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## IN-BETWEEN WORLDS –BECOMING AND BEING A COSMOPOLITAN

[Chapter Author 1: Johanna Raitis]

[Chapter Author 2 Riikka Harikkala-Laihininen]

[Chapter Author 3 Niina Nummela]

[Chapter Author 4 Eriikka Paavilainen-Mäntymäki]

### Author's Biographies:

*Johanna Raitis is a senior researcher in International Business at the Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, Finland. Her areas of expertise include identity, values, socio-cultural integration and global mobility. She has published an article on system-spanning values work in the Journal of Management Studies, edited a book on socio-cultural integration in mergers and acquisitions (Palgrave Macmillan) and contributed to several internationally published articles and book chapters. She has an extensive experience in conducting qualitative, cross-cultural research and her data collection has extended to 14 countries and over 20 nationalities. She enjoys collaborating with different kinds of case companies and is currently involved in projects with family firms and big multinational corporations.*

*Riikka Harikkala-Laihininen is a Lecturer in International Business at Turku School of Economics at the University of Turku. Her doctoral dissertation "The power of positivity: How employee emotions and interaction can benefit cross-border acquisitions" won the 2020 AIB-UKI Adam Smith Best Doctoral Dissertation award. She is a Fulbright Finland alumna and has held visiting positions at Florida Atlantic University, USA and Leeds University Business School, UK. Her areas of expertise include emotions in organizations, cross-border acquisitions, and cross-cultural communication. She has published in international journals as well as contributed to several internationally published books, also as an editor. She is an editorial board member of the Journal of Change Management. Her current research interests include life-course emotions, globally mobile individuals, and cross-cultural encounters. She is also a certified Positive Psychology Practitioner.*

*Niina Nummela is Professor of International Business at the Turku School of Economics at the University of Turku, Finland. She is an EIBA Fellow, and her areas of expertise include international entrepreneurship, global mobility, and research methods. She has published widely in academic journals and contributed to several internationally published books, also as an editor. She has also co-edited special issues for journals and has several years of editorial experience. In a bibliometric analysis, she was ranked among the 30 most impactful scholars in the field of International Entrepreneurship (Baier-Fuentes et al. 2019). Her current research interests include globally mobile individuals, the formation of trust in intercultural business relationships and mixed-methods research.*

*Eriikka Paavilainen-Mäntymäki is a Professor of International Business at Turku School Economics at the University of Turku. She holds an Adjunct Professor position at the University of Vaasa, Finland*

*and a Visiting Lecturer position at the Estonian Business School, Estonia. She received the Journal of International Business Studies Decade Award in 2021. She is a member of the Journal of International Business Studies Reviewer Board and she has operated as a special issue editor in the Journal of World Business and in the International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research. She is also a board member of the Research Methodology Shared Interest Group of the Academy of International Business. She has published in international journals and books and her research interests include global mobility, returnees, relocation and onboarding, and cosmoscapes.*

## **ABSTRACT:**

Despite changes in politics, policies and attitudinal climate, cosmopolitans, citizens of the world, form a growing group of individuals, who are voluntarily on the move from country to country, pursuing self-fulfilment in life and work. This chapter sheds light on the process of becoming and being a cosmopolitan by studying the cosmopolitan individuals and their lived experiences. In recent years, an increasing number of studies have investigated global migration and its links to international business, but most of the attention has been given to assigned expatriates or elite travellers. This study seeks to expand our knowledge by studying those who migrate – usually multiple times – for their own initiative and personal growth. The empirical data for our research originates from a qualitative study of Finnish-born cosmopolitans. The interviewees' life courses and identities were investigated retrospectively and analysed with the help of social identity maps. The findings of our study show that cosmopolitan orientation does not require international exposure or experiences, and it can emerge already prior migration and first move abroad. The chapter also elaborates on the cosmopolitan characteristics and illustrates the cosmopolitans' perspectives on work. In a broader sense, the findings are suggested to contribute to the on-going debate on cosmopolitan identity formation and the state of liminality. Based on the findings presented in this study, it is evident that these individuals possess attitudes and competences that are needed in the multicultural and constantly shape-shifting global environment.

## **KEYWORDS:**

1. Cosmopolitan
2. Identity
3. Global mobility
4. International career
5. Liminality

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## Introduction

Our lives, identities and work are increasingly shaped by globalization and societal changes (Castells, 2009; Vertovec, 2021). These changes, such as, increasing migration flows and intensified human interaction, create new opportunities but also necessitate enhanced mutual understanding across national, ethnic and cultural boundaries (Kennedy, 2008). Individuals' cross border mobility has also become an elementary part of international business and organisations are continuously searching for culturally competent, talented and flexible workforce. According to a Deloitte survey, 68 % of organisations considered mobile workforce as a major enabler of their competitive advantage and in the same survey, they estimated global mobility to continue and diversify (Moueddene et al., 2019). We too assume that global mobility remains an important element of cross-border business in the future, and that it will continue to diversify even further as new forms of work and business emerge.

In the field of International Business there has been a systematic rise of studies on cross-border mobility and migration of skilled workers. So far, however, these studies have not addressed the diversity of the phenomenon. The focus has been somewhat narrow, mainly concentrating on expatriate and elite business travellers relocating to another country assigned by an employer for a fixed period of time (Caliguiri & Bonache, 2016). Such a limited view has been criticized as it leads to partial or incomplete understanding of skilled individuals and mobility (Szkudlarek et al., 2019). Thus, we need to expand our point of view to different types of travellers in order to identify and understand the variety of mobile human resources in the global arena. A broader or alternatively a more focussed view would allow a more strategic approach to global mobility, something which has been called for particularly in the field of International Human Resource Management (Collings & Isichei, 2018).

As a response to this call, this study focuses on cosmopolitans, i.e. individuals, who *voluntarily and independently* move from country to country in pursuit of self-fulfilment in both life and work (Nummela et al., 2024). Features that differentiate cosmopolitans from other similar mobile groups of people, such as self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) and nomads, is their self-identification as global citizens implying distinctive cultural openness, as well as interest and engagement with global issues (see, e.g., Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; Skrbiš & Woodward, 2016; Watson, 2018). Cosmopolitans hold significant potential for the global workforce now and in the future, as according to the World Values Survey, more than third of its respondents in 57 countries identified themselves strongly as cosmopolitans (Haerpfer et al., 2020). Moreover, the significance of this group for multinational organizations or networks is starting to illuminate. Recent studies have suggested, for example, that cosmopolitans' multicultural experiences increase their leadership effectiveness (Lu et al., 2021), and contribute significantly to their role as providers of external knowledge in multicultural teams (Haas, 2006). Being profiled as world-wise travellers and connoisseurs of diversity (Hannerz, 2007), cosmopolitans' knowledge and experience is suggested to be particularly crucial for companies with geographically dispersed and culturally differentiated workforce and partners (Levy et al. 2018; Morris et al., 2016; Ybema et al., 2011).

Although cosmopolitanism as a phenomenon has been quite neglected in business studies, it has been studied across numerous other disciplines such as anthropology, citizenship studies, philosophy, political science and sociology. According to these fields of research, cosmopolitan disposition forms a set of attitudes, behaviours and practices (Bögenhold et al., 2017, Woodward et al., 2008) that reflect individuals' life patterns, identities and attitudes toward work. So far, however, we know little about cosmopolitans' transnational lives, i.e., how cosmopolitan identities emerge, are maintained and what a cosmopolitan life is like, as previous research has paid little attention to the individuals' own experiences and self-identifications (Nowicka & Kaweh, 2016). We aim to address this gap by studying cosmopolitan individuals and their lived experiences. We are particularly interested in cosmopolitan identity formation and the role of work in their lives. For this purpose, we conducted a qualitative study of Finnish-born cosmopolitans. We studied their life courses and experiences retrospectively and analysed the data with the help of social identity maps.

Our empirical data demonstrates that although the life courses of the interviewed cosmopolitans differ, they are also similar in many ways. We expect that the outcomes of this study will help us to understand how cosmopolitan identity is constructed and enabled irrespective of the geographical whereabouts. For academics and companies alike wishing to identify, attract and retain cosmopolitans possessing skills and cultural resources required in international business, the findings of this study could offer some interesting insights.

## **Being and becoming a Cosmopolitan**

### **Defining cosmopolitans**

The key characteristics that define a cosmopolitan individual are mobility, valuing of different cultures, and disengagement from national and local anchors (Skrbiš & Woodward, 2013). Cosmopolitans are geographically and culturally mobile individuals (Kendall et al., 2009), to whom places, countries and other traditional, location-based characteristics do not limit how they live, work, venture, experience and learn (Raitis et al., 2019). As follows, a cosmopolitan 'disposition' is understood as an attitude of 'openness' towards other cultures (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002) that also transforms into practice. Cosmopolitans tend to be attracted to cosmoscapes, i.e., spaces, practices, objects, and networks that downplay national affiliations and cultural differences (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt, 2018) facilitating a cosmopolitan life (Kendall et al., 2009). In other words, cosmopolitans are based somewhere yet mobile, with hybrid identities (Daskalaki et al., 2016; Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt, 2018). For cosmopolitans, mobility itself is empowering, and it provides them with the means to live a life they prefer (Nummela et al., 2021; Nummela et al., 2024). Despite being often considered a global elite (cf. Skrbis & Woodward, 2007), in common usage the term 'cosmopolitan' refers to curiosity about world cultures, ability to speak multiple languages, and experiences of living abroad (Tung, 1998). In other words, many ordinary migrant workers possess the elements often considered the criteria of cosmopolitanism (Friedman, 2018).

In the context of work, cosmopolitans share features with SIEs, who independently seek employment across national rather than organizational boundaries (Shaffer et al., 2012; Andresen et al., 2014). They too follow an individualized career path instead of one that is assigned or given to them (Carr et al., 2005), and their international career is usually not

predetermined in length (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Career-wise SIEs, however, follow more traditional career paths, whereas cosmopolitans may more often engage with non-linear, socially constructed career journeys (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014). Moreover, in contrast to SIEs, cosmopolitans' mobility is not initiated merely to maintain a profession or finances (cf. Loacker & Sliwa, 2016) — they pursue self-fulfilment in a much broader sense. Cosmopolitans are motivated and driven by possibilities of self-transformations or self-enhancement, construction of alternative selves and life paths (Bayram, 2015; Kennedy, 2008). When it comes to the relationships to work, SIEs may prefer more stable employment that prioritizes job security, steady salary and promotions (Loacker & Sliwa, 2016). Cosmopolitans, on the other hand, may prioritize meaningful project-based or freelance work with companies rather than for companies (Loacker & Sliwa, 2016).

### **Cosmopolitans' experiences of liminality**

Being attracted but not bound by cultural boundaries, cosmopolitans often find themselves in a liminal state of ambiguity and uncertainty, the position of 'betwixt and between' (e.g., Beech, 2011; Chreim, 2002; Garsten, 1999; see also Turner, 1967). This mode of belongingness—or rather, a conspicuous lack of belonging—distinguishes cosmopolitans from other migrating and mobile groups (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt, 2018; see also Brimm, 2010). Past research on identity (re)construction has highlighted the importance of social validation in assuring and fortifying emergent identities (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Such measures emphasizing locally-bounded oneness and interrelationships to immediate environments may not hold, or their meaning, dynamic and temporality may be different in the case of cosmopolitans, who are more likely to develop a non-location bound social identity (Skrbiš, 1999). It is suggested that they mobilize cosmopolitanism as a resource for cultural identity construction (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt, 2018). So far, however, the literature has lacked systematic empirical research on this matter and we do not know yet how belonging and otherness, the corner stones of identity, are embraced, enabled and enacted in cosmopolitanism (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt, 2018; see also Kaufmann, 2002; Skrbiš & Woodward, 2013).

Management scholars have been increasingly interested in the concept of liminality (Tagliaventi, 2020, Söderlund & Borg, 2018), which could help us understand how this happens. Liminality refers to the process of becoming, in which an individual is transitioned to an in-between space that corresponds with neither the home-country nor host-country identity (Daskalaki et al., 2016). Occurring generally during major changes in life at certain ages or life stages (Noble & Walker, 1997), liminality is suggested to imply alterations in one's sense of self. A cosmopolitan life is filled with liminal experiences. These critical events or transitions are not, however, imposed externally or triggered automatically, but sought for and guided by the cosmopolitans' own search for individual expression, self-fulfilment and meaning (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). The literature suggests that this may occur as a temporary transition towards a re-construction of personal identity or a more longitudinal experience of ambiguity and in-between-ness in a particular context (Beech, 2011). Arguably, the potential of liminality is to foster identity growth but only if sufficient amount of time is used for the exploration (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). Moreover, ongoing mobility seems to be critical in the process. In a study of foreign correspondents, Hannerz (2007) discovered that if the correspondents stayed too long time in one location, they lost

their “sense of wonder” and fresh eyes for the peculiarities, became world-weary and jaded in their views, losing a sense of openness to the world.

### **The emergence of cosmopolitanism**

An interesting and related, yet empirically unresolved question is: how can an individual become a cosmopolitan with no significant previous international experience or exposure? To what extent is cosmopolitanism an inherent orientation or something that develops under favourable conditions? Some studies suggest that young mobile professionals are often driven by spirit of adventure, change and discovery, when they move abroad for the first time (Kennedy, 2008; Nowicka & Kaweh, 2008). Thus, while geographical mobility might increase individuals’ propensity to develop a cosmopolitan outlook, this is not its necessary condition (Nowicka & Kaweh, 2008). Some individuals already possess a cosmopolitan outlook prior to moving abroad, although living abroad might intensify the cosmopolitanism through their lived experiences (Kennedy, 2008; see also Nava, 2007). Therefore, it is important to regard cosmopolitanism as a quality that is *evolving rather than fixed*. While cosmopolitan orientation motivates and drives the individuals to move abroad, the enactment of cosmopolitan life shapes their identities over time (Delanty, 2006; Kennedy, 2010).

Past studies suggest that cosmopolitan orientation as well as international tenure are affected by cosmopolitan capital (Hannerz, 2007; Kennedy, 2008). Kanter (1995) refers to the cosmopolitan resources as the ‘three C’s’ – concepts, competence, and connections – which refer to the individuals’ knowledge, social ability to operate abroad and forge global networks. Other scholars highlight technical and intellectual resources that help individuals to gain employment abroad and allow them to appreciate cultural symbols and practices of others (Kendall et al., 2009). While studies often connect these abilities or resources to business elites (Kanter, 1995; Nowicka & Kaweh, 2016), or people coming from middle social class or higher (Kennedy, 2008) certain resources and transportable skills such as education, occupational training and language skills (Kennedy, 2008; Nowicka & Kaweh, 2008) are attainable also by others. In addition, cosmopolitanism entails a personal ability facilitating one’s way into other cultures through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting (Hannerz, 1990). Majority of studies, however, focus on skills and competences acquired through transnational experiences that enable individuals to participate effectively in activities abroad (Koehn & Rosenau, 2002; Vertovec, 2021). Thus, cosmopolitanism comprises a combination of attitudes, practices and abilities gathered from experiences of travel or displacement, transnational contact and diasporic identification (Vertovec, 2021).

Certainly, there exists multiple kinds (Delanty 2006; Hannerz, 2007; Kendall et al., 2009) and ways of being a cosmopolitan (Kennedy, 2006), as well as paths of becoming one. In this study, we aim to enrich and elaborate on these pathways by focusing on the real-life experiences of individuals and their ways of becoming and being a cosmopolitan. Despite a growing body of work on cosmopolitanism, the literature lacks a clear explanation of what moves individuals to see themselves as world citizens and how their experiences shape their being. Based on extant literature, cosmopolitanism remains implicit as there has been too little attention paid to the individuals’ own experiences and self-identifications (Kendall et al., 2009; Nowicka & Kaweh, 2008). In general, there is a lack of empirical studies and analyses on cosmopolitanism at the individual level (Bayram, 2015).

## An interview study of life stories and social identity maps

Finland has a history of active migration and an international outlook. The relative smallness of the country has already for decades directed people to seek for opportunities abroad. For a long time, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century the emigration of Finnish citizens was motivated mainly by economic reasons and work-related opportunities. However, since the 1980s the motive to migrate for basic livelihood and necessity, has been surpassed by non-economic or "personal" reasons (Korkiasaari & Söderling, 2003; Koikkalainen, 2011). Nowadays, the emigration flow of Finns is fairly steady and on average, 14,000 people emigrate annually. Altogether, there are approximately 300,000 Finnish citizens and 1.5 million individuals with a Finnish descent living abroad. Geographically, Finns are scattered all around the world, but the most popular destination is Sweden, followed by the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States and Spain. ([Migration Institute of Finland, n.d.](#); OECD, 2024).

Initially, we focused on Finns living in the United Kingdom (UK) as the country holds one of the biggest diasporas of Finnish citizens in the world (Ministry of the Interior, n.d.). We searched for potential interviewees by posting a study invitation to a Facebook group named "Finnish People Living in London", containing altogether 9200 members. In the invitation, we relied on self-identification and called for Finnish citizens, who identified themselves as cosmopolitans. We also contacted people based on articles in newspapers or other media, where they had introduced their international lives style and referred to themselves as "cosmopolitans". For the purpose of our study, we were looking for information-rich cases for our in-depth study (Patton, 2014).

We looked for variety in terms of age and gender, but also for the cosmopolitan disposition, which we typified as experience abroad (years and places) and the early age of initial and independent emigration. Using purposeful sampling, we included 15 interviewees (13 from the Facebook group, two from direct contacts) from the database in this study (see Table 1). We use pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. The variation of cases provided us with the possibility to demonstrate both diversity and common patterns among cosmopolitans (see Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2011). The interviews were conducted over Zoom and Teams in spring 2020. The interviews were held in Finnish as it is the native language of the participants and the interviewers. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and from the transcriptions only the cited quotes were translated into English. In order to protect the personal information of the interviewees, we use pseudonyms to present the data.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

The data analysis started with drafting the life course and particularly noting down the international moves of each participant on a timeline. Based on this preliminary analysis we were able to identify the major changes and critical junctures in the cosmopolitans' lives. This was followed by a systematic coding of the data (Gioia et al., 2013), which meant digging deeper into the identified junctures and looking for evidence related to motivations, perceptions of oneself, but also challenges and triggers driving the emigration. This phase of the analysis allowed us to gain a preliminary understanding of the on-going processes of identity construction (i.e., becoming and being a cosmopolitan), which we then further visualized and concretized with the help of the social identity maps (see e.g., Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019 on the method) (see Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Although the social identity maps have been originally developed for researchers to reflect on their positionality in terms of research objects and subjects, we found the method useful in analysing the positionality of the cosmopolitans in their transnational lives. As suggested by Jacobson and Mustafa (2019), we drafted and filled in different categorical boxes of cosmopolitanism. The boxes included the interviewees' values, functions and relevance of career, role of home country (e.g., pushing, enabling cosmopolitanism), the emergence of the orientation and purpose in life. The identity maps allowed us to visualize the similarities between the interviewees but also illustrate the different ways of becoming and being a cosmopolitan.

## Findings

Our empirical data demonstrate that although the life courses of the interviewed cosmopolitans differ, they are also similar in many ways. In the following, we present the findings of the study in three distinct sections discussing the becoming and being a cosmopolitan in different phases or aspects of their lives. The sections are: 1) cosmopolitan orientation and the initial steps; 2) cosmopolitans' perspectives on work; and 3) perceptions on liminality.

***Cosmopolitan orientation: The desire to see the world and the initial steps.*** A key feature among the participants was a strong desire to 'see the world' and expose themselves to new environments and experiences. Many of our interviewees had identified the desire to live abroad already early on in their life. They wanted to 'see behind the facades' and understand life and learn about it. One of the interviewees, Veera, recalls how the impulse and desire manifested already before the age of ten:

*I come from a small rural village located close to the Russian border. Very early on, when I started to understand something about life, it was before the age of ten, I remember feeling anxious. Already at the age of seven I started to visit my relatives in Helsinki, it was like the first contact, first chance to get out from the small circles and see what else is out there. (Veera)*

Tuula remembers her early desire to travel and learn languages:

*When I was a kid I was always so angry when my parents travelled and us, the kids were never invited to go. I have always had a strong desire to travel and learn languages. I remember when I was three years old – and this is probably one of my earliest memories – we went to Åland Islands<sup>1</sup>. Before the trip I started learning Swedish because I wanted to speak with the locals. (Tuula)*

We found that the desire to experience and learn about new places and surroundings was connected to the individuals' curiosity and general interest in life. Going abroad was considered a means to gather information, increase understanding of the world and thus, satisfy cosmopolitans' curiosity. It was also a feature that distinguished them from others, as explained by Olli:

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<sup>1</sup> The Åland Islands are an autonomous, Swedish-speaking region of Finland.

*I have always been very curious and looked for information on various things. Going abroad was one way of gathering more information about this world. When I compare myself to my schoolfriends, who stayed and didn't go.... I think that is the biggest difference. I don't think everyone has the same kind of feeling or interest, craving for knowledge and understanding how of what happens behind the facades. (Olli).*

Typically, the interviewees' motivation to move abroad was personal and linked to self-development and self-exploration. Thus, it was not work-related goals that motivated them to go. They wanted to expand their perspectives, but they were also curious about themselves. In other words, they wanted to learn and discover something new about themselves and grow personally. As Anna explains:

*When I first went abroad I remember having a very strong feeling that an adventure is about to start. I didn't want to note down any date for returning. I didn't even expect my friends would visit me right away. It's was about me going away and developing myself into something new, brilliant, a better version of myself. It was really exciting! But it was my own thing, something very personal. (Anna)*

In addition, some interviewees referred to negative push factors and motivations to migrate. In these cases, the urge was built up due to feelings of not-belonging and otherness, feeling out of place in their home country, Finland. Herein, the decisive, negative factors were the smallness and homogeneity of the home country or home town, the experienced small-mindedness of the local people, and the general norms and expectations in the society, which they considered restrictive. Following the traditional, usual path in life was not desired, or they felt that the surroundings restricted them in being who they were or wanted to be creating feelings of anxiety and stress, as Erja explains:

*The agony of staying was bigger than the fear of leaving. I just had to leave, I simply did not fit to Finland. It is pretty hard to live if you do not fit in to your country, it has been difficult to accept. In Finland there exists very strict norms and expectations that you get an education, then you work, establish a family etc. My life hadn't followed that kind of path even before. In London I don't experience that kind of friction, I can be who I want. (Erja).*

In order to re-construct oneself, the interviewees emphasized the necessity of being exposed to differences and diversity, as well as the importance of do-it-yourself mentality, and their own agency in the process. This meant that they did not want to depend on anything or anyone and the urge to move abroad or the way they lived abroad was often connected to their desire to be independent. Generally, they felt bothered if they had to depend on someone or something in their lives. While their moves and decisions felt stimulating, self-evident and even necessary for the cosmopolitans, they were often perceived as risky, swift, unusual and courageous by others. The following quotations by Maria and Olli emphasize the boldness and lack of clear plans upon the first move abroad:

*Maybe it was a bold decision to move to Sweden to study at the University right after school with very basic Swedish skills at the age of 19. My back-up plan was that if things don't work out in Sweden then I will go to Germany. (Maria)*

*When I moved here (London) at the age of 26 my thinking was that I will just throw myself into the unknown and see where this life takes me to and I'm still on the same path. (Olli)*

In addition, another distinguishing feature is the idea of the permanence of the emigration. Erja had also observed that some prefer temporary moves, while others do not set endpoints for their time abroad:

*I observed my friends when I was in my twenties and some went for an exchange. There were two types of people – the ones, who were thinking about the day of return, and knowing all the time that they will go back. These people were even counting days to get back. The other type are the ones, who have another foot outside the door all the time. They don't think about returning, they enjoy their time abroad and don't miss home that much. They are like me. (Erja)*

**Cosmopolitans' perspectives on work: the role of work in their lives and the type of work desired.** Work is very important to the cosmopolitans. However, the role of work is more inclined to supporting the cosmopolitan lifestyle and values rather than advancing their career and climbing the corporate ladder. This was evident, for example, when they moved abroad for the first time in their early adulthood. They did not move for work and they did not even usually have a job waiting for them. Driven by cosmopolitan orientation, their primary motivation was that they wanted to live abroad. Their plan was to find a job and sort everything out once they get there. As the main thing was to live abroad, they did not even care too much what kind of work they would get in the first place, as Paula explains:

*I moved to London when I had just turned 19 and had completed the matriculation exams. My idea had always been that I would move abroad as soon as I can. [...] When I moved I had no job at sight at point so I just applied to all kinds of jobs, the ones for immigrants with no education requirements. I applied for all kinds of work, at restaurants, shops and similar. In the end I was working in a store for three years. (Paula).*

While some migrated as soon as possible and educated themselves abroad, others educated themselves before emigrating thinking that having a formal education would help them to live abroad. In the latter cases, the interviewees intentionally accumulated cosmopolitan capital prior their departure to be able to relocate independently. Again, educating oneself was not considered to be a rational pursuit of gaining economic advantage, but an enabler of international life. Language skills and formal education in the field of International Business were, for example, seen as valuable resources enabling emigration and autonomy abroad as Veera commented:

*I understood that I need to have an education in order to make it as an independent woman. This was the push factor to get out from the small circles, my ticket out (from Finland). I was pretty good at school and I realized that this is how I will survive out in the world... And this was the push factor, the energy that also affected my career choice. I wanted to have an international business career. (Veera)*

When pondering on the type and meaning of work, the interviewees often described their ideal work as meaningful, stimulating and enjoyable. We found that an ideal work allows to fulfill oneself, be stimulating and challenging intellectually, while producing something good

to the world. The work too was expected to align with the cosmopolitan outlook, desires as well as values as Roope mentioned:

*Ideally work brings meaning to life. I believe that work is an essential part of life. It would be wonderful to do something that you can enjoy doing. It is necessary to get some money, but you are not doing it only for money, it has other meaning as well. (...) There has to be another passion (than money) for working. (Roope)*

In the cosmopolitans' careers the type of work was found to vary. Thus, a meaningful work satisfying cosmopolitan needs can be found in various places, positions, fields and types of organizations. We found that the working career could include entrepreneurship, freelance work, research, working on a commission, being employed by a start-up, non-profit or a big corporation. A distinguishing feature was that a single work career could include many of the above. Many interviewees also had experienced complete career shifts meaning that they have had to study and familiarize themselves with totally new fields of business and practices over the course of their careers. Such major changes were described as "fun" as they opened whole new worlds to the individuals. By gaining diverse experiences allows them to go towards something "greater" or "bigger" as the following citation by Veera shows:

*I have this need to experience something bigger. And I just went on to carry it out without knowing what the end result would be. For me it was like, next country, next work and like that a bigger picture started to form. I started to realize that this is what I want. (Veera)*

Although the participants seemed to be flexible regarding the type of organization or field, they did have specific expectations of the work itself. When asked about the ideal type of work, it was described as something that is movable, transferable and flexible. Ideally, they would like to travel in their work, visit new places, work in multicultural teams and with different kinds of people. On the contrary, working (hypothetically) in a Finnish company with homogenous organization and staff structure, would be "strange". The participants also valued autonomy in their work, like being able to build their own roles and work days as they preferred and considered suitable. The contents of their work or the aims of the company ought to have positive impact to the world. Their expectations and outlooks on work were also reflected in their qualities as employees. For example, flexibility was a feature that they recognized in themselves, too. In addition, silos and "not my job" kind of attitude fit poorly with the participants, as do cultures and atmospheres where things are not done properly or done for wrong reasons as Olli confessed:

*I cannot allow myself to think that we'll just do things somehow. Everything that you do has to be done well... I don't like it how especially in the corporate world people sometimes do things just because they look good on paper. I couldn't do it. You have to do things properly. I don't know how to explain... I suppose it's a feature in me, I take my work personally. Even though it's not my firm, I take responsibility and work like it is (my firm). (Olli)*

Veera said that the readiness towards new and challenging kind of situations was also noted by their employers:

*It's (taking on new challenges) always been quite easy for me. My bosses have said to me that I'm like a chameleon that I can be thrown into a stony soil and something will always sprout. (Veera).*

### **Living a liminal cosmopolitan life: balancing the global and local**

Although, the interviewees generally agreed that moving to new countries on a regular basis and living in different cultures is not difficult or that it becomes easier over time, they had developed distinct tactics of settling in and rooting to the new locations. For some, connecting with the locals, their ways and customs was highlighted emphasizing curiosity but also alertness to immediate surroundings. They explained that being able to connect with new people in a new culture requires sensitivity towards the context and its people. According to Anna, such sensitivity requires ability to blend in and temporarily change oneself:

*Every move is like a critical turning point in a sense that every time you move, you need to re-invent yourself. Like, what kind of a person I am in this country, in this organization and of course the people around you impact that. For example, when I am in Finland in the cottage I am very Finnish. My husband is not Finnish and I find myself explaining things about Finnishness and Finnish traditions very vigorously to him.... When I am elsewhere I don't highlight the fact that I am Finnish. When I am in the USA, I am more American. (Anna)*

For Veera, the rooting to a new place occurred via transferable hobbies, which basically followed the person and allowed him/her to engage with similar and important activities irrespective of the place. The hobbies were the constant or permanent element in the otherwise mobile life:

*I have managed to keep myself in a balance through sports, exercise etc. Those things have kept me grounded, wherever in the world I am. I have this skill that I can make my home anywhere as long as I have my important things, the possibility to play golf or go to the gym or yoga. I feel good when I feel that I am in a good shape. (Veera)*

On the other hand, liminal experiences were also prevailing among some of the interviewed cosmopolitans. They felt being 'betwixt and between' or in a continuous cultural identity negotiation process (Li et al., 2019). And some of them even seemed to end up in a state of permanent liminality, i.e. the experience is no longer transitional or temporally limited but enduring (Bamber et al., 2017). Sometimes, this experience creates stress and anxiety and is typically described as a negative one as Ilona explains:

*It is a baffling experience... It is like a toy, a box which has holes in different shapes. There is this round-shaped hole and a triangular one and there are these bricks in different shapes and you try to put them into a hole in which they fit. Your home country is, for example, square-shaped and the new location is round-shaped and you have become a triangle which does not fit into either of them. With hindsight, you start to perceive the differences. You are kind of in-between, in a twilight zone. It does not show in your everyday life, and I did not experience it every day. But when you thought about it, you felt confused, it was something you had not experienced before. I have kind of used to that, all is not that clear always. (Ilona)*

On the other hand, a seemingly common feature was that the cosmopolitans have to keep on moving. They find it difficult to reconstruct a feeling of belongingness in a traditional sense. Over time, as Ella explains, uncertainty of the future seems to become easier to live with and experiences of liminality become a normal and, in some cases, even a desirable feature of their lives:

*I have this feature, perhaps even a gene, that living in one place does not keep me in peace. Finding peace is so different for people. Others search for quietness and a single place, others the opposite and both find peace. I find it incredible. (Ella)*

## **Discussion and conclusions**

International Business (IB) scholars have already for a long time emphasized the need and relevance of cross-cultural competencies in conducting international business. These calls are getting even more acute in the increasingly complex, volatile and uncertain global markets. In these discussions, individual 'skills' are often emphasized over 'interests', which is a clear shortage in the literature as interests are elementary for skill development. In the case of cosmopolitans, for example, their motivation and interest towards other cultures and differences push them to new situations and places, where they naturally and spontaneously develop these critical competences. Moving the focus from 'skills' to 'interests' requires, however, new kinds of research settings and analytical approaches in IB theorization. Above all, scholars need to get much closer to the person when trying to understand why and how interests emerge. In our study, we applied life-story interviewing and social identity mapping in an attempt to gain a more in-depth understanding of our selected interviewees. We argue that utilizing such approaches requires a true 'interest' also from the researchers' side as they entail taking another step towards a more humane approach in IB research.

Understanding the life course and authentic experiences of cosmopolitans is valuable from the perspective of learning more about this special group of people and also about our contemporary society and work life. Based on our findings, it is evident that these individuals possess attitudes and competences that are needed in the multicultural and constantly shape-shifting global playground. But this group also poses new challenges for business and management theories, which have been developed in and for the "old world". The manoeuvres and mobile lives of these individuals are driven and guided by their search of themselves, where work needs to be aligned with their lifelong development processes. These findings pose a challenge for future theorization in IB as they urge scholars to extend their viewpoints beyond business, dilute the organizational boundaries and more decisively introduce and incorporate relevant topics, e.g. meaning of work, from the outer edges to the core of IB.

By analysing the individuals' life stories, we found that cosmopolitanism is evident first in the individuals' orientation (or mindset), which then leads to a certain type of behaviour. In other words, the emergence of cosmopolitanism does not require international exposure or experiences. According to our findings, cosmopolitan orientation may emerge early on in individuals' lives, and at the time of adulthood it pushes them to migrate and fulfil their inherent desires. Moreover, we found evidence of intentionality and building of cosmopolitan capital prior the first move abroad. Thus, the possession of inherent cosmopolitan orientation urged some individuals to obtain cosmopolitan resources in order to fulfil their cosmopolitan goals in later phases of life. On the other hand, a 'laissez faire' attitude was also prevalent in how they, for example, approached major changes like first moves abroad and were willing to take steps without knowing exactly how

everything would turn out. These findings suggest that cosmopolitanism is intrinsically motivated, persisting over time and visible in different ways. However, without having applied the life story analysis, including childhood and youth, we might not have been able to identify the enduring, inherent motivation driving the individuals, sometimes to actions, which seemed sudden and unplanned. This suggests that analysing data from short snapshots of time may not comprehensively explain the present (or future) actions and decisions. As such, our findings contribute to the discussion on the relevance of time in understanding IB phenomena (e.g. Hoorani et al., 2023) by implying that learning from the past enables us to more comprehensively understand and theorize the present.

From extant research (e.g. Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; Kendall et al., 2009; Skrbiš & Woodward, 2013), we know that cosmopolitans are generally portrayed as open minded and appreciative of cultural variety and difference. The findings of this study allow us to elaborate on their specific characteristics such as independence, flexibility, diligence, and courageousness distinguishing them further from other mobile groups. We illustrated how cosmopolitans approach and handle changes in their lives, and what kind of attitudes and values guide them during those junctures. The findings support the cosmopolitans' aims of self-exploration and self-enhancement, but show more concretely how they may be achieved. Openness and eagerness to try and take on different kinds of work is supposedly one method to learn about the world but also about themselves. The individuals did not move abroad for work or to find a work, but through work they were able to live and fulfil their life as a cosmopolitan. This calls for more multidisciplinary research in IB, incorporating theories from fields such as anthropology, sociology and psychology to understand the human element in the accustomed work context.

In a broader sense, our findings contribute to the on-going debate on cosmopolitan identity formation and the state of liminality. We found that liminality may be an enduring and accepted state by cosmopolitans. Liminality seemingly drives mobility, and mobility seemingly drives liminality. Building one's home without the need to anchor it to a fixed location creates tolerance of liminality: cosmopolitans have developed endurance and solutions to cope with liminality, such as relying strongly on a feeling of home (rather than a place called home), and active networking and creating one's own community irrespective of country or nation. Liminality may also be mitigated by embracing various identities at the same time. This introduces a novel nuance to how IB understands spatiality. Cosmopolitans are distinctly not local, but their way of being global transcends also the common conception of transnational identity. Rather, cosmopolitanism presents a new style of multi-locality coupled with cross-cutting sense of universality. The cosmopolitan space is subjective and boundless, rather than objective and bound. This, along with the notion of 'cosmoscapes', highlights that future theorization in IB will need to consider spatiality as more nuanced than before.

In modern organizations (or business environments), characterized by multiculturalism, diversity, mobility and constant changes, being able to balance the tension of identity disparity and dynamism is critical. In other words, perpetually positioning and reconstructing one's identity in an ongoing, dynamic manner is needed to be able to manoeuvre in constantly changing environments. Already two decades ago, the need for flexible workforce in organizations was recognized (Garsten 1999). More recently, in their study of consultants and organizations, Sturdy et al. (2006) argued that liminality can in fact be a strategic or tactical space enhancing creativity. However, recent changes in the global climate may influence cosmopolitans' ability to fulfil their identity through the kind of mobility described here. It seems that a pendulum shift of globalization is emerging, and attitudes towards migration are hardening. Thus, in the future, liminality for cosmopolitans may include a

sphere of forced locational boundedness. This has implications for IB theorization not only in terms of migrant identities but also for global talent management and career mobility.

Finally, for companies being able to identify the cosmopolitans in organizations and harness their capabilities, can offer them completely new kinds of human resource assets. Our findings imply that cosmopolitans are not afraid of changes or challenges. Finding suitable projects, roles and tasks for cosmopolitans would allow companies to fully leverage their accumulated skills and/ or inherent attitudes. However, not being afraid of changes can also imply swift changes of jobs and employers. Thus, the question of how to motivate and keep the cosmopolitans, raises yet another relevant question for future research. Our study sheds some light on this matter by illuminating the features that cosmopolitans appreciate and value in their work such as autonomy and flexibility, ability to travel and work in multicultural teams, as well as good organizational intentions or higher purpose. Future research could elaborate and illustrate these features more concretely, such as what kind of flexibility or type of purpose would be appreciated and desired.

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Table 1. Overview of the interviewees

Pseud.	Age	Gender	Employment type	International experience	
				Years abroad	Countries of relocation
Veera	59	F	Employee, entrepreneur	30	UK, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Germany, USA, Canada
Anna	32	F	Employee, realtor, personal trainer	12	Sweden, Hong Kong, Russia, USA, UK, Jordan
Maria	36	F	Employee, entrepreneur	10	Sweden, UK, Canada
Olli	43	M	Employee, freelancer	17	France, UK
Erja	40	F	Entrepreneur, employee, freelancer	18	France, UK, Netherlands
Saija	47	F	Researcher, employee, professor	20	Kenya, France, UK, Netherlands
Paula	36	F	Employee, researcher	17	UK
Antti	26	M	Blogger, entrepreneur	8	Australia, Hong Kong, UK, Poland
Julia	41	F	Employee, official	20	UK
Roope	45	M	Employee	15	Eritrea, Ukraine, Philippines
Tuula	39	F	Employee, researcher	19	Namibia, India, Zambia, France, South Africa, UK
Kaisa	51	F	Entrepreneur	32	Belgium, Greece, Germany, Denmark
Ella	40	F	Employee	17	USA, UK
Ilona	31	F	Employee	4	South-Africa, UK
Leena	55	F	Employee, entrepreneur	35	UK, Sweden, France, China, Australia, South-Korea, India, USA, Italy

**Figure 1. An example of a social identity map**

