



LEARNING  
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# Working for the European Union public administration – Developing interculturality and identity capitals

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eurodesk

## Today's starting point

- In its policies and strategies the European Union (EU) has repeatedly addressed the importance of developing **human capital**, fostering **educational attainment** and promoting **cross-border movement** of people for careers and learning.
- **Intra-EU labor mobility** is said to balance out skills shortages and gaps between the EU28 member states. With an increasing labor force mobility within the EU, **employers across Europe** can capitalize on the benefits that **talented people** from diverse cultural backgrounds make in working life. This is considered to increase the **EU's economic competitiveness** in the global market.
- Growing to one's **professional potential** while working in an international environment attracts many. This workshop will **explore and discuss the development of interculturality and identity capitals in relation to international careers**.

## Today's theme and focus

- Did you know that there are altogether some **50.000 European citizens** working for the European Union institutions?
  - > Out of them more than **30.000 work for the European Commission**, and around **6.500 are employed by the decentralized EU agencies** located across the member states.
  - > only some **6 % of the total EU budget** go to **salaries of EU officials**
- The main motives for people to work overseas are **professional achievement, career development, social networks, intercultural orientation and interests, and esteem- and status-building.**

# Background of the research

- The phenomena of **identity, interculturality and career as capitals** were studied among staff at three different EU agencies (Cedefop, ETF, Eurofound) within the context of intra-EU labour mobility
- **20 staff members** working at the above EU agencies located in Greece, Italy and Ireland were interviewed on a face-to-face basis
- Main **aims** of the research were to explore
  - 1) how **identity capital** can be understood as a developmental resource of an individual in relation to his/her identity and multiple identifications (incl. personal, professional, European vs. national)
  - 2) how **interculturality capital** can be comprehended as an individual's capacity to perform in an interactional and co-constructivist process with diverse people.

# Research findings – Motivation for working abroad

- The motives and views of the interviewees for having an international career can be grouped into four main themes

-> working within the EU public administration

1) often offers opportunities for continuous **professional development**

2) fulfils **personal curiosity** and interests

3) gives a chance to be part of a genuinely **intercultural environment**

4) provides for relatively stable, financially **secure working conditions**.

## Ice breaker – Feeling European?

- At this LbyL seminar European cooperation and networking across education, training and employment sectors are being debated.
- Many of us may have been working at a European/international level already for quite some time, whereas some may only recently have got involved in EU level activities.
- Anyway, what we do not necessarily consider that often is how we as **individuals relate to Europe**, Europeanness and the European Union.
- So, what does **feeling European** bring to your mind? Personally? Professionally? Contextually? Geographically? Socially? Etc.
- Discuss this with your neighbour/s (in pairs or small groups)!

## Idea generation – Being intercultural?

- Everybody keeps saying that you have to be **interculturally minded, oriented and competent**, when working at a European or international level.
- But what does the abstract notion of **being intercultural** mean to you?
- What are the things you associate with the idea of being intercultural?
- **What is it and what is it not?**
- People may perceive differently what being intercultural entails; not even experts agree on that. So, when discussing in pairs/small groups, try to identify **at least 3 things that you together associate with being intercultural**.

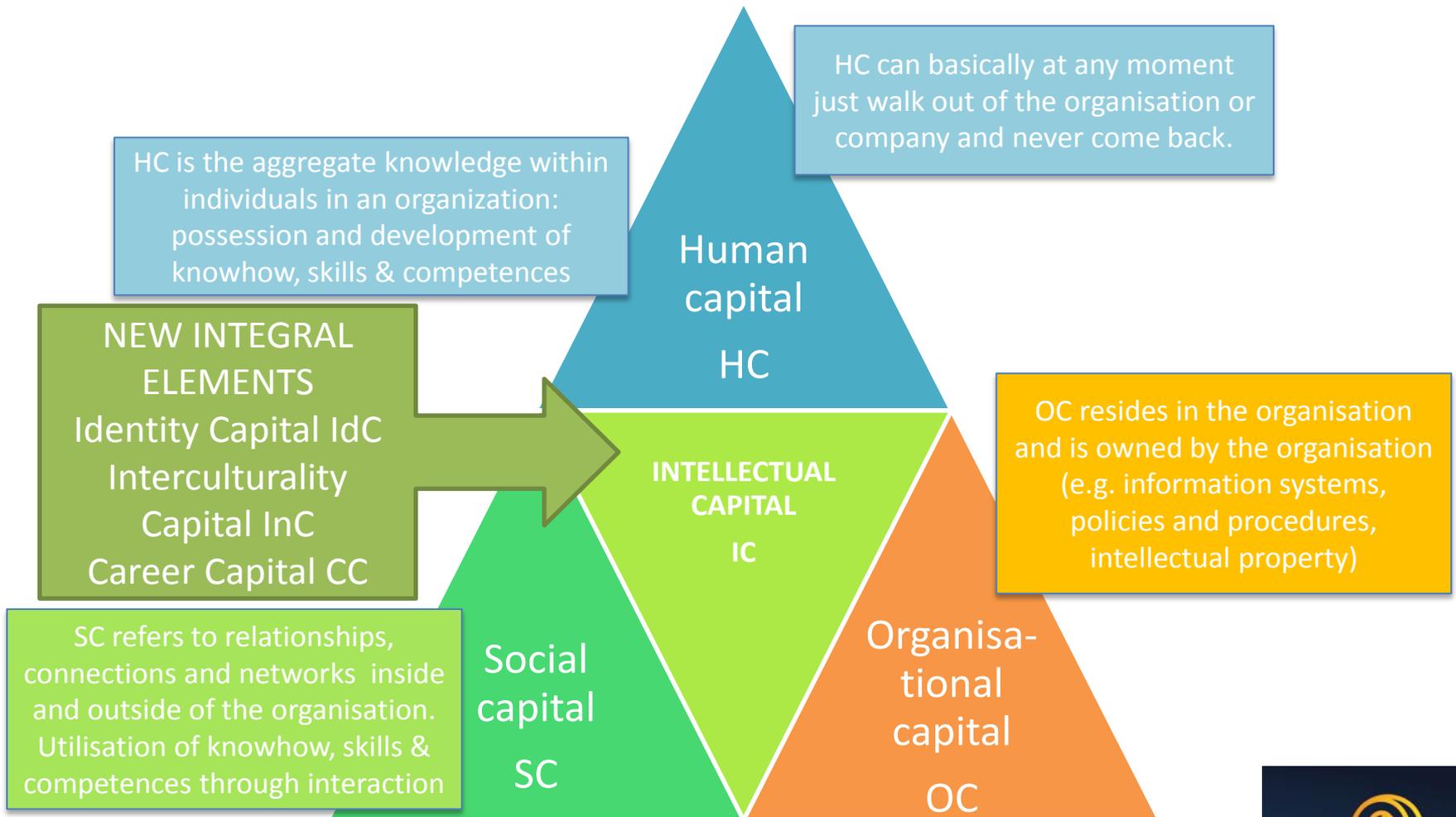
# Changing labour market, changing careers

- We often hear that we **MUST** have a **CAREER**
  - > goal/objective
  - > plan/purpose
  - > focus/emphasis
  - > aspiration/interest
  - > vision or dream
- We are also told that we should be prepared for a **CAREER CHANGE & TRANSITION**, which usually requires **CAREER ADAPTABILITY**.
- How would you describe what a **professional career** is in today's world? What are the characteristics of an **international career**? What should be taken into account when considering a **career abroad**? Discuss in pairs/small groups.

## Careers abroad – Self-initiated expatriation

- **Career** can be defined as the patterns and unfolding sequence of a person's **work-related experiences** pursued within one or several industries, sectors and geographical locations spanning his/her life course.
- The notion of an **intelligent career** conceptually embeds elements of **protean careers** (e.g. self-determination, personal values) as well as of **boundaryless careers** (i.e. crossing institutional and/or territorial boundaries for career choices).
- The intelligent career builds upon the competences obtained through six closely intertwined **types of knowing** (i.e. knowing why, how, whom, what, where, when) that is the foundation of **career capital**.
- **A self-initiated expatriate:** 1) independent self-initiated international relocation; 2) regular employment abroad; 3) intentions of a temporary stay; 4) skilled and/or professional qualifications.

# Traditionally intellectual capital consists of three types of capital



## Theory – Identifications and belongings

- Living in an ever-globalizing world makes individual **identities less stable, less fixed and less permanent**, and instead they become more protean and multifaceted. As a consequence of this, the identity development of individuals has become a more complex process than it used to be.
- Along human lifespan people's **identities usually evolve** and their identifications with and affiliation to diverse groups and cultures are subject to change and revision
- People have **multiple identifications** dependent on their given social environment and that they therefore through weaker and stronger ties belong to several collectives and communities at any given point of time (identifications can sometimes be in conflict with one another)
- Identification involves some kind of a **recognition of some common origin or characteristics** with another person or group in relation to the individual self.

# Theory – Identity as a social construct & Identity capital

- **Identity is a lifelong evolutionary process:** "Becoming in the future as well as having been in the past and being in the present are closely intertwined." **Who am I today?**
- Identity can be viewed as a **developmental resource** that allows us to conduct and construct ourselves **through relationships with others**. Ideally this resource becomes identity capital that allows individuals to strategically manage, develop, organize, and apply their identity-related resources in different institutional and social contexts, such as working and living abroad.
- **Identity capital is acquired through a process** in which individuals invest in their preferred or chosen identity (or identities) and engage themselves in **social interaction** with other people in multiple contexts -> co-construction
- **Identity capital can be divided into tangible and intangible resources.**  
**Tangible:** professional reputation and status, networks and the access they provide to information, knowledge, expertise and material resources  
**Intangible:** human agency, self-efficacy, resilience, self-esteem, self-awareness, cognitive capacities, emotional intelligence, ...

## Research findings – Feeling European

- **European identity as an ‘obvious’ outcome**
  - > Political dimension: EU values (democracy, rule of law, freedom of speech), EU symbols (flag, €, passport), EU programmes (Erasmus)
- **Territorial identifications – European vs. national**
  - > Europe was seen as a geographical territory and not only as a politically defined region or a block of countries (i.e. European Union)
  - > European and national identifications were intermixed to a varying degree: a sense of multiple belonging and seeing European and national more or less merged together
- **National stereotypes – alive, but professionally kept aside**
  - > Yes, stereotypes and caricatures about other countries/nations exist
  - > Individual colleagues differ from national stereotypes
  - > Acting as a professional without letting stereotyped thinking to influence

## Theory – Interculturality capital is something interactional

- Interculturality in its very essence is about **human encounters and human co-existence**, i.e. readiness for interaction between people from **different origins**.
- **NEEDED:** social interaction and communication, reflection and introspection, willingness for continuous learning and easy access to learning resources, development of sensitivities and exposure to diversity, readiness to adjust to constantly evolving situations and circumstances, **search for commonalities across different people**.
- Interculturality capital is about human **interest**, conscious **openness** and **curiosity** towards **cultural diversity**, and social **relations** well-fitted to a diverse and complex world, and the **willingness** to interact with the 'other'.
- Interculturality capital is generated through an individual's exposure to, interaction with and learning from others in an **intercultural context**.  
*[behavioural, cognitive and affective processes of learning and development]*
- Interculturality capital encapsulates the **aggregate knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences and personality dispositions** that provide the individual with a competitive edge to coping successfully with culturally diverse situations.

## Research findings – Intercultural interaction

- **Social encounters** contain a varying degree of formality, and thereby range from strictly **formal professional discussions** (e.g. meetings with directors and heads of unit) to **semi-formal work-based interaction between colleagues** (e.g. exchange of information as a daily practice) and to **more relaxed and informal style** (e.g. lunchtime conversations at the canteen).
- **Communication styles across nationalities** – in broad terms – may differ. This sometimes causes **tension and confusion** to intercultural interaction. Things said or written may be well meant by the other nationality, but as they have been expressed somewhat differently (in terms of tone and style) from what the other person is used to in his/her own country, may create unpleasant situations.
- **Risk of losing oneself**, if one becomes all too sensitive and responsive to every little aspect there is that should be taken into consideration in intercultural interaction.

## Research findings – Intercultural interaction

- What we show on the surface to the others (*i.e. correct non-judgmental behavior*) may not necessarily correlate with what and how we feel and think internally (*i.e. irritation or aggression because of the behavior of the others*).
- “[...] working well in any organization like this, it teaches you how to think without even noticing it. You don’t even realize it, but it does actually teach you, how to accommodate to these differences, how to get along together, how to live together. When I say live together I mean in the professional environment, you know, how to negotiate actually, you know, sometimes stormy waters, and then still achieve ultimately whatever [...] one thing I hate to see down in the dining hall is, I hate to see all the nationalities to eat together, I hate that [...] I hate to see them lunching together (one nationality sticking together). But then you see that part is most me. That is what I am about. **I am about mixing and I have done it for really all my professional life [...]**” (Interviewee 16)*



## Topics to be discussed and debated

- **Is international career and learning experience valued by employers at national level?**
  - > Yes, No, I don't know, maybe? Why or why not?
  
- **How to make international experience better visible to national employers?**
  - > What is done in this regard in different countries?
  - > What kind of tools/methods could an individual use for demonstrating his/her international career or learning experience?
  
- **How could national-level employers better utilize the international experience and interculturality capital of their current and future staff members?**
  - > Any good examples from across the participating countries?



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