encountered, proactively preparing themselves for present and future challenges.




*Helga is a primary school teacher. She decided, in consultation with her (then) teenage daughter, to move to Spain for a few years, taking a job in a private German school in Barcelona. Her daughter returned to Germany a few years later, but Helga decided to stay longer. Helga reflects that, while moving to Spain was a conscious, rational decision, staying for so many years was not. She met her current partner and decided to stay for longer. Helga admits that she just 'goes with the flow', because she doesn't always love her life in Barcelona, but she has a job, and this is her everyday life. Helga has worked in the same school since she arrived in Spain. While she's on a permanent contract, in comparing it with working in Germany, Helga misses the extra security she would have had as a civil servant working in a public school in her home country. She mentions that working in a private school means there is also more pressure from the parents, and from the board of directors in terms of financial conditions/restrictions. Helga is aware that, had she remained in Germany, she would have had less stress and a higher income. Helga's wish for the future is to live between Spain and Germany, but she's not sure how to achieve this, or if it could work out. If she decided to move back to Germany, she would have to*

*start again, and look for a different school. She couldn't transfer through the school she currently works in, because she gained employment through a local Spanish contract, so the school has no obligation to transfer her when she's on a local contract. Helga had a very good level of Spanish when she moved to Spain, which has improved after 18 years living in Barcelona, and can now also understand Catalan. However, her employment chances in Spain are restricted to private schools, as in order to become a public-service employee in a public primary school she would need a Spanish teaching qualification, as well as obtaining one of the available positions granted via very competitive public contests.*

While *Helga* demonstrated proactivity in finding a job in, and moving to Spain, subsequent work-related decisions have not been as proactive in comparison with other participants. Rather, other facets of her career (from a whole-life perspective) have taken precedence over her work role. It could have been that at the time of the interview she was preparing to bring a group of students on a school trip, which was causing her a lot of stress. Of all interviewees, *Helga* gave the impression to be the least satisfied with her career abroad, and the least proactive. *Helga*'s account suggests that the sustainability of her career, in terms of career/values fit and both objective and subjective career satisfaction is currently at a low point. However, she has been working in the same school since she moved to Spain 18 years ago, which suggests she has been productive and continues to be employable.

*Helga* is one of four participants employed by SMEs in Spain. *Jason* [IE3-ES] – who, as previously mentioned, combines his full-time employment in a SME with a self-employed role – and *Clare* [IE2-ES] are both employed in the higher education sector, and *Kathy* [IE4-ES] is a customer service representative for an insurance company. As previously mentioned, *Kathy* reversed the employment to self-employment trend detailed in the previous section, because when she moved to Spain, she worked in the IT-related business she set up with her husband. *Kathy* [IE4-ES] was able to use her experience in IT and her languages [English and French] to secure this role, which she says suits her better at this point in her career (see section 7.2.1.1).

*Clare* [IE2-ES] has recently transitioned from an international business role in a professional service firm to a lecturer role in a private university. *Clare* contributed to designing and facilitating training activities in her previous organisation, an activity she enjoyed. A colleague recommended her for a lecturing opportunity in the university which currently employs her. Through this opportunity, Clare realised that she really enjoyed her lecturer role, which prompted her to complete a PhD, initiating her transition into academia:

> *"I hadn't quite decided I wanted to move into academia when I decided to do the PhD… that kind of came gradually. So, when I discovered I also liked research and got more teaching, then I thought, OK… and then it became a deliberate step." Clare* [IE2-ES]

*Clare* displayed both communicative and behavioural career competencies in being able to apply her international business experience and knowing-how to her current role in academia. She speaks of her integration, and how this has helped her host country employability:

> *"I've been working here for 20 years, all of my professional connections are here, so I would KNOW a lot of people. So, it wasn't the same when I was looking for a job 10 or 15 years ago, than looking for a job now because… my CV kind of speaks of being 'one of them'… or 'one of us' and people I know… in an interview… they would ask if know this person, or that person… and yes, I know these people." Clare* [IE2-ES]

To conclude, this section (7.4) and its related subsections have shared a retrospective account of the strategies used by the participants to proactively prepare for future challenges – mainly in their host countries, but also tentatively in their home countries or elsewhere – and react flexibly to career changes, thus maintaining and enhancing their employability over time. The narratives shared in the vignettes and supplementary quotes in this section and sub-sections provide a snapshot of the career trajectories of the participants in their respective host countries, as well as the competencies gained in their home country. The narratives collected reflect a temporal/retrospective series of recollections from the sample in relation to their career trajectories and their current lives – incorporating their ongoing relationships across international borders – thereby encompassing a more temporal overview of their intra-EU careers, from a whole-life perspective. While this section focuses on the employability [currently, and as an indication of perceived future employability] of the research participants, the vignette structure of the section allows for a clearer exposition of the interrelation of the happiness, health, and productivity indicators of a sustainable career.

## 7.5 Conclusion

Taking a whole-life perspective of a sustainable career (Hirschi *et al.*, 2020), this chapter has shared how the specific national and supra-national [EU] contexts in which the participants in this study live and work can influence the achievement and/or maintenance of individual career sustainability. The findings were analysed according to the person, context, and time dimensions, as well as the happiness, health, and productivity indicators of a sustainable career

as conceptualised by De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020). As an individual-level study, the person [and their personal context] is the dominant dimension of this analysis. The [wider] context dimension encompasses three host/home countries – Ireland, Germany, and Spain – as well as the supra-national EU context. Highlighting a whole-life perspective of career [including work and non-work engagements and interactions], the time dimension is considered in the retrospective career narratives of the study participants, across life stages and career transitions. In doing so, this chapter has addressed the third research question of this study: (iii) How are the diverse elements of a sustainable career balanced, enacted, and experienced across [intra-EU] borders?

To my knowledge, the elements that constitute a sustainable career have not been analysed together across national/supranational contexts and cultures. It is evident from the participants' narratives that the three indicators of a sustainable career interrelate. The narratives shared in this chapter suggest that the happiness, health, and productivity [employability] indicators can be further intertwined for this sample, as the participants' careers [in a whole-life sense] span two countries. For example, it is shown that familial health and health-related concerns [in both home and host countries] influence the participants' career decisions in terms of priority re-alignment and work-life balance considerations, exemplifying one instance where the interrelation of the health, happiness and productivity indicators of career sustainability can be appreciated. Furthermore, serious unhappiness – for example, manifested in acute feelings of loneliness or guilt for being far-away from loved ones in the home country – can develop into more concerning health-related issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression.

The participant accounts demonstrate proactivity and career self-management across borders, resilience in the face of hardship and adversity, and adaptability. As shared in this chapter, these qualities and competencies evidenced by the participants' career experiences, equally protect health-related resources and contribute to happiness and employability at different times in their lives and careers. Indeed, too much overlap is found between the happiness, health, and productivity indicators of a sustainable career. This study's findings prove that there are other factors that need consideration when examining the sustainable career across countries, where host-home country connections, links, socio-economic and relational engagements persist. In particular, it is found that the complementarity dimension of transnational living is highly relevant to transnational sustainable careers, as individuals make trade-offs to better balance their professional and personal lives while living between countries. In this sense, this study found that complementarity in particular provides a more nuanced

understanding on how the happiness, health, and employability indicators are balanced for this study's cohort

Each respondent in the sample have their own particular career story to tell. However, as shared in this chapter, their narratives are coloured by their home and host country career experiences, as well as the unifying supra-context of the EU, regardless of the work and professional careers that they follow. The participants in this study have been proactive in their pursuit of a [sustainable] career in their respective host countries, choosing to forgo familiar home country structures and regulations, as well as relational support, in favour of the pursuit of host country careers. Within the three country contexts and nationalities present in this study, the findings show that the Spanish participants are most likely to move to other EU countries [and remain abroad] because of the perceived lack of opportunities and perceived adverse labour conditions (e.g. working hours, typical hierarchical structures, lack of job autonomy) in their own country.

Spanish participants report greater career satisfaction in their host countries, and improvements in terms of employability. However, they – and the Spain-based participants – rate the health provision offered in Spain as superior to that of the other countries in this sample. Health and lifestyle, as well as relational links and country/culture affinity were quoted by the Spain-based participants as the reasons for pursuing a happy, healthy and productive career in Spain. Most Spain-based participants (n=8 out of 14) circumvented the reported adverse work-related conditions by becoming self-employed. Germany and Ireland were seen by the Spanish participants as providing equal offerings in terms of career satisfaction / career progression, satisfying both the happiness and productivity indicators of a sustainable career. However, the German participants, in agreement with the Ireland-based Spanish participants, report the less hierarchical and rigid Irish work-related context has facilitated their career satisfaction [happiness] and employability. Out of the three country contexts, the Irish context was reported to be the least satisfactory in terms of [macro-level] health provision.

While this study did not set out to specifically identify language differences in the pursuit of international careers [and sustainable careers abroad] pertaining to the sample in question, the design of the study, including three countries with different languages, rendered this an important consideration. It became obvious from the findings that differences exist with regards to the happiness and employability indicators of a sustainable career depending on the participants ability [or not] to communicate in the host country language, and/or in English as a dominant language in certain occupations/professions. The findings show that the use of English as a working language (n=23) in non-English-speaking countries (i.e. Germany and Spain for this

sample), either exclusively or alongside the HCL, is widespread across all professions. Thus, English language dominance in many professions (e.g. IT-related roles, academia and research) gives English speakers a competitive advantage over non-English speakers.

In sum, this chapter has shown how intra-EU [German, Irish and Spanish] transnationals have experienced, enacted and balanced the diverse elements of a sustainable career. It is evident in the findings that both individual proactivity and the structures and regulations of the EU favouring intra-EU labour movements have a part to play in the achievement and maintenance of career sustainability for the EU citizens participating in this study. For this intra-EU transnational sample, the happiness, health, and productivity [employability] indicators of a sustainable career have been found to be interrelated, and occurring across the person and context dimensions, across time. Due to the overlap between indicators, it is difficult to pinpoint the strength of each indicator which then brings the useability and practicality of those indicators into question. Rather, they could be considered as qualitative markers in relation to sustainable careers that need to be explored in depth and more dynamically through qualitative studies such as this and career narratives where participants show the richness of the crossover of health, happiness and productivity indicators in facilitating an enduring sustainable career in a transnational context.

# Chapter Eight – Discussion, Contributions of the Study, and Conclusions

## 8.1 Discussion

This PhD undertaking considers the contemporary career focus of sustainable careers in an intra-EU international context. This discussion chapter blends the empirical findings and analysis from Chapters Six and Seven with the study's contextual, methodological, and theoretical foundations. In answering the three research questions, this study makes a number of contributions to the international careers literature and the broader interdisciplinary migration literature. First, the study describes how the conceptual boundaries assigned to the SIE and migrant categories are blurred for this study's population. This finding challenges the extant literature, presenting an alternative way of looking at dynamic intra-EU career movements. Next, and fundamental to the thesis of this study, it provides a novel way of considering globally mobile professionals through a transnational living lens, which to my knowledge has not been used in management or international career studies to date. Finally, in the findings and detailed analyses, I have found that the transnational living dimension of 'complementarity' aptly connects both transnational living and international sustainable careers as the umbrella concept that reflects how this study's sample of globally mobile professionals navigate living between their home and host countries in order to satisfy best the dimensions of a sustainable career: health, happiness, and productivity.

## 8.2 Contributions of the Study

### 8.2.1 Contribution 1: Alternative description/categorisation of intra-EU migration

This study addresses a specific type of geographical career mobility – the intra-EU mobility of EU citizens – that, due to the unifying legal framework of the EU in terms of labour mobility, draws similitudes to internal career-related movements within national borders. In particular in the context of Germany, Ireland, and Spain, which are all original EU member states. The EU freedom of movement affords EU citizens the right to live and work in other EU countries, and the geographical closeness and easy/cheap travel available to this study's cohort, facilitate their regular travel between host and home countries. The participants, as EU citizens, have the right to live, work, and move freely within the EU. Their social rights – access to education, healthcare, pension provision, etc – are also protected, and can be transferred from country to country within the EU. They can open and maintain bank accounts in Euro currency in both their home and host countries, and can avail of favourable mobile telephony roaming rates.

Given the peculiarity of intra-EU migration, this study addresses a nomenclature fit question considering intra-EU mobility. Drawing upon international management and

international mobility literature, the study considers the empirical findings to identify alternative ways to best describe EU citizens living and working within the EU. In answering the first research question of this study – (i) How can EU citizens living and working within the EU can be best described and categorised? – the findings prove that the participants in this study are able to maintain transnational engagements, living simultaneously, whether physically or cognitively, in two countries. For the participants in this study geographical career mobility is more fluid than the conceptual boundaries assigned to the SIE and migrant categories currently suggest. At present, there is no conceptual distinction that captures the idiosyncrasies of intra-EU migration or expatriation, even though EU citizens have evident advantages of movement – which include home-country comparable legal right to work and avail of social protections – within the EU, compared to other migrant cohorts.

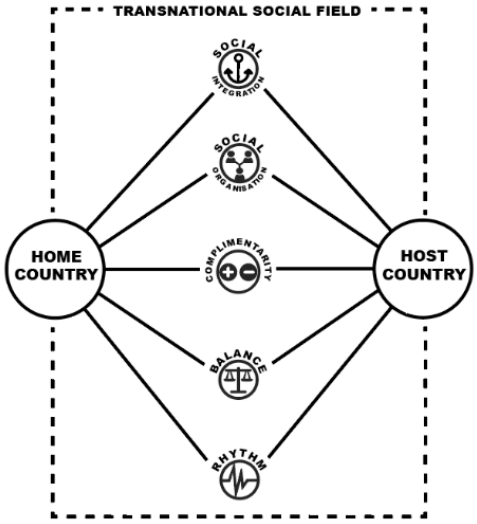
In conceptualising the business expatriate category (see Chapter Four), McNulty and Brewster (2017) did note that the 'citizenship' boundary condition (i.e. not possessing host country citizenship) in their conceptualisation may become redundant for intra-EU expatriates as the legal rights and protections for EU citizens extend (McNulty and Brewster, 2017, p. 44). Not requiring visas, and therefore not being bound by temporal length of stay conditions, equally reflects the dynamism and fluidity of intra-EU migration/expatriation. However, these particular conditions have not been reflected in expatriate categorisations to date. In light of the findings, the term EU-transnational is proposed to designate and better describe the group being studied in this research undertaking. The term EU-transnational reflects the particularities of intra-EU migration, which, as supported by this study's findings, affords EU citizens the capability of simultaneously engaging with and enacting their careers, from a whole-life perspective, in two different EU countries. In doing so, the first research question of this study is addressed.

### 8.2.2 Contribution 2: Transnational engagements of intra-EU migrants

This study's analysis of a sample of intra-EU migrants [EU-transnationals] across three different EU countries provides a novel way of considering globally mobile professionals through a transnational living lens. Transnationalism, commonly used in sociology, human geography, and economics-related migration studies (e.g Amelina and Horvath, 2017; Tedeschi, Vorobeva and Jauhiainen, 2022), is gaining traction in interdisciplinary (e.g. Habti and Elo, 2019) and management (e.g. Stoyanov, Woodward and Stoyanova, 2018) research in relation to understanding international careers. However, the novel concept of transnational living has not been used in management studies to date.

The anthropologically rooted concepts of transnationalism and transnational living [as an *action*], detailed in Chapter Four, formed the base to explore the second research question concerning this study (ii) How, and in which ways, do EU citizens living and working within the EU live transnational lives? Transnational living conceptualises transnationalism as simultaneously living in two countries (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021) – which was proved in my sample of 42 intra-EU migrants in relation to the five dimensions of variation detailed by Carling and colleagues. Figure 4.5 shared in Chapter Four, and reproduced below for ease of reference, represents the five dimensions of transnational living (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021) that connect home and host country engagement within a transnational social field.

***43. Figure 4.5 (*duplicate, reproduced from Chapter Four): Schematic representation of the five dimensions of transnational living: Social integration, social organisation, complementarity, balance, and rhythm.***




***Source: Developed by the author (Suarez-Bilbao, B., 2023). Created from Carling, Erdal and Talleraas (2021)***

Figure 4.5 illustrates my interpretation of the five dimensions of transnational living, as the conceptualisation that best fits the narratives of the participants in this study in relation to their simultaneous home and host country socio-economic, cultural and relational engagements. The figure was developed from literature discussed in Chapter Four (section 4.4) and supported by the empirical findings discussed in Chapter Six. As detailed in Chapter Four, the five dimensions of transnational living are represented in Figure 4.5 as follows: Social integration is represented as an anchor; social organisation as a network of relationships; complementarity with a plus/minus icon, representing the aspects of each country that influence, drive or necessitate transnational living; a scales represents balance [of engagement]; and rhythm [of engagement] is denoted by an electrocardiogram symbol.

The interplay between EU structures facilitating intra-EU mobility (see Chapter Three), and the participants' own proactivity in maintaining simultaneous home/host country engagements is reflected in the five dimensions indicating the simultaneity, intensity and scope of transnational living for this study's cohort. The findings presented in Chapter Six supported the notion that intra-EU transnationals maintain, and nurture, sustained and simultaneous engagements with both home and host countries. As highlighted in the findings (Chapter Six), the temporal aspect is core to transnational living, as there are life-stage differences between participants in terms of the intensity and scope of transnational engagements. While this study found the participants maintained transnational engagement in relation to social integration and social organisation, as well as balanced and regular (i.e. rhythm) home-host country interactions, of the five dimensions of transnational living, **complementarity** was found to be the most salient for this study's cohort.

Transnational complementarity underscored the participants' initial decision to move and/or stay in their host country, as well as influencing their host country choice. In this sense, the study found that complementarity incorporated or guided the other four dimensions of transnational living. Through complementarity between home and host countries, the dimensions of social integration, social organisation, balance and rhythm may be satisfied more creatively in that if a particular element of these dimensions is lacking in either the home or host country, it may be accessed via complementarity in the other. The study's findings identified three types of non-exclusive complementarity, namely professional, relational, and complementarity related to lifestyle/wellbeing. In doing so, it provided an answer to the second research question: (ii) How, and in which ways, do EU citizens living and working within the EU live transnational lives?

### 8.2.3 Contribution 3: Sustainable Careers of Transnationals

This study develops the sustainable career concept with respect to transnational careers, incorporating the dimensions of transnational living, and in particular the complementarity dimension as an overarching dimension facilitating happiness, health, and productivity in a transnational career context. This central thesis of the study is conceptualised in Figure 8.2 concerning a development of the career sustainability concept in living transnationally within a transnational social field.

The third and last research question of this study, (iii) How are the diverse elements of a sustainable career balanced, enacted, and experienced across borders?, was explored in Chapter Seven. As discussed in the findings in relation to transnational living (Chapter Six), a whole-life

perspective of careers takes into consideration the effect that transnational living has on individual proactivity [and reactivity] in terms of career decisions. To my knowledge, this study is the first time the elements that constitute a sustainable career have been analysed together across national/supranational contexts and cultures. In this respect, it is argued that for the specific sample of this study, whose careers and lives span home and host countries, living transnational lives may enable career sustainability across borders. The findings analysed in Chapter Seven, in accordance with the sustainable career perspective, highlighted the importance of both the person and context dimensions in promoting and maintaining a happy and healthy – as well as productive – transnational career over time.

Figure 5.2 shared in Chapter Five, and reproduced below for ease of reference, represents the three dimensions and three indicators of a sustainable career as conceptualised by De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020). The 'lotus' moniker was chosen to describe Figure 5.2 because the lotus flower symbolises balance and harmony, which resonates not only with the sustainable career concept, but also with harmoniously balancing a transnational life. In the centre of the career sustainability 'lotus', individual person-career fit is highlighted in red (see Chapter Five), as "the notion of a dynamic person-career fit in terms of health, happiness, and productivity is at the core of sustainable careers" (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020, p. 5). The time, person, and context dimensions in the 'lotus' framework are represented by a clock, person, and frame icons respectively.

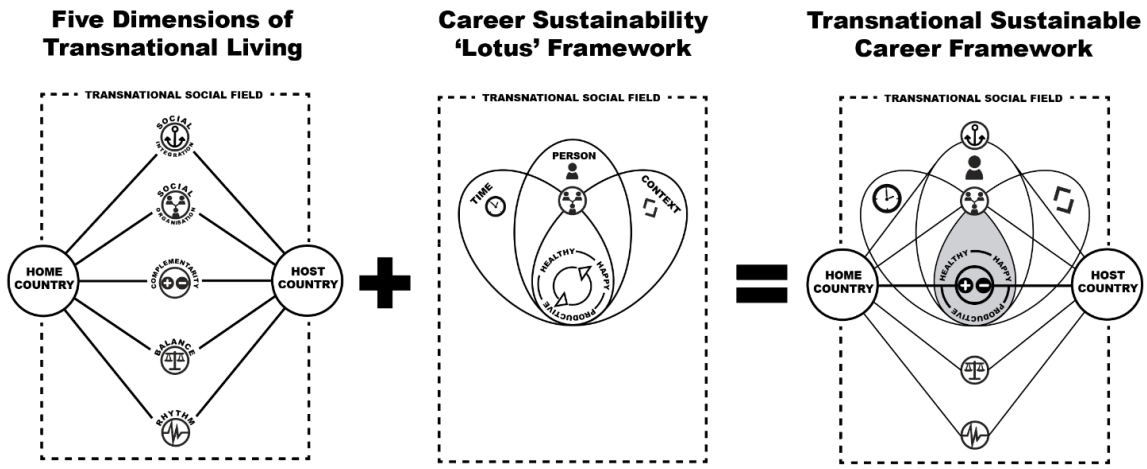
44. ***Figure 5.2 (*duplicate, reproduced from Chapter Five): Career Sustainability 'Lotus': The three dimensions and three indicators of a sustainable career.***


***Source: Developed by Suarez-Bilbao (2023), adapted from De Vos et al. (2020)***

Figure 8.1 below shows the development and integration of the dimensions of transnational living and the career sustainability framework, in relation to transnational careers. It considers the linkages between intra-EU individual careers, temporality in relation to intra-EU career transitions, and the broader transnational social field in which intra-EU careers are embedded

(see Chapters Six and Seven in particular). In this sense, the development presented in Figure 8.1 overlaps the dimensions of career sustainability – person, time, and context – and the dimensions of transnational living. For this study cohort, the temporal, personal and contextual needs and outcomes influencing their career decisions, and thus their career sustainability, take place within a wider transnational social field encompassing home and host countries. Within this transnational social field, the five dimensions of transnational living – social integration, social organisation, complementarity, balance, and rhythm – also influence and overlap the happiness, health, and productivity of the cohort's sustainable career across time.

45. ***Figure 8.1: Development of the Transnational Sustainable Career Framework***



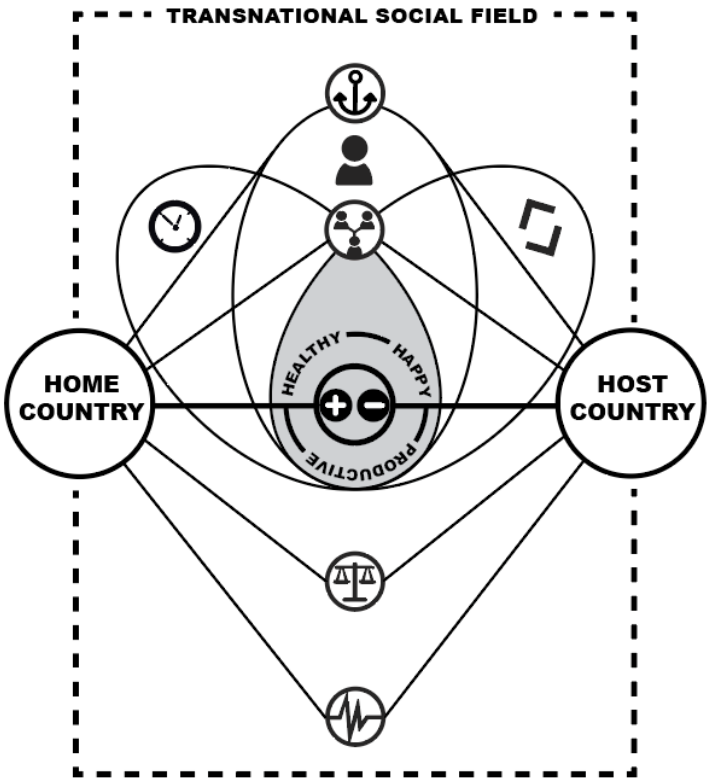

***Source: Developed by the author (Suarez-Bilbao, B., 2024), adapted and integrated from (Carling, Erdal and Talleraas, 2021) and (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2020).***

As shown in the findings, and represented by the Transnational Living Framework at the left of Figure 8.1, the participants in this study live their lives between their home and host countries, across the five dimensions of transnational living. In particular, the findings highlight the complementarity of transnational living and its relevance to transnational sustainable careers where individuals make trade-offs to better balance their professional and personal lives while living between countries. Transnational living happens across the three dimensions of a sustainable career. In relation to the person dimension, the findings show the proactivity and agency of the participants in availing of opportunities in their host country, constructing a transnational career for themselves, and in doing so balancing their home-host country lives. In terms of context, the findings show the relevance of the supra-structures of the EU in facilitating a transnational career for the sample. The retrospective nature of the narratives analysed in this dissertation undertaking highlight the time dimension – across home and host countries – in terms of career transitions, changes, and time periods in relation to life-stage dependent career decisions [from a whole-life perspective of careers]. These elements in turn influence the

happiness, health, and productivity of the participants as indicators of a sustainable career, as shown in the Career Sustainability 'Lotus' Framework at the centre of Figure 8.1. However, both the literature review and the empirical insights reveal that measures such as career satisfaction, work-life balance, and wellbeing can satisfy more than one indicator. For example, career satisfaction can indicate both happiness and productivity, understood as current and future employability; work-life balance can be reflected in both the happiness and health indicators; while wellbeing can be understood as influencing workability, thus satisfying all indicators. In a transnational context, this dissertation integrates the concepts of transnational living and sustainable careers, proposing that the complementarity dimension of transnational living can be a more reliable indicator of a sustainable transnational career, as proved in the findings.

The resulting organising framework, shown at the left of Figure 8.1, and presented fully in Figure 8.2 considers the complementarity dimension in particular, as central to enabling or facilitating transnational career sustainability. In this sense, the complementarity dimension of transnational living is considered an overarching dimension facilitating a happy, healthy, and productive (i.e. sustainable) transnational career.

46. ***Figure 8.2: Transnational Sustainable Career Organising Framework***




***Source: Developed by the author (Suarez-Bilbao, B., 2024).***
**** Guide to icons: (1) 'Lotus' career sustainability framework - from left to right: Time, Person, Context. (2) Transnational living framework – from top to bottom: Social integration, social organisation, complementarity, balance, and rhythm.***

The result of the development and integration of the two main frameworks guiding this study – the five dimensions of transnational living and the sustainable career concept – is represented fully in Figure 8.2 above. Figure 8.2 integrates the dimensions of transnational living and the different elements at play in achieving and maintaining a sustainable career across the person, context and time dimensions. The conceptualisation presented in Figure 8.2 is complex. It is multi-faceted, given the complexity of international careers, from a whole-life perspective. The organising framework was developed abductively from this study's analysis, and considers the simultaneous engagements the participants maintain with both their home and host countries across the social integration, social organisation, complementarity, balance, and rhythm dimensions of living their transnational lives. The aim of this framework is to present the intra-EU transnational societal field, comprising the dimensions of transnational living, which 'feed' or support a transnational sustainable career, and how these elements overlap and connect – via a strong person/life-career fit, which is indicated as the grey area in Figure 8.2 – with the happy, healthy, and productive dimensions of a sustainable career, depending on the positioning of the individual within the various contexts of the framework.

The essence of the transnational career sustainability organising framework presented in Figure 8.2 is to highlight continuous, evolving change in transnational careers according to personal and contextual circumstances. Figure 8.2 is informed by the theoretical frameworks and aptly represents the empirical study conducted for this dissertation. Even though individual idiosyncrasies are reflected under each of the headings depicted by icons in Figure 8.2, it was apparent in this study that all factors/indicators represented in Figure 8.2 were displayed in the EU-transnationals' careers. Complementarity in particular was found to facilitate the transnational sustainable career, where it was evident that participants complemented and harmonised health, happiness, and productivity between countries. In other words, participants in this study chose the extent to which their health, happiness, and productivity [employability now or in the future] was realised and/or performed in their home or host countries, and how this was sustained [or not] over time and circumstance.

#### 8.2.3.1 Transnational complementarity influencing the sustainable [or unsustainable] career of transnationals

This study's findings support the premise that in the case of transnational careers, the diverse social spaces crossed when enacting a career span both the host and home country social fields. Consistent with the literature shared in Chapter Five this study's findings highlight the significance of contextual influences for career actions and outcomes. This chapter, drawing from the findings analysed in Chapters Six and Seven, discusses how the three indicators of a

sustainable career – happiness, health, and productivity – intersect with and are influenced [mainly] by the complementarity dimension of transnational living, as presented in Figure 8.2. The findings also confirm the interrelation of the happiness, health, and productivity indicators, for this study sample. In particular, the boundaries between the happiness and productivity [employability] indicators were blurred for this study's population.

As per participant accounts shared in Chapter Six and Seven, the initial motivations for mobility and current reasons for remaining in the host country point to different types of transnational complementarity experienced by the participants in this study. The types of transnational complementarities can be classified as professional, relational, and a complementarity associated with the general wellbeing of the participants in the host country. Professional complementarity refers to professional opportunities in the host country that are not available, or are distinct from those available in the home country. Relational complementarity refers to having family and/or friends in the host [and home] country being the main reason for transnational living. Finally, wellbeing-related complementarity refers to lifestyle considerations. The different types of complementarities – which may vary at given career and life stages – are dynamic in nature, highlighting the temporal dimension of both sustainable careers and transnational living.

Living a transnational life, as shared in Chapter Four, and presented empirically in the Findings Chapters, implies having simultaneous engagements and presences [physical and virtual] in both home and host country societies. The participants' career experiences analysed in Chapters Six and Seven are time-specific. They indicate diverse career stages, and distinct periods of time when the participants shared their reflections about their career satisfaction with, for example, a specific learning experience, either regarding formal education or training, language, culture or communication-related learning, or experiential workplace learning. Participants' accounts also show they take time to reflect on their own abilities and experiences, and the chances they have in their respective host countries, signalling also employability competencies. Likewise, the participants reflect on the differences between national cultures, which affect their careers. Some see this 'learning from others' in relation to culture influencing career satisfaction and employability as enlightening and positive, while others see it as a negative side of the host-country environment they need to overcome and balance with other complementary positive aspects in order to attain career sustainability, while continuing to live a transnational life.

Living abroad has allowed the participants in this study to compare and contrast institutional/systemic, socio-economic and cultural issues, or peculiarities that affect working

and living conditions in their home and host countries, and that for them are the source of transnational complementarity. In living transnational lives the participants in this study have managed the aspects of their home and host countries that necessitate them availing of differently localised resources – such as relational connections, professional opportunities, and social/cultural or lifestyle-related choices – that may ultimately contribute to a happier, healthier, and more productive career in the long term. The findings shared in Chapter Seven have illustrated how balancing the complementarity of transnational living has contributed to participants' happiness, health, and employability, from a whole-life perspective of career.

This study has found that in a transnational context both home and host country factors play a part in determining the extent to which EU-transnationals rely on the host or home country [professional, personal/relational and/or national environment] to fulfil their own personal happiness, health, and productivity, in striving to achieve a transnational sustainable career over time. In light of the findings, I suggest the sustainable career conceptualisation could incorporate an international/transnational dimension by explicitly adding home and host country sustained engagements over time, context, and personal circumstances, via the framework of continuous, sustainable complementarity as presented in Figure 8.2. Figure 8.2, in combining transnational living and sustainable career, proposes an integrated conceptualisation of the EU-transnational sustainable career, which may be explored further to consider its robustness as a framework for international sustainable careers.

## 8.2 Conclusions

This study has focused on the career sustainability of a sample population of EU-transnationals working in different industries and professional sectors within the EU, specifically in Ireland, Germany, and Spain. A mainly inductive, exploratory study, it seeks to unpack how globally mobile professionals navigate living between EU countries in order to attain and/or maintain a sustainable career across time and context. The findings provide a novel way of considering globally mobile professionals through a transnational living lens, a theoretical framework that has not been used in management/international career studies to date.

The research endeavored to answer a number of questions. First, the study put forward a definition – EU-transnational – to better describe the group being studied in this research undertaking. In doing so, it answered the first research question of this study: (i) Drawing upon international management and international mobility literature, and given the particularities of intra-EU mobility, how can EU citizens living and working within the EU be best described and categorised? Next, a transnational living lens was adopted to explore the second research

question concerning this study (ii) How, and in which ways, do EU citizens living and working within the EU live transnational lives? This was proved with regard to a sample of intra-EU migrants across three EU countries, supporting the notion that the intra-EU transnationals in this sample maintain, and nurture, sustained and simultaneous engagements with both home and host countries.

This study introduces a new multi-stage organising framework concerning the development of the career sustainability concept in living transnationally within a [intra-EU] transnational social field. The organising framework presented in Figure 8.2 attempts to answer the third and final research question of this study, (ii) How are the diverse elements of a sustainable career balanced, enacted, and experienced across [intra-EU] borders? The findings and detailed analyses of this study found that the transnational living dimension of 'complementarity' aptly connects both transnational living and international sustainable careers as the umbrella concept that reflects how the sample of EU-transnationals navigate living between countries in order to best satisfy the dimensions of a sustainable career: health, happiness, and productivity.

Theoretically, this study's contributions are two-fold. First, the study contributes to the international career and international mobility literature by proposing an alternative lens/descriptor to the managerialist focus on expatriate, SIE, and/or migrant categories through the introduction of transnational living into the management literature. Transnational living, as a verb, denotes *action* and dynamism, rather than the nouns (i.e. expatriate, SIE etc.) that are normally used in international management literature. Transnational living aptly captures the recursive, continuous relationship of internationally mobile populations with both their host and home countries over time and circumstance. The second theoretical contribution of this study is to the evolving and burgeoning conceptualisation of sustainable career in the career literature, by including the macro transnational context to the dimensions and indicators underlying the sustainable career conceptualisation. Based on the empirical findings, this study suggests that the commonality across both the literatures on transnational living and international sustainable career could be captured through the overarching transnational living dimension of complementarity across the three indicators – health, happiness, and productivity – and the person, context and time dimensions of a sustainable career.

Empirically, this PhD undertaking provides a snapshot of intra-EU migrants' career experiences and their ongoing, continuous associations with their home countries in different forms over time and space. In a world where globalisation and mobility are prevalent, this study describes how, and discusses why, internationally mobile individuals maintain ties/engagements

across social institutions with their home countries while residing in a host country; and living with a 'foot in both camps' is normalised.

## 8.3 Closing Reflection

In reflecting on my research trajectory, I am reminded of Prof. Jan Selmer's assertion at EURAM 2020: we research what we know. My life has been steeped in the themes of migration and international mobility, providing a unique perspective that deeply informs my work. However, my PhD journey has been as much about my chosen topic as it has been about my development as a researcher. While I embarked on this journey with abundant enthusiasm and an open mind, the first major challenge was leaving full-time employment, with the consequent loss of earnings, and having to momentarily set aside the practical learnings of over twenty years of professional experience to start anew as a student. I was fortunate that my supervisors supported me in the initial exploration phase—as I ventured down many rabbit holes, exploring different kinds of literature and research approaches—as well as throughout my PhD journey. This support, coupled with the encouragement of early writing in my PhD program, led to the opportunity to co-author a book chapter with my supervisors in my second year, followed by a journal article. Reflecting back, being part of a 'write and review' process early in my PhD journey, thus 'learning by doing', was invaluable in shaping my thinking and academic writing style. It also enhanced my understanding of the academic writing and publication process.

As a researcher, I made deliberate choices in engaging with the literature, designing my research, and analysing interview data. However, serendipity and chance also played significant roles in this academic journey. One such serendipitous decision was to pursue and obtain an H2020-funded Early Stage Researcher (ESR) position in the GLOMO project. This opportunity led me to move to Bamberg, Germany, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic in August 2020, marking a significant turning point in my PhD journey. Academically, my tenure in GLOMO facilitated new academic and research networks and exposed me to different schools of thought through engagement with new literature. Living in Germany, I experienced first-hand, for the first time in my life, the limitations of not being able to communicate. This helped me empathize with the struggles of the participants in similar situations. This move to a non-English-speaking country expanded my perspective on migration, prompting an evolution in my research focus as I continued with the data-gathering phase of the research, which I had started in Ireland a few months earlier.

The data collection phase of my research coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which not only disrupted my plans for face-to-face interviews but also significantly

impacted the lives of the participants. Understandably, they expressed concerns about their loved ones in their home countries and elsewhere, longing for the ability to travel again to see them. Although technology helped alleviate some of their worries, several participants shared that being unable to travel between home and host countries made them reconsider the future viability of their host-country careers.

While my initial PhD focus was on home-host country diaspora links, talent attraction and retention, and career capital, the participants' reflections on the impact of unplanned events shaping their international careers—resonating with my own career experience—redirected my attention to literature on career crafting, career shocks, and the chaos theory of careers. This abductive approach led to the publication of my first, first-authored paper. At that time, I had not yet transcribed and analysed all the interviews. As I continued this process, I abductively determined that the transnational migration literature and the concept of sustainable careers were a more suitable fit for my sample. As a migrant myself, I found that current expatriation frameworks overlooked the lived experiences of individuals who, like my sample, maintained long-term, continual, and sustained engagement between their countries of origin and destination across time, space, and circumstances.

I find similarities between my own changing thought process and direction throughout this research journey and those of my research candidates with regards to their career paths. In this sense, I used introspection reflexively, with my self-understanding aiding in interpreting the participants' narratives and general insights, linking my own experience as a researcher with the experiences of the participants. The choices we make occur in a time and historically specific moment, based on the perceived facts and options we have available to us. These options also depend on our particular circumstances, the influence of significant others, and the availability or lack of opportunities—at a specific point in time.

This journey has been a blend of structured planning and unanticipated opportunities, shaping my growth as a scholar. The diverse experiences and environments I encountered have not only broadened my academic horizons but also deepened my understanding of the complexities surrounding migration and career development. The support from my supervisors and the vibrant academic communities in which I have been lucky to find myself has been instrumental in my development as a scholar. As I conclude this chapter, I am grateful for the rich academic formation and the invaluable lessons learned throughout my PhD journey.

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# Appendices

# Appendix A: Topic Guide

The emphasis on the topic guide below should be on the interviewee's own interpretation of their experiences, on what they feel is important, or not. This will allow 'room' for expansive answers.

1. Background to interview

Essential Question: *'Tell me about yourself, your background and life back home'*.

The focus here is gathering information on the participants' background, their home country career capital up to when they made the decision to migrate. This part of the interview focuses on the participants' past work experiences, past qualifications, education, social networks, and identity.

Probing Questions: What did you study in university? What was your last role/job back home in XXX? Was your job connected to your qualification? If your job wasn't connected to your qualification, why not? Have you ever worked in a role that your qualification/degree/masters is/isn't connected to, either in your home country or host country?

2. Motivation to emigrate

Main questions: *Why did you emigrate/move? Why did you emigrate/move to [Ireland / Germany / Spain?*

This topic is designed to collect contextual information regarding macro and individual factors influencing the participants' mobility. The focus is on their reasons for moving and their reasons for migrating to their specific host country [Ireland, Spain or Germany]. The research's aim is to find out about the participants' motivations for mobility and their career experiences in the host country, with the objective to obtain their views on the following themes: push/pull factors, cultural factors, identity (migrant/SIE), (possible) structural/career barriers, capital mobilisation, career development, and career satisfaction.

Probing Questions: Were you working when you decided to migrate/move? Why did you leave that job? Why did you leave your 'home country'? Did you have support or help from family/friends/organisation etc. already living abroad? Did you come straight to [Ireland / Germany / Spain]? If not, where did you migrate to first? What was your experience there? Why did you then migrate to/on to [Ireland / Germany / Spain]? What did you know about [Ireland / Germany / Spain] before moving there? What were your expectations, in terms of work- career-lifestyle? Were your initial expectations met? Did you move on your own or with family? Did you have friends or connections in [Ireland / Germany / Spain]?

3. Bi-culturalism / Multi-culturalism / Transnationalism

Main question: *Tell me about your culture/identity and your 'feelings' about your home and host countries. Do you keep (social/cultural/business) links with your home country?*

The theme being explored here is the participants' cultural identification with the home and host country and the links/engagement they maintain (or not) with their home country. I would like

to explore if the participants identify themselves as bi-cultural, multi-cultural or transnationals and if (and how) this identification influences host-home country engagement and capital flows. Transnationalism, as defined by Glick-Schiller et al. (1992), implies the development and maintenance of different connections (personal, social, economic, etc.) and linkages between two or more countries.

Probing questions: Do you have a cultural affinity with [Ireland / Germany / Spain]? How/in what ways is your home country culture different/similar to your host country culture? How is the working/professional environment in [Ireland / Germany / Spain] different/similar to your home country? Did you have any regulatory/compliance or bureaucracy issues when you came to work to [Ireland / Germany / Spain]? Does your company value international experience? Do you trade/sell/partner with firms in other countries?

Do you miss 'home'? If so, what do you miss? Would you go back (now or in the future)? Do you keep family/social links with your home country? Do you holiday in your home country (why/why not)?

Do you have business connections in your home country? How often are you in touch/interact with them? Do you have business connections in other countries apart from your home and host countries?

Are you a member or have active connections to home-country institutions (such as embassies, consulates, chamber of commerce, business associations, ex-pat associations, etc.) operating in [Ireland / Germany / Spain] and/or in your home country? Elaborate

Do you follow current affairs topics and news from your home country? How do you do this?

How would you describe yourself (an expat / migrant / bi-cultural / transnational / global citizen)?

4. Career / work life in the (current) host country

Main question: *Tell me about your work life/career since moving to Ireland (Germany/Spain).*

The theme being explored here is the participants' career in the host country. I want to find out about their career experiences in the host country, with the objective to obtain their views on the following themes: career motivations, career development, (possible) career barriers, capital mobilisation, career outcomes, career satisfaction, and identity.

Probing questions: What does career mean to you? How has your career progressed to date? Who or what influences your career decisions? Is your present role connected to your qualification/experience? What industry do you work in? Did you apply to work for a particular company/job role when you came over? Did you use a recruitment agency or similar to find a job in XX? Did you come over to work/find a job, or were you here beforehand (studying, etc.)?

How long have you been working in [current organization]? Was this your first job in [Ireland / Germany / Spain]? If not, how did your professional life evolve in [Ireland / Germany / Spain]? At what stage are you in your career (early/middle/late)?

How did you end up working for this company? How long was your initial contract for? What attracted you to work for the company? What do they do different/better when compared to other companies in other countries you've lived/worked?

Are, or were, your skills/experience/qualifications used or recognised in your work in your current host country? What skills/knowledge/connections - forms of capital - if any, have been beneficial in your career development in the host country? Are those skills needed for your industry as a whole? Is there competition for global talent relating to those skills? If there is, what does your company do (hiring/employment policies, culture, etc.) to 'win' global talent over your competitors? What have been the main obstacles to obtaining skilled work, or work more suited to your skills in the host country?

Can you rate your job satisfaction; are you happy with your career development so far? What steps have you taken to improve your career? How important is your work/job/career to you? How important is your work/life balance?

5. Future career / career mobility plans

Main Question: *Tell me about your future career and life plan*.

The theme here relates to the participants' future plans for their career – either in the current host country, back in their home country, or in another geographical location. The aim is to find out about their future career plans and the utilisation of the career capital acquired in the current host country. Does this involve staying in the current host country, move to a different host country or back 'home'? The objective of these questions is to obtain the participants' views on the following themes: future career development, future plans, home/host country socio-economic engagements, transnational connections, career capital utilization.

# Appendix B: Information and Consent Form for Research Participants

## Information Sheet

**Purpose of the Study.** I (Blanca Suarez-Bilbao) am a doctoral student in the School of Business, Maynooth University. I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr Marian Crowley-Henry and Dr Edward O'Connor. The research results will be used as data for my PhD project.

The study is concerned with deepening the understanding of the careers of expatriates/skilled-migrants, focusing on the motivations for international mobility and career experiences of this diverse population. The topics explored pertain to the role of context, cultural identity and identification (with host/home countries) and its impact on expats'/skilled-migrants' career-related decisions and behaviours, such as:

- Home/host country issues impacting on the expat/migrant experience (e.g. push-pull motivations, transferability of career capital between countries/institutions, available opportunities, cultural differences, relational aspects)
- Temporality: Looking at the development of skilled-migrants' career over time / life-course (e.g. host-country level of adjustment and long-term career effects)

**What will the study involve?** The study will involve interviewing expats/skilled-migrants (legally) working for organisations in [Ireland / Germany / Spain], in order for the participants to share their opinions, experiences and concerns regarding their international career. The focus is to explore expats/skilled-migrants' motivations for international mobility, host/home country links, and socio-economic and cultural engagements as related to the advancement (or not) of the participants' careers.

Interviews will be conducted on a date/time suitable to the participant and should not take more than 30-45 minutes of their time.

**Who has approved this study?** This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics committee. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

**Why have you been asked to take part?** You have been asked [to take part] because you are an expatriate (either company-assigned or self-initiated) or a skilled-migrant (an individual with third-level qualifications or professional experience working/living in a country other than their country of origin), living/working in [Ireland / Germany / Spain] for three years or longer.

**Do you have to take part?**

You are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are analysed. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with the researcher or Maynooth University.

**What information will be collected?**

Personally identifiable information will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and/or codes.

The following personal data will be collected at/prior to interview:

- Participant name
- Participant nationality
- How many years they have lived in [Ireland / Germany / Spain]
- Business email

You don't have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with.

Data, once coded and analysed, will be irreversibly anonymized.

**Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?** Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. All data will be held securely in Maynooth University (MU) and will be accessed only by Ms Blanca Suarez-Bilbao (doctoral candidate and Principal Investigator), Dr Marian Crowley-Henry (senior lecturer MU and PI supervisor) and Dr Edward O'Connor (lecturer MU and PI supervisor).

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you up to data analysis stage (December 2022). The data will not be available at a later stage as it will be irreversibly anonymized and thus non-identifiable.

*'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'*

**What will happen to the information which you give?** All the information you provide will be kept at Maynooth University in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed (by the PI – Blanca Suarez-Bilbao).

**What will happen to the results?** The research will be written up and presented as a PhD thesis. The results will also be presented at National and International conferences and may be published in scientific journals. A copy of the research findings/publications will be made available to you upon request.

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?** I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part

**What if there is a problem?** At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you experience any distress following the survey you may contact me directly and I will provide details of an appropriate support group/person.

You may contact my supervisors, Dr Marian Crowley-Henry (Marian.CrowleyHenry@mu.ie) and Dr Edward O'Connor (edward.oconnor@mu.ie), if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

*If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.*

**Any further queries?** If you need any further information, you can contact me: Blanca Suarez-Bilbao at blanca.suarez.2019@mumail.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this**

# Consent Form

I……agree to participate in Blanca Suarez-Bilbao's research study.

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me verbally & in writing. I've been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.

☐

I am participating voluntarily.

☐

I give permission for my interview with Blanca Suarez-Bilbao to be audio/video recorded

☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.

☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to anonymization/submission of thesis [*December 2022*].

☐

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.

☐

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet

☐

I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

☐

[*Select as appropriate*]

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

☐

I agree for my data to be used for further research projects

☐

I do not agree for my data to be used for further research projects

☐

I agree for my data, once anonymised, to be retained indefinitely in the IQDA archive

☐

Signed…….  Date…….

Participant Name in block capitals ……..

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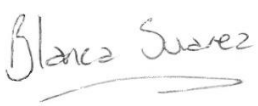
*I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.*

Signed……   Date…30/June/2021……

Researcher Name in block capitals …BLANCA SUAREZ-BILBAO……

Contact details: blanca.suarez.2019@mumail.ie  mobile number: +49 152 03117100

*If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.*

*For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.*

You may contact my supervisors, Dr Marian Crowley-Henry (Marian.CrowleyHenry@mu.ie) and Dr Edward O'Connor (edward.oconnor@mu.ie), if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

***Two copies to be made: 1 for participant, 1 for PI***

# Appendix C: "The influence of complexity, chance and change on the career crafting strategies of SIEs", *Career Development International*

Suarez-Bilbao, B., Andresen, M., Crowley-Henry, M. and O'Connor, E.P. (2023), "The influence of complexity, chance and change on the career crafting strategies of SIEs", Career Development International, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 359-376. https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-06-2022-0137