



16 Global career perspectives and employability of internationally mobile employees and researchers in times of sanitary crises (Post-Covid-19 reflections)

Cordula Barzantny

ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the unexpected and paradoxical impact of Covid-19 in the middle of the GLOMO research and doctoral training project since February 2020. The GLOMO project was initially scheduled from 09/2018 to 12/2021; 15 Early Stage Researchers (ESRs), coming from 12 different countries around the world, were welcomed in seven universities in six European countries working on a collaborative and interdependent research design. Covid-19 accounted for drastic changes in the field of global mobility and revised practices in organizations. The research conditions for the scholars, universities, the organisations and partners of these projects have been impacted heavily by this sanitary crisis, hence also completely annihilating global career perspectives and the employability of internationally mobile employees as core of the project. Nevertheless, the crisis is also leading to global mobility changes with focus on enhanced mindfulness and sustainability as well as gender issues. Thanks to high reactivity of all parties involved, the GLOMO research project shifted to new questions and research considerations with a strong emphasis on remote and digital work facing lockdowns, confinements, travel bans... As a creative consequence elaborated by the ESRs, we can observe transformative and resilient examples from young researchers and their research settings and observations as well as their personal experience on how to re-think their intercultural situations and to overcome the hurdles posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Such reflections have added extreme deconstruction but also creative and intercultural adaptation of the intended research project to address the paradox and still produce respectable outcomes.

INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEXT - PASSION AND VISION OF A GLOBAL MOBILITY EUROPEAN RESEARCH AND DOCTORAL TRAINING PROJECT

The story started on 2014 when several management scholars interested in international mobility and expatriation decided to call for a first academic conference on Self-Initiated Expatriation that then took place in spring 2015 at TBS¹⁶. The conference gathered an international audience of mobility and international HRM¹⁷ experts and academics, while the idea to inquire further about SIE, i.e., international mobility of individuals by way of their own initiative and motivation rather than being assigned by an organisation. SIE represents an increasingly

¹⁶ Toulouse Business School, France.

¹⁷ Human Resource Management

complex phenomenon resulting from globalized business, internationalizing supply chains,¹⁸ progress in international treaties which grant freedom of movement across borders, and the needs of MNC's¹⁹ for global talent, among other factors. Research focusing on self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) has been increasing during recent years and the impact and management of SIE on business are still to be clarified with needs to develop theory further (Andresen et al., 2020). With the exchange of viewpoints among scholars three core levels have been identified, the micro, individual level, the meso or organizational level as well as the macro, institutional, and societal level.

This is where the idea of a joint, transnational, and multi-level research and doctoral training network was born, helped by calls for proposals for European-wide research in the social sciences to create and stimulate knowledge about how to make labour mobility more efficient and beneficial for all parties involved. Following a meandering process of writing and coordinating an EU research and European, Innovative Training Network (ITN) grant proposal with a submission in 2017, a satisfactory achievement about 97.6% for all evaluation criteria was obtained. Considering that acceptance rates for all submitted ITN projects in 2017-2018 in the Social Sciences have been at 4.8% in 2017-2018, the consortium was extremely fortunate with the obtention of 3.95 mio € funds for 15 early-stage researchers (ESRs) across four academic years between 2018-2021.²⁰

GLOMO – GLOBAL MOBILITY OF (QUALIFIED) EMPLOYEES – A EU H2020 MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE PROJECT

Chapter 1 already outlines the idea, content and objectives of the GLOMO project (see also Figure 1 in chapter 1). At the individual level, international mobility affords many choices and opportunities, and these individuals subsequently go on to benefit from a hopefully always positive career experience. Management studies have described the career capital of SIEs in terms of education, professional experience, and networks of contacts, focusing on the more privileged SIEs. It is, therefore, necessary to also consider the lesser privileged individuals with respect to skills, physical (dis)ability, ethnicity, and gender, from among the population of internationally mobile individuals. (Examples of GLOMO contributions: Biswas, Mäkelä, & Andresen, 2021; Escobar-Borrueal, Suutari, & Mello, 2022; Oleškevičiūtė, Dickmann, Andresen, & Parry, 2022; Suarez-Bilbao, Andresen, Crowley-Henry, & Connor, 2022.)

¹⁸ Roy D. Voorhees, Emerson L. Seim & John I. Coppett (1993). 'Global Logistics and Stateless Corporations', *Transportation Practitioners Journal* 59(2): 144-51.

¹⁹ MNC- Multi-National Company – a company having activities in at least two countries, generally for corporations with a quite international, even global presence in many countries around the world.

²⁰ <https://www.horizon-europe.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2021-12/itn-statistiques-h2020-5191.pdf>

At the organisational level, SIEs are likely to possess a keen understanding of both local and global markets; have knowledge of foreign languages and cultures; and are likely to be more cost-effective than traditional expatriates, given the travel and living expenses, salaries, and taxation regarding financial issues incurred by corporate expatriates. Thus, it is of great importance that companies have a clear sense of the nature of SIEs and how best to manage them. (GLOMO publication examples: Abdul Hadi, 2022; Andresen, 2021; Nguyen & Andresen, 2019, 2021; Vulchanov, 2020.)

At the international and institutional level, SIE concerns the relationships between countries and the evolution of law, in particular employment legislations. Scholars aiming at understanding global careers must consider the contextual nature of talent management of the expatriate workforce within their respective historical, geographical, institutional, and organisational settings. (Examples of GLOMO output: Bassetto & Freitas Monteiro, 2022; Bozhnoska-Lazarova, 2020; Freitas Monteiro, 2021; Luong, 2022; Raupp et al., 2022.)

GLOBAL MOBILITY AND INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCES IN HARD TIMES: THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON AN INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY RESEARCH PROJECT

GLOMO strives for excellence by arranging research collaborations on different levels. First, several disciplines are cooperating with supervisors and ESR, not only from management expertise, but also other social sciences like psychology, economics, and political sciences. Furthermore, all ESR benefit from intersectoral and international secondments, one to an academic partner, a second one foreseen with an industry or institutional partner organization across Europe. Secondly, the ESR research projects are strongly inter-related, thematically as well as through shared data collection and usage. To foster further cooperation and mentoring various joint training programs, seasonal doctoral schools and discursive workshops are offered, where ESRs, supervisors and mentors come together to advance their knowledge on international careers. Thus, this research collaboration is aimed at producing high quality scientific output with publications but also impact for companies, institutions, and the wider society. Third, the interdisciplinary nature of the GLOMO ETN brings together an intensive exchange within and across the three levels (micro, meso and macro) and four pillars (careers before migration, career capital, outcomes of migration and sensemaking) of analyses (see Figure 1 in chapter 1) linked to the project's scientific conference participation (EURAM²¹ 2019, 2020, 2021 among others) as well as the virtual communication strategy (social networks and see also: www.glomo.eu).

²¹ EURAM - European Academy of Management annual conference

The interdisciplinary and synergetic approach of the GLOMO project should lead to critical perspectives and an enhancement of existing research in the field of global mobility, expatriation and migration of qualified employees while qualifying the young scholars to various international career roles at the same time (expert in international careers, self-manager, international professional, researcher, professional academic and boundary spanner). Moreover, confirmed scholars are involved as members of the project's Advisory Board and as visiting researchers for the various events, sharing their critical views, expanding perspectives, and challenging results.

Such an exciting, international project offered each ESR already very individual intercultural situations, since they were globally recruited from 12 different countries for this European venture, welcomed in seven universities in six European countries. They experience intercultural situations, privately as well as in their research, furthermore, accentuated by academic and corporate secondments planned in the overall research project for the intercultural and international experience.

With the impact of Covid-19 in the middle of the project since February 2020 across Europe and the world, the consortium accounts for drastic changes in the field of global mobility and revised practices in organizations. The research conditions for the scholars, universities, the organisations, and partners of these interrelated projects have been impacted heavily by the sanitary crisis, leading to global mobility changes with focus on enhanced mindfulness and sustainability but also gender (see i. e.: Søndergaard, 2001), work-life balance (see Cohen et al., 2009) and health issues (see also: Collings & Sheeran, 2020).

GLOBAL MOBILITY RESEARCH UNDER LOCKDOWNS AND PHYSICAL CONFINEMENTS

Global Mobility in pandemic times became physically impossible and entered a remote work and on-line paradox situation. The Covid-19 pandemic brought national to global lockdowns with large parts of the population around the world confined since early 2020. Under the pandemic threat organizations have reduced their global mobility flows and various business sectors shut down completely (tourism, aviation, hospitality, culture & entertainment events....). Most of the ESRs of the GLOMO project found themselves in another country in the middle of their first academic secondment. Following a disintegration of the formerly single European Schengen Area with national lockdowns and sanitary crisis policy not (yet) coordinated among the 27 EU Member States, travel became almost impossible and horridly expensive for the last days before complete lockdowns decreed in many countries. This affected internationally mobile workers

as well as students around the world and made large way for digital remote working solutions.

It also requested different and stronger support modes from senior academics and supervisors to care for their students and ESRs, often isolated in small student housing, in a different country, sometimes without linguistic knowledge of the local language adding more stress and anxiety to the understanding of the daily changing situation (on anxiety, uncertainty and affect see: Gonzalez, 2014; Griffin & Grote, 2020, Sadler & Miller, 2010; Watson, 1988; Wetherell, 2012), notably in the first days and weeks of the Covid-19 outbreak per country. Furthermore, it was nearly impossible to start any empirical fieldwork with companies to collect global mobility data as foreseen for the GLOMO project, therefore, the ESRs and supervisors had to go into a deep reflection how to work out strategies to save a global mobility project in times of lockdowns and travel bans.

Covid-19 accounted for extreme changes in the field of global mobility and revised practices in organizations. The conditions for scholars, universities, organisations, and partners have been impacted heavily by the pandemic, hence also completely annihilating global career perspectives and the employability of internationally mobile employees as core of the project.

Family situations became immediately stressful in remote work situations, since schools and childcare facilities also were closed during lockdowns and confinements, leaving the supervisors, mainly mothers, with the issue of home schooling and attending their small children plus cooking and other household chores that could no longer be outsourced. As one of the GLOMO ESR research projects studied: work-private life conflicts and expatriation-specific demands are reflected in reduced expatriate performance and willingness to stay (Biswas et al., 2021).

Fortunately, electricity and IT equipment were present in Europe, so that work activities could resume for large parts, even if remote working days seemed longer and endless with chains of Zoom meetings and phone conversations. Hence, the crisis is also leading to global mobility changes with focus on enhanced mindfulness and sustainability as well as gender issues, not only always negative (for the rather negative, *bordering* effects, see: Wemyss & Yuval-Davis, 2020). Thanks to high reactivity of all parties involved, the GLOMO research project shifted to new questions and research considerations with a strong emphasis on remote and digital work facing lockdowns, confinements, and travel bans... Furthermore, all meetings and doctoral training events since February 2020 needed to be reverted and re-organized to a full on-line mode until Spring 2022. Because of adaptation delays, the project outcomes have also to be shifted to August 2022 instead of December 2021 with full cooperation of the EU Research Project Officer, but without extended funding.

“In the European Economic Area, and particularly the Schengen Agreement Area, mobile employees have moved between countries, searched for work and settled in accordance with the existing framework guaranteeing free movement on the background of citizenship. The uncoordinated and seemingly arbitrary national level restrictions of movement following the COVID-19 pandemic have, during 2020, created shifting and at times paradoxical entry conditions for individuals who lead mobile lives. Mobility rules have been drastically reshuffled through closed borders, bilateral agreements and travel corridors, questioning the validity of the Schengen Agreement and setting the scene for “cross-border immobility”. (Martel et al., 2022c)

After the first shocks and frustrations because of the pandemic, the ESRs started to reflect on their personal experience and possible adaptations, reassessing their intercultural situations and how to overcome the hurdles posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the physical distance among ESRs, supervisors and all other parties involved, cooperative and collective coping appeared with positive influence on the research project under paradoxical scrutiny. For example, a group of eight ESRs studying global mobility and labor migration from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, all with prior international mobility experience, had left their previous countries of residence in 2018 to join the EU funded research project, located in different European cities. They could be classified as highly qualified, privileged migrants. But the Covid-19 pandemic suddenly forced everyone not to travel anymore. Hence a new collaborative, auto-ethnographic study was born (methodologically inspired by Denshire, 2014; Järventie-Thesleff, 2016; Karra & Phillips, 2008), conducted in 2020 with regular, weekly online meetings to exchange and *“refaire le monde”* and virtual, dialogue, self-interrogations, and group reflections (Ouattara, 2004; Pullen et al., 2020; Richard-Frève, 2017). Based on an emic approach, in line with Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2013), the ESRs applied an iterative process of data collection and analysis. The weekly conversations naturally emerged as a safe space for exchange and understanding, as we were facing similar situations, despite staying at different places (Martel et al., 2022b). *“Suddenly, as the privilege of “always being on the move”, “always socializing and networking” disappeared due to closed borders and pandemic threats, we experienced anxieties and isolation and had to re-evaluate our perceptions on life, work and international mobility.” (Martel et al., 2022a) “The very purpose and meaning of our broader research endeavors and employment perspectives suddenly faded away. Moreover, we realized more than ever before, what it means to us to be allowed to move and travel freely as opposed to being separated from significant others on other continents in the long run.” (Martel et al., 2022a). [inspired by Acker & Haque, 2015; Alvesson, 2003, 2009; Anteby 2013; Elliot et al., 2016; Gosovic, 2018]*

COVID-19 RELATED EVOLUTION OF RESEARCH ON GLOBAL MOBILITY, PHYSICALLY ON HALT BUT INTELLECTUALLY ACTIVE AMONG THE GLOMO PROJECT – POSITIVE ADAPTATION

Several pieces of work by the ESRs during the sanitary crisis might be described by others as a “sidestep”, a “hobby project”, a “shadow activity” (Martel et al., 2022a), but for them it represents “*a recollection of shocks and wonders, a sentence of precious, ephemeral instances, that they have shared and hidden for over 9 months.*” (aka resilience: Chen & Bonanno, 2020; Nuget, 2014; insiders and outsiders: Merton, 1972).

Many firms have begun to use the increased freedom that international remote work can give to allow their employees to work, often for a short period, at a location of their choice. This means that some forms of global work, for instance, lengthening a foreign holiday, have become more prominent. As countries and societies increasingly learn to live with the pandemic, global mobility streams are picking up again. This implies that the many exciting, practical insights from the GLOMO project continue to be relevant for policymakers, senior managers, global mobility professionals and individuals. Hence, there are theoretical and practical contributions of the GLOMO project also in times of pandemic crises, and this book title is a vivid testimonial of those.

As a creative consequence elaborated by the ESRs, we observe transformative and resilient examples from young researchers and their adapting research settings and attempted field studies show how to overcome, adapt and transform the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic. Such reflections have added extreme deconstruction but also creative and intercultural adaptations of the intended research project to address the paradox and still produce respectable outcomes. Most of the academic conferences reverted also to full on-line format, so that the research production and critical peer evaluations continued following a first adaptation period in 2020.

The whole importance and symbolic of free movement became salient since mobile individuals alike the GLOMO project researchers base their life choices on those established principles of physical and spatial freedom. Hence the individual case studies of each ESR became interesting, since they attempted to travel during the pandemic for professional and professional reasons linked to quite complex combinations of citizenships, residence, and affiliations with various institutions and locations across and beyond Europe (at least four continents!). This resulted in very different situations and singular cases where the

pre-crisis base for movement had been replaced by novel and continuously changing constraints²². Previously very active European movers like hyper-mobile PhD candidates, the ESRs became hyper-reflective pandemic intimates (Bourdieu, 1990; Cotterall, 2013, Horowitz, 2017; Mo, 2019; Nietzsche, 1908). Also, this situation was positively transformed and continue to give way to experiential research output inside the GLOMO framework.

SOME LESSONS FROM THE SANITARY CRISIS FOR GLOBAL CAREER PERSPECTIVES AND EMPLOYABILITY OF INTERNATIONALLY MOBILE EMPLOYEES AND RESEARCHERS

Beyond the great disruption of Covid-19 pandemic, the GLOMO project researchers continued to systematically generate knowledge about the mobility phenomenon and its implications like success factors, effects and added value, adding new perspectives with the Covid-19 restraints and possible adaptation.

The supervisors, peers and partner continued to provide (remote, on-line) training to develop the 15 ESRs within GLOMO, albeit on-line, helping them to explore the complex multidisciplinary phenomenon of mobility. Indeed, this adaptation permitted to continue exploring and suggesting relevant implications for individuals, organizations, European societies, and economies.

All people committed to the GLOMO project experienced intercultural situations for themselves, privately as well as in their research, furthermore, accentuated by academic and organizational secondments foreseen, but no longer possible in the overall research project and for the intercultural and international experience. In most cases, remote solutions were negotiated and experienced as resilient responses to the sanitary crisis. Beyond a certain delay, resilient examples from young researchers and their adapted research observations as well as their personal experience on how to re-think their intercultural situations and to overcome the hurdles posed by the Covid-19 pandemic have added extreme deconstruction but also creative and intercultural adaptation of the intended research project (for resilience see also: Bonanno, 2020). It goes without saying that also the digital skills got a boost during these pandemic times and make evolve the teaching and learning tools, important for higher education but also scientific endeavours through meetings, on-line workshops, and conferences. We will see future hybrid configurations to allow people to bridge distance and time, as the final GLOMO conference, held at Bamberg University 11-12 April 2022 testified.

²² One possible research outcome among others: 'By examining the travel restrictions implemented in EU states during the COVID-19 pandemic, we aim to build on theory of society membership criteria.' (Martel et al., 2022b,c).

Similar observations and adaptations are recorded for the corporate world of work and though the various empirical research that the GLOMO ESRs maintained and adapted through the Covid-19 crisis (Barzantny et al., 2022). Hence, all parties involved can be proud of the continuity approach in such times of crises and extreme paradox for global mobility.

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