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The International Journal of Human Resource Management

ISSN: 0958-5192 (Print) 1466-4399 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rijh20

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To cite this article: David Clark & Yochanan Altman (2016) In the age of 'liquid modernity': self-initiated expatriates in Crete, their multi-generational families and the community, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 27:7, 729-743, DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2015.1079230

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1079230

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The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 2016
Vol. 27, No. 7, 729–743, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1079230

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In the age of 'liquid modernity': self-initiated expatriates in Crete, their multi-generational families and the community

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In this paper, we aim to broaden and deepen the current debate on expatriation in business and management discourse, and especially self-initiated expatriation. Following Bauman's [*Liquid Modernity* (2000), Cambridge: Polity; *Liquid Love, On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (2003), Cambridge: Polity] critique of postmodern society and, employing an anthropological lens, we examine work-related expatriation as set within a wider life context. Whereas conventional expatriation research focus is on the workplace, the focus of this study is the wider community. We take a longitudinal approach demonstrating the essential fluid nature of expatriation in general, self-initiated expatriation in particular. We show the importance of multi-generational links as overall critical considerations in effecting decisions to move or stay; we also show how over time, changes in circumstances, career plans and demands of significant others, drive the expatriate agenda. We pay particular attention to non-traditional expatriates and issues of health and disability in the extended family. Finally, we document the importance of the wider family and of the community in the process of adjustment and in engendering a sense of belonging.

Keywords: Crete; ethnography; longitudinal; multi-generational; self-initiated expatriation

Introduction

Set within a milieu of inherent, fundamental unpredictability as 'the new normal', requiring frequent adjustments and revisions to personal projects and career trajectories, expatriation can be placed within a wider context of global changes in society, whereby the more rigid boundaries of territory, class and community have become more permeable and less permanent. A globalizing community driven by perennial insecurity (Bauman, 2007, p. 104), configures a *fluid* society, where power has become exterritorial, with multinational corporations leading the way, and instability is heralded as a desired adjective of postmodern life (Bauman, 2000). *Individualization* is another key word of contemporaneity that goes in tandem with globalization (Beck, 2002): identity is no longer ascribed (as one's default option), but crafted and enacted by the individual, through the 'engine' of the labour market (Beck, 1992, p. 92). Consequently, bonds that are constantly made and unmade become the building blocks of a community's social fabric (Bauman, 2003) and the construction of one's self-identity a continuous 'work in progress', in an ever-changing environment.

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This paper seeks to contextualize expatriation in a framework which goes beyond the immediate confines of the workplace and examines the impact of changes within the wider environment. Taking a longitudinal approach, we examine the impact of changing circumstances on individuals and their extended families, highlighting the essential *fluid* nature of expatriation.

The expatriates that we studied in Crete seem to fit the mould of individuals and families struggling to create a new life in a world characterized as *fluid*. We posit that expatriation should be construed as a process of identity building, occupational and otherwise, which is both an expression of and a response to 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000).

The past three decades saw the progressive easing of economic borders and the broadening of labour mobility opportunities, notably in Europe. The dismantling of the 'iron curtain' in central/eastern Europe and free movement of people within the European Union (EU) greatly facilitates this trend. The economically proactive can cross borders more easily, whilst for others living abroad becomes a lifestyle choice (Benson, 2010).

Recent research records the emergence of a new breed of work seeking expatriates, labelled 'self-initiated expatriates' (Andresen, Al Ariss, & Walther, 2013; Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013; Vaiman & Halsberger, 2013). Altman and Baruch (2012, 2013) identify a subcategory of Corporate Self-Initiated Expatriates, highly proactive and personal development centred, who chase expatriate opportunities within their institutional environments. Richardson, McKenna, Dickie, and de Gama (2013) echo this sense of adventure that prevails amongst Organizational Self-Initiated Expatriates, seeking to combine career development with personal development. McNulty (2013) too notes that amongst the Corporately Assigned Expatriates she interviewed, 69% accepted their assignments for personal or family reasons, rather than solely to pursue career opportunities.

Other researchers address the nature of expatriates' social adjustment, whether in the form of encapsulation within expatriate enclaves or some degree of integration with the host community. Finch, Andrew, and Latorre (2010) comment on the ways in which a more adventurous outlook, ability to speak the language, family links or having children going to local schools facilitates the process of integration. Moreover, the decision to stay (and for how long) or to leave, is constantly revisited in line with new demands and changing circumstances (Rutter & Andrew, 2009).

In this paper, we address the call of this special issue editors, to further and deepen our understanding of nontraditional expatriates. In our approach, non-traditional expatriates are those who are living in non-traditional household arrangements or have relocated initially for life style rather than work and career reasons; most still maintaining strong multi-generational ties spread over wide geographies. Our approach also reflects a broader conceptualization of contemporary families as 'large, ego-centered, and relatively unbounded networks, spread throughout geographical and social space' (Kaufmann & Widmer, 2006, p. 125). As we demonstrate, such families typically face new challenges and constantly changing circumstances. For some, financial considerations necessitate alterations of plans; for others, the need to look after an elderly parent or care for special needs children requires considerable readjustment; and sometimes multi-generational ties may impinge on the decision whether to stay or to leave.

To date, few studies have examined the longer term implications of changing family dynamics and multi-generational needs. Schütter and Boerne (2013) raise this issue in relation to work–family interface on international assignments and suggest that while the initial period of assignment can be particularly stressful for families, most gradually adjust to their new cultural milieu.

In this study, we expose the fluid nature of expatriation, whether corporate assigned or self-initiated. *Fluid* in the sense that any decisions and consequent adjustments are being reassessed in the light of changing personal and situational circumstances. This often requires the necessity to seize opportunities as they present themselves, be proactive and establish new bonds without entirely forsaking the old, and continuously readjust to changing circumstances.

The research context

The study, undertaken between 2003 and 2013, purposely located in the community and outside the workplace, investigates the lives of members of an expatriate organization on the western coast of Crete – the Cretan International Community (CIC), established in Chania in the late 1980s, it was initially set up to provide support for expatriate wives who had married Cretan men.

Kousis (1989) commented on the ensuing patterns of adjustment amongst such wives, seeking to fit into the life of local communities but still wishing to maintain their own identities. As the nature of in-migration changed rapidly in the 1990s and subsequent years, the expatriate organization also began to change and evolve. An increasing number of second home owners and retirees came to Crete, attracted by cheaper property prices, moderate living costs and pleasant climate. Life style migrants and younger migrants also started coming. Hence, the composition of those belonging to the CIC has become now much more varied, boasting 300 members, mostly from Europe and North America, who live in and around Chania. The CIC organizes events such as outings to the countryside, boat trips, a Christmas bazaar, dance evenings and coffee mornings. Most of the events and activities are held in English rather than in Greek.

For many members, the CIC is the first port of call when seeking advice, especially on how to deal with the local bureaucracy. In Crete, most dealings with local government officials or statutory agencies would require the production of either proof of paying income tax or else an IKA (health and social insurance) number. Those expatriates obtaining work in bars, shops, restaurants and English language schools, often did so without the benefit of IKA social security payments (though regulations have been tightened recently as a result of financial reforms) and so find themselves at a disadvantage when dealing with the authorities. For those who do not speak adequate Greek, this is a further disadvantage, as they find themselves unable to explain their situation or negotiate their way round the problem. A dilemma these expatriates share with migrants from Central/Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

Andriotis (2003) provides census data for Crete, noting a Greek population of 554,000 inhabitants and about 27,000 others, the great majority of them are Central Europeans (c. 18,000) or else from the Middle East and North Africa. The largest group of Western nationals are Germans (1500), followed by British nationals (960). Those from Central/Eastern Europe, Asia and North Africa are mainly economic migrants in the construction and service industries with uncertain legal status, and even those with legal residency status are subject to changes in administrative regulations, harassment and generally poor treatment (Samatas, 2011). There are a number of US citizens in Crete, many residing in and around the military base, as well as civilians, mainly in teaching or academia. Whether from developed or less developed countries, all of them come under the category of migrants; some are economic migrants, others life style migrants. None of them are sure how long their stay on the island will last, due to constantly changing circumstances, as our case studies will reveal.

Methodology and an ethical note

Fieldwork was undertaken in Crete by the first author between 2003 and 2013. The project arose out of an EU project on Oral History in the Mediterranean, documenting the manner in which different cultural and ethnic groups had lived and worked side by side over a long period of time (Kousis, Selwyn, & Clark, 2011). The first author was approached by the CIC who were keen to find out to what extent members felt satisfied with the services and activities they run. This is in turn expanded into a fully fledged investigation into the lives of expatriates.

The focus of this study is the community rather than the workplace, as is common for much of the research on expatriation. This allowed us to place work alongside other key aspects of the expatriate experience and is one of the unique features of this study.

Initial research entailed meeting with members of the CIC and participant observation at events organized by the CIC. The approach from the start was ethnographic, aiming to portray a holistic understanding of expatriate experience, through the collection of life histories and observing people going through their everyday lives.

The study design entailed spending relatively short periods of time in the field, with frequent repeat visits; a total of 24 weeks spread over 18 visits. This design reflects changing approaches within the discipline of anthropology, with a considerable variation in the practice of fieldwork, involving a multiplicity of locations, varying lengths of stay and repeat visits (Clifford, 1997, p. 54).

In 2006, all CIC members living in Crete were mailed a questionnaire, numbering 298 at the time of the mailing, and 118 questionnaires were returned fully completed (a response rate of c. 40%, which is higher than the norm for postal survey research: Baruch & Holton, 2008). The questionnaire contained personal demographic questions as well as questions on motives for relocation, expectations and barriers to settling into Crete (Clark, 2005).

The survey was followed up with in-depth interviews of 20 respondents, who had completed the questionnaire and stated their willingness to participate in further interviews. Ten of these respondents were also interviewed on subsequent visits to the island, thereby building up a picture of their social adjustment over time. Four out of this group of ten were then chosen as case studies for this paper, with their full consent, though with names changed to protect their identity. These four have been chosen specifically to illustrate issues, exemplified in their life histories, encountered by non-traditional expatriates. These four expatriates have read and approved the text included in this paper, thereby confirming and validating the information provided and giving consent to its publication.

We make the claim here that this is a longitudinal study, in normative anthropological research, combining ongoing participant observation and repeated in-depth interviews with the same subjects over a 10-year period. Building up relationships and trust over time enabled us to gain access to and insight into personal affairs whilst also addressing the issue of triangulation in research methods raised by Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry (2013).

General demographic findings

Whilst not entirely representative of the expatriate population of Crete, with English native speakers being over-represented, our sample covers a wide range of nationalities: 61% are UK citizens, 9% from the USA, 6% from Germany, 5% Irish, 3% French, 2.5% Dutch, 2.5% Danish, 2% Belgian and 2% Austrian. The greater preponderance of

British members in the CIC is partly due to the use of English as the common language within the CIC and at most of its activities.

The higher number of retirees amongst the British residents in Crete adds a further twist to this demography. Thus, 36% are aged over 60, a further 40% aged 50–59 and only 17% are under 50. This contrasts with figures for British citizens residing in Greece as a whole, with nearly 66% under the age of 44 (Sriskandarajah & Drew, 2006).

Yet, despite this older age profile, as many as 50% of respondents are still working, split evenly between full-time and part-time work, with a further 10% being engaged in voluntary work. Amongst those engaged in work, the occupations represented included 19% teaching or lecturing, 9% in building trades, 8% clerical work and financial administration, 7% in the creative arts, 7% run shops, 7% in real estate, 5% tour guiding and 4% copy editing. The range of other occupations was wide: journalist, archaeologist, a medical doctor, nurse, psychotherapist/counsellor, manicurist/pedicurist, running a clay pigeon shooting range, working in a crèche, dance teacher, piano teacher, domestic, marketing, financial adviser, bar owner, organic olive farmer and an astrologist. Volunteering included work on the sea turtle project, as human rights advocates and archaeological support work.

Virtually all of the above would be considered Self-Initiated Expatriates, fitting into the rubric of lifestyle migration and finding themselves a suitable niche in which to operate on arrival to Crete. Indeed, many of them are either self-employed or freelancing, categories not often addressed by research on expatriates. Moreover, whilst Doherty, Dickmann, and Mills (2011) suggest that Self-Initiated Expatriates form a much larger group than previously thought, our study also indicates a much broader range of occupations and fields of activity than previously reported.

Many respondents were relative newcomers; 55% had been on the island for up to three years, 14% between four and five years and 31% for six years or more. This clearly reflects the fluid nature of expatriation; a population very much on the move, over half residing there between six months and three years, not too dissimilar from the normative length of stay of Corporate Assigned Expatriates. Yet, even those who had been in Crete for longer, faced pressures which might jeopardize their continued stay; this will be explored further in the case studies.

Two further features of our sample are worth noting, the gender composition and the extent of linguistic competence. Two-thirds are women and one-third men. This is in line with the survey undertaken by Sriskandarajah and Drew (2006), in which 64% of UK-born residents in Greece were female and 36% male. More significantly, in our sample, women are greatly over-represented in the age group 30–59, whilst for the over 60s there is a more equal gender representation. Indeed, men are less likely to join the CIC until their 50s or upon retirement, whilst women of all ages find an expatriate group such as the CIC a useful point of contact and support network. This is especially true for women in the 30–49 age group who are raising children in a new environment, particularly those married to local Cretans (47% of women in this age group); hence, one of our case studies focuses on an expatriate woman married to a local Cretan.

For many of the expatriates, learning a new language was a challenge. The proportion speaking Greek beyond simple conversational phrases is generally low. This is particularly marked amongst British respondents, most of whom are over 50, with only 7% speaking fluent Greek. Yet, the age group 30–49 is evenly divided between those who only speak a little Greek and those who speak it fluently. This reflects the greater preponderance of economically active respondents in this age group as well as the number of women with Greek husbands.

Most respondents mention either bureaucracy or language as the greatest difficulties they face in Crete. This is in line with findings from Italy, Spain and Portugal (King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000). In our sample, a third of those aged 50–69 mention bureaucracy as the main difficulty, many of them being home owners. In the age group 30–49, a quarter of them mention the issue of cultural difference, reflecting the high proportion of women married to Greek men in this age group.

Most had visited their home country in the year prior to the survey. There was an even split, with a third of respondents visiting their home country once, another third more than once and a third had not revisited their home country at all in the previous year. In addition, many receive visits from friends and family in the course of the year, especially at holiday times. Most are in constant contact with friends and relatives via email and Skype phone calls, as well as through the social media. For all of them, home ties are never completely severed and this will be explored further in the life histories presented.

To sum up the survey findings, only half the respondents in our sample are still economically active, and yet the range of occupations and activities undertaken is vast. Virtually, all of them can be categorized as Self-Initiated Expatriates. Women are over-represented in the under 50 age group, with a more equally balanced gender representation amongst the over 50s. They all face some problems in settling in Crete, whether linguistic challenges, difficulties in dealing with the bureaucracy or adjusting to cultural differences. Yet, as Doherty et al. (2011) note, Self-Initiated Expatriates display a considerable degree of agency and tend to be more proactive in integrating into the new environment than Corporately Assigned Expatriates. The following section will explore the ways in which expatriates use their agency in the process of adjustment.

Expatriate adjustment

Much of the literature on expatriation stresses the importance of adjustment to the local environment and local working demands as key factors in facilitating the success of a foreign assignment. Adjustment, however, is a complex process. Black and Gregersen (1991) suggest that there are three distinct aspects to expatriate adjustment, namely adjustment to the local culture, adjustment to interaction with host country nationals and adjustment to the work environment. Theirs has been the ‘gold standard’ of the expatriate adjustment literature. Lazarova, Westman, and Shaffer (2010) add family and couple adjustment to this equation, noting that the spouse or partner may face role readjustment within the family as well as acclimatizing to a new culture. Furthermore, they note that such adjustments may undergo change during the period of the foreign assignment, hence the need for longitudinal studies. They also suggest that if expatriates are culturally adjusted, their positive feelings will spill over to both family and work roles, thereby creating a positive spiral.

In our study, we were able to track some of these adjustments over a 10-year period. One of the most striking findings was the importance of the local expatriate community in mediating adjustments to the local culture (in part that reflects our research approach, with members of the CIC serving as our sample, rather than basing the research on the workplace). The following section outlines social adjustments within the context of the expatriate community itself, then interactions with host country nationals.

The significance of social networks

There is a general tendency amongst expatriates to form social enclaves in order to facilitate a sense of 'home' (O'Reilly, 2000). Social clubs are an important devise to that end. Crete does not have the same proliferation of expatriate clubs as Spain, for instance. In the absence of such an all-inclusive enclave, networking becomes an essential means of supplementing available social relations. Hey (2005) comments on the development of 'network sociality' amongst London's middle classes, complementing and supplanting long established 'friendship sociality'. In Crete, maintaining such networks is crucial and bears its own character.

Apart from the dedicated expatriate organizations, such as the CIC, there are faith-based institutions such as the Anglican and Catholic churches and the Ecumenical Centre which provide significant meeting spaces and reference points. Yet, for many, café life provides an important venue for establishing contact with others, both locals and foreigners. Café life is, of course, a feature of the Mediterranean; expatriates, just like the locals, often have their favourite café. By this device, both locals and expatriates are made to feel more 'at home'. There are a few cafés and restaurants run by expatriates, as well as souvenir shops and second-hand shops, and these too are important meeting and networking places. Nevertheless, expatriates do not rely on any single mode or venue for their networking; instead, they seem to weave in and out of these various networks, at different times or stages in their stay.

Another important venue for networking and seeking advice for newcomers in particular, is a local website which provides a chat forum, *interkriti* forum (*Interkriti Forum*, www.interkriti.org/board; last accessed June 13, 2014). Newcomers, and even those just contemplating visiting Crete, write in for advice. Old timers respond with advice but also regale each other with anecdotes and update each other on local news. This 'virtual home' is another means that helps to increase familiarity and a shared sense of space and belonging.

Establishing social ties with local Cretans

Social ties with local Cretans proved more difficult to establish and required to be more proactive, though the manner in which such ties were established varied a great deal.

One couple had worked for a number of years in a hotel/restaurant establishment in Rethymno and when they decided to get married chose one of their co-workers, a local Cretan, to be their best man. In local custom and tradition, the role of best man entails being the couple's right hand man, to be called upon when any assistance is required, in addition to being first in line to being a godparent. Hence, when they had saved enough money to set up a holiday-letting complex, they were able to ask their best man to help in dealing with the local bureaucracy. They were thus able to obtain a licence to sell alcohol in their bar, initially denied to them on account of being foreign residents.

Another couple, early retirees who had moved to Crete following redundancy, established social ties with their local Cretan neighbours thanks to their dog. They had moved to a village outside of town, along the hills overlooking the coast. The wife regularly walked the dog across the hillside, passing the houses of some of their neighbours. Gradually, the womenfolk started to greet her and invite her in for a cup of coffee. Soon they were invited round for family celebrations and got to know their neighbours as a result. One of the neighbours turned out to be fairly influential in the

locality, and that too helped with sorting out planning permission for various renovations and home improvements.

One German couple frequent the same café by the harbour, where they meet friends, get to know new people as well as the waiters and some of the local residents. One Easter, as they sat there, they were invited by local regulars to join them at their table, where they were enjoying Easter Sunday lunch with family and friends; they joined in the meal, as well as the singing and dancing that followed. Later in the year, they were asked to join in the grape harvest, back in the village of the family that had hosted them over Easter lunch.

Thus, while most expatriates in our sample took full advantage of the various activities of the CIC and seemed well integrated within the expatriate community, some of them were able to reach out beyond that, establishing significant ties with the local Cretan community. Tharenou (2013) attributes higher cross-cultural interaction skills to self-initiated expatriates more generally, though in our study this propensity seemed variable. For all the expatriates in our sample, social networks within Crete itself were crucial to their continued stay on the island, whether it be contacts and advice given within the expatriate community or ties established with local Cretans. For those still economically active, such social ties were an invaluable means of establishing a foothold in the local economy.

Non-traditional expatriates: responses to changing circumstances

Whilst most of those surveyed and interviewed in our sample fall squarely into the rubric of self-initiated expatriates, this section will focus on just four life histories which illustrate the manner in which being a non-traditional expatriate is as much a response to changing circumstances and living in a *fluid* global society as it is a role taken up by design.

Each case reflects the inner tension between seeking to meet one's own needs and aspirations and those of others, in an ever-changing set of circumstances; often this may bring to the surface, the crucial issue of whether to stay or leave. The fact this issue is at all considered, demonstrates the 'fluid modernity' at the core of the expatriate experience. Staying or leaving is an option always on one's mind. Of particular interest, in each case, is the role of multi-generational ties and the element of care that may or may not be involved. Whilst many communal and social ties were being loosened, family ties, and especially multi-generational ties, still had to be reckoned with and could not be entirely discarded.

Caring for an elderly disabled mother

> When, in his early 50s, Fred was made redundant from his publishing firm in England, he formulated the wish to set up a bookshop in Greece selling English language books. He and his wife had been to Greece on holidays many times; Clare spoke fluent Greek and could teach English as a foreign language. At first they settled in Evia, not far from Athens, where Clare soon found a job teaching English. But the proximity to Athens made an English language bookshop less viable. Meanwhile the couple found themselves with the added responsibility of making arrangements for the care of an elderly mother back in England, now in a wheelchair. The couple investigated other suitable sites, settled on Crete as a promising location and moved to Crete.

They soon managed to find someone from within the English expatriate community to help look after the mother, providing a chauffeur and escort service so that she could be out and about. But the bookshop failed to attract sufficient clientele, the mother wanted to return to England and Clare could only find intermittent work teaching English.

The mother returned to England, accompanied by her chauffeur/carer, who had given up trying to find suitable employment in Crete. Clare was offered a job in the school where she had previously taught in Evia and the couple moved back to Evia. Subsequently, the elderly mother died and Fred and Clare are now considering moving back to Crete. They are negotiating taking over a second-hand shop in Chania as the current owner, an expatriate herself, wishes to retire and sell the shop.

A number of issues are raised by this case. Whereas, Mäkelä and Suutari (2013) reported on Finnish expatriates, who could envisage having to repatriate to Finland should an elderly parent need further care, in this instance, the couple took the unusual step of relocating the needy mother to Crete, where they could help look after her more easily. This illustrates the manner in which changing family needs, taking a multi-generational perspective, can affect various aspects of 'adjustment' and changing family roles. It also entailed relocation from Evia to Crete and back to Evia once the mother had returned to England. Yet, there is a further twist to this story, with the couple contemplating a return to Crete. The couple's active involvement in the local expatriate community, in the CIC and its activities, proved crucial in the process of adjustment in Crete the first time round, enabling them to sort out care arrangements for the elderly mother, but is also a key factor in enabling them to contemplate a subsequent return to Crete.

Caring for autistic children

This story starts with a romance in Crete between two expatriates. A young English woman was in Crete helping out her parents to run a small holiday complex near Chania, comprising four chalets, all self-built by her father. On a night out in town Rosie meets and falls in love with a young American marine on shore leave. They get engaged, marry and decide to live in Crete; Lenny leaves the Marines, finds a job on the American base in Crete in a civilian capacity and they set up home in one of the chalets. They have children and, in due course, Lenny's mother, a widow, joins them to help look after the children.

The first two children are diagnosed as autistic; the older one, a daughter, does not speak a word and has tantrums, whilst the son also seems to be a slow learner. The daughter is found a place in the only special school in town. The school is Greek speaking, with caring teachers but poorly resourced; the couple find it difficult to communicate with the teachers, most of whom do not speak English. Meanwhile they have a third child, who seems to be developing normally, much to their relief.

However, the daughter does not benefit much from school attendance and the couple is faced with difficult choices. They feel the need to move elsewhere to seek more appropriate schooling and support for their children. Lenny rejects the idea of returning back to America, where he no longer feels at home and they decide to move to England, where Rosie feels she will get the support they need. Having investigated various locations they choose the seaside town where Rosie's sister lives, which has good special schools and affordable housing. Rosie moves there with the children over the summer and finds places for the children at excellent special schools. Her parents remain in Crete to look after the holiday business, whilst Lenny too is left behind for a while, as he needs to carry on working in Crete to support the family. However, he seeks a transfer from his employers to a location nearer to England and is lucky to be transferred to a new post on the American base in Naples, with a significant promotion as branch manager. Lenny's mother will join him in Naples, as she suffers from arthritis and finds the winters in England too cold.

Lenny's is the only genuine case in our sample of Corporate Self-Initiated Expatriation supported by employers, though in this case relocation involved moving away from Crete to a new location in Europe. His case also highlights an instance of relocation due to resourcing demand and supply options. Whereas, Viry, Kaufman, and Widmer (2008) note the importance of a relatively rigid educational structure in Switzerland which encourages families with school-age children to stay put, in this case the search for special schools entails relocating back to England. It also clearly illustrates the way in which the needs of three different generations are taken into account and impact in different ways over time. Indeed, it could be argued that ties within the wider extended family were crucial in determining the manner in which each generation was able to adjust to living in Crete; whether it be Rosie's parents needing Rosie's assistance to help with running the holiday complex in the first place, or, later on, asking Lenny's mother to come to Crete to help with the children. Yet, ultimately, the need for adequate special schools not available locally meant leaving Crete altogether.

Marrying locally yet maintaining home ties

> Katie came to Greece in 1983 as a freelance journalist working for an American wire service and met Alexis whilst on holiday in Crete. Alexis, a Cretan, was busy renovating his father's restaurant at the time. They got married and opened their restaurant, whilst Katie also taught English as a foreign language and upon the birth of her sons was instrumental in setting up the CIC to encourage bilingualism amongst the children of expatriate women. Katie was also keen to maintain her ties with her family back home and her six siblings. So whenever she could, she took her two sons on visits back to America, especially over the Christmas holidays, when business was slack. So her children grew up knowing her side of the family as well, meeting their American cousins and learning English.
>
> After 11 years running a restaurant they switched to running a shop instead. As a result of a chance encounter and a request for Native American artefacts, Katie soon found herself importing Native American items as well as 'ethnic clothing'. This meant more frequent trips to the United States, especially when her mother was still alive. Her mother died some four years ago; her father is in a nursing home and now she only goes over to the United States every other year. The shop has been passed down to her eldest son. It is the younger son, however, who has been active in maintaining closer links with his American relatives; he was lucky enough to win an athletics scholarship to study in his mother's hometown, having done well at school in track and field sports. On graduation he came back to Greece and completed his military service, but found few opportunities for him in Greece, either in the sporting field or in the labour market. He did manage to get a job working for an insurance company in Crete, but on a commission basis only, and became disillusioned with his prospects in Greece. He has now decided to move to Aberdeen in Scotland, where he has a friend who is a mechanical engineer in the oil industry. Aberdeen has a substantial Greek community and low unemployment.

This case illustrates the advantages of balancing active involvement and immersion in the local Cretan community with maintaining family ties back in the home country, as well as bringing up one's children bilingually. It also speaks of a willingness to seize opportunities as they arise; Katie was able to use frequent trips back to America not only to acquaint her children with the wider extended family in the USA, but also to further her trading connections and import Native American crafts for her shop. One of her sons was able to use his contacts and experience in America to obtain a scholarship, but when, on return to Crete he found limited opportunities, he was prepared to seek further opportunities in a different country altogether. Again, the needs and interests of three different generations interact in various ways, whilst changing

circumstances require one to be both proactive and alert to new opportunities, all awhile making good use of one's assets, including cross-cultural skills.

Seemingly letting go: empty nester and single

> Growing up in America, Doris had a dream to see Europe before she reached 30 and in 1982 made her dream come true. She was keen to include Greece in her travels and in the course of her trip came to Crete and fell in love with Chania. She came back for two months the following year, together with her daughter, then aged 12 and still at school, so for a while they kept visiting Chania on holidays. By 1992 her daughter had finished high school and got a job in America. Doris felt she could now pursue her dream further, leave the United States and settle in Chania, hoping to open up a bookshop. She teamed up with two other expatriate women and set up a second-hand shop. The second-hand shop soon gained popularity amongst the expatriate community and Doris became actively involved in the CIC, at various points taking on the role of chair and membership secretary. Together with another two expatriates she took over the running of a café in town, which became a popular venue for some of the CIC coffee mornings. After seven years of running the café, it was sold on to a Polish couple, then a New Zealand couple.
>
> Doris has a number of acquaintances amongst local Cretan residents, making friends mainly through the Chania Bridge Club. She has been living in Chania for 21 years, but Doris does not know how much longer she will stay. Her fall-back position is to go back to the United States. Her daughter, now married with three children, bought a large house with a separate ground floor flat, where Doris' mother now currently lives since becoming a widow. Doris is thinking of ways and means of extending her stays in the USA; as she grows older she feels she misses her family more, contemplating a move back at some stage.

In this case, we evidence the evolvement of an 'empty nester' – a trajectory not found in the extant literature, perhaps because the vast majority of women expatriates are single (Altman & Shortland, 2008). As time unfolds, her dream to live in Europe fulfilled, other wishes and concerns come to the fore for Doris, dictating new and different patterns of engagement. Throughout her stay in Crete, Doris has been mainly immersed in the expatriate community, helping at various stages to run the CIC, to run a café and a second-hand shop. Yet, a widowed mother and her own grandchildren pull her back towards the USA. Doris' case demonstrates a course of mobility that started as self-initiated expatriation, proceeds into migration and culminates with repatriation as a possible endpoint, reflecting the evolving nature of one's life focus and self-identity.

Discussion

Unlike the vast majority of expatriate research which focus is on the workplace, ours is set in the community. Most of the expatriates in our sample do not have the cushioning of an organizational sponsor and associated support. Virtually, all of our informants came to Crete under their own steam, as it were, for a variety of reasons. As self-initiated expatriates, they face the need to adjust to a new social, cultural and political environment, an aspect which they share with corporate expatriates.

By focusing our sample on the members of an expatriate organization, our study has uncovered a much broader pool of talent out there than the management literature seems to suggest. Doherty et al. (2011) do indicate that the pool of Self-Initiated Expatriates is probably much larger than hitherto thought, but our study also reveals a much wider range of skills and talents available amongst such expatriates than previously documented.

We also were able to document the importance of mutual support and networking within the expatriate community as a positive influence on the ability to adjust to local circumstances and a new cultural environment. This has already been well documented in the anthropological literature (Benson, 2011; O'Reilly, 2007) but less widely discussed in the management literature.

Moreover, we were able to uncover some of the processes whereby those expatriates who were more proactive and skilled in intercultural relations succeeded in establishing good rapport and networks with host country nationals. Kaufmann and Widmer (2006) provide tantalizing avenues for further research into the impact of socialization and family dynamics in the families of origin on the ability to adjust later on to changing environments. Our own study could only investigate family dynamics prior to relocation in retrospect and the small sample does not warrant any conclusions, yet clearly some of the expatriates we encountered were more adept at establishing ties with local Cretans from the start, whilst others preferred to remain bounded within expatriate social enclaves.

Crucially, due to the longitudinal nature of our study, we were able to explore the impact of changing economic and familial circumstances over time. One of the key findings of our research is the continued importance of multi-generational ties; changing demands and needs within the extended family have a significant impact on expatriate decisions. Bauman (2003) points to the loosening of bonds, even familial ties, and the need to constantly create new bonds; yet multi-generational ties, whilst weakened, never completely disappear. Time and again, changing needs within the wider extended family bring up the issue as to whether to stay put or move on, demonstrating indeed 'the strength of weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973). As a result of such pressures, there is always an inbuilt element of uncertainty in the expatriation process. The 'non-traditional' expatriates of our study did not necessarily arrive with the intention of staying put; neither though have they come for a fixed term, as would generally be the case for Corporately Assigned Expatriates. Instead, they fall somewhere in between these two modes, adjusting to constantly changing needs and demands, with a great deal of flexibility. Part of such flexibility revolves round changing life cycle stages and constantly evolving life focus and self-identity (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, & Levinson, 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1997) as well as reflecting economic, social and political changes in the wider environment.

In the process of adjustment to a new environment, expatriates develop the ability to juggle various needs and seek support from various quarters. All of them face a great deal of unpredictability and uncertainty, all of them are required to be 'agents' and 'actors' in their own transformation and to be proactive in the host environment. We thus view the process of expatriation both as an expression of and a reaction to 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000). Some let themselves 'flow' with life events that may involve a series of expatriations; others wish to slow down and anchor themselves in an environment of their own choosing but not necessarily for ever.

This study suggests that framing the extant discourse on expatriation within organizational walls may not be the best way to fully appreciate the complexity of the phenomenon. Self-expatriation, crafting one's own 'story' may be qualitatively different from corporate expatriation, yet essentially it is the same experience, donning similar issues. The importance of widening the research focus as a means to unearthing the complexity of expatriation has been demonstrated here.

Implications for practice

The current concern with international mobility sits well with developments in organizational structures and processes. Strategic flexibility (Evans, 1991), an organization's capability to adapt to volatile environments, may be well served by deploying flexibility-orientated talent whilst becoming attuned to the wider contextual demands of such workforce (Lee, Lovelace, & Manz, 2014). We therefore expect that companies will be favourable to deploying self-initiated expatriates with a *fluid* approach to life circumstances; while self-initiated expatriates may educate companies to respond favourably to their changing personal and family needs.

This study has uncovered a vast pool of talent in destination areas, not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of the wide range of skills that are available amongst expatriates already residing there. Moreover, we have noted the importance of local expatriate associations as support mechanism for Self-Initiated Expatriates in those areas. Hence, corporate recruiters may well access channels already available locally within the expatriate community, such as the expatriate organizations themselves, and their dedicated media outlets: newsletters, radio stations and websites.

Another important source of recruitment that is often neglected by corporate recruiters is expatriate women married to host nationals. Some of them we found to be highly skilled in the professions: journalism, medical fields, teaching, social services, accountancy, catering; as well as running their own businesses. They often have excellent local contacts and speak the local language fluently.

Our study has revealed the continued importance of multi-generational ties and the changing and evolving nature of the demands visited upon the expatriates by their extended families.

Whilst corporate Human Resources departments are generally well aware of the implications of relocation on the needs of the nuclear family, there seems to be less awareness as yet of the implications on the wider extended family, often spread over several countries and even continents.

Finally, we urge scholars of expatriation to take a broad view of their subject matter; see expatriation as a life journey rather than a one-off episode in time and space, a journey that is constantly changing and evolving, requiring a wide canvas to portray accurately and fully comprehend.

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