

Integration, Mobility and Connection:  
An Anthropological study of Expat Communities in the Netherlands



Photo by Martha V. Costa

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## **Abstract**

Expats represent a privileged class within society. By virtue of the economic capital that they possess, they are afforded specialized programs, infrastructure and mobility rights without the requirements of citizenship necessary for other immigrant groups to access these rights. This thesis argues that expats exist both within Dutch society and outside of it due to their global connections, leading to unique integration, mobility and connection experiences. Data for this research was gathered over three and a half months of fieldwork in Utrecht, the Netherlands using ethnographic techniques. This thesis will showcase the tension for expats between Dutch society and global culture by focusing first on how integration issues are experienced and coping strategies are developed. The development of global cities encourages expats to integrate into global culture instead of the broader local community that surrounds them. The thesis then focuses on how the highly mobile nature of expat life separates expats from other immigrant groups. This can lead expats to focus on integration to the global community in the short term. The limiting of mobility for long term expats is then shown to slowly encourage integration into local culture. Finally, the impact of online spaces is explored to show how they allow people to connect to others to understand local community and culture while also giving them the opportunity to connect globally back home and to many other people abroad. By focusing on how expats deal with issues of integration, mobility and connection this thesis highlights how expats live with the tension of local verses global culture.

**Keywords: Integration, Mobility, Connection, Expats, Migration, Community**



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## Prologue

Louise walks into the office using the key that she got from the security guard at the front desk. She takes the elevator up to the first floor and then after punching in the code uses the key to open up the various rooms that make up ACCESS, an expat organization designed to help people transition both to and from the Netherlands. She turns on the lights, makes coffee and tea, and checks if there are any biscuits in the biscuit tin. After the coffee is made, she turns on the computers, logs in and then pushes a button to open up the call help line. The walls are decorated with helpful information, phone numbers and email addresses that answer common questions of both volunteers and clients of the organization. A3 papers printed and then taped to the wall. The on-call counselors that month, important email and web links, the free advice lawyers. Covering the walls on the other side are pictures of volunteers with their names pinned underneath them and pinned pictures of people standing by cakes, on walks or at events celebrating various occasions. After a few years at ACCESS she has the route down pat, and she opens the email to see who has contacted the organization during non-working hours. When she first came to the Netherlands, Louise was busy unpacking, getting settled into a house and then having her children while her husband worked for an international company. It was only after her first child started going to school 4 years after her initial journey to the Netherlands that she felt the urge to be back in a professional environment and volunteer.

Louise starts by scanning the emails, seeing one asking for real estate agent options, another asking about creating a will when you live in the Netherlands but your children live in another country and yet another about specific tax benefits open to expat workers. As she starts on the oldest email in the inbox, other volunteers slowly come in, saying hi and asking about how her children are doing and if she is looking forward to her upcoming vacation back to her home country of Britain in two weeks. The other volunteers come in to work on the volunteer newsletter, research, data collection on new government regulations and perform financial, written, and human resources tasks in many other areas. Although she didn't know any of them when she first came to ACCESS, she now sees many of them weekly and knows who runs a cooking blog, who has kids at the international school and who is thinking of moving. They all live in the

city or in small villages surrounding Utrecht and at times see each other both at specially organized ACCESS events but also socially for drinks or when she drops her kids off at school. The phone rings and she answers a person's question about signing up for utilities in the Netherlands and if one can get out of a contract after they have signed it. Many of the emails are not things that she initially knew about when she started volunteering one day a week, but slowly over time as she built up a base of knowledge. She also learned if she did not know the direct answer to a question someone asked in person or on the phone then how to find the answer in a timely manner. Volunteering hasn't led her directly into more contact with Dutch people, but it has given her the confidence to try different things, for example taking a course in Dutch or trying food from many other countries. It has also enabled her to meet other expat mothers in the area and reminds of her career days working in office management before she had children. As her four hour shift of answering phones and writing emails to people seeking help draws to a close she takes off her nametag, puts her coffee cup in the office kitchen and says goodbye to people in the office until her next shift.

## **Introduction**

Louise's immigration experience is not the same as a vast majority of immigration stories. In many ways she operates within a very privileged position within society. Factors such as her age, class, gender, race and the visa status that she has create a different set of circumstances that affect how she feels within the Netherlands. This is true even within a small country like the Netherlands and within specific immigrant classes such as high skilled professionals. The discourse surrounding different classes of immigrants varies widely. Anti-immigration sentiments can be seen in many countries, with steps being taken to limit so called illegal immigration and asylum claims. In the Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte stated in a public letter during the recent 2017 election, "People who refuse to adapt, and criticize our values should behave normally or go away (Henley 2017)." This was widely seen as an attempt to lure populist anti-immigrant voters from the even more right leaning and anti-immigration Freedom (PVV) party (Ibid). In contrast to this, high skilled professionals or expats often encounter the opposite reactions from countries, with specific programs designed to lure and attract expats to move to the nation. The Netherlands is one such country, offering high skilled professionals tax incentives, fast track family reunification and specialized services such as expat specific government offices to encourage expats to come and settle.

### Theoretical Outlining

But what creates this disconnection between how expats and other immigrants are treated? Expats often operate in a supranational environment, in contrast to most other forms of immigrants that exist and live within the boundaries of a nation state (Jaffe and De Koning 2015). By virtue of their possession of large amounts of capital, combined with the backing of multinational corporations advocating for their ability to be mobile, expats have the ability to not just travel but move throughout the globe in ways that low skilled, poorer, or refugee immigrants do not. They are a part of what Leslie Sklair calls globalizing professionals and form a key component of his attempts to explain capitalistic globalization through what is know as the global systems theory (2000, 69). This theory showcases how transnational corporations, the transnational capitalist class and our

current western culture of consumerism have created globalization as we see today (Ibid, 67). A 1999 United Nations Human Development Report wrote, "the global labour market is increasingly integrated for the highly skilled - corporate executives, scientists, entertainers, and the many others who form the global professional elite - with high mobility and wages. But the market for unskilled labour is highly restricted by national barriers (UN Development Programme 1999)." In this way, countries often compete to make a larger mark on the global economy by implementing policies (de-regulation, privatization, liberalization of trade and the movement of specific people) that will attract wealth and investment into their country (Castells 2011, 23). Therefore people who can generate value in global markets such as computing, science and technology, international trade and financial markets are then granted permission not to follow the usual rules of immigration, salary and working conditions (Ibid, 27). Different classes of people are then created and tensions exist between the rhetoric of the government regarding how they want people to integrate and the integration expected of high skilled professionals. High skilled professionals and immobile workers are segmented hierarchically not within countries but across borders (Ibid, 34). For scholars such as Castells and Sassen this means that new segments of immigrant population are no longer constrained by state factors and instructions in ways that they once were; the balance of power has shifted from countries to a segment of high skilled professionals. This exists in contrast to past theories on immigration that focused on immigration as a move from one country to another ending in immobility such as the Push/Pull Model, or theories in which highly skilled professional immigrants are lumped with other temporary labour migrants in the study of migration such as the Historical Structural Model of M. J. Piore (1986, 26). The Historical Structural Model is a marxist approach which views migration as occurring due to historically formed macrostructural forces, but has a hard time accounting for individual immigrant decisions outside of state dictated regimes (Russell 2012, 16). Both these theories fail to account for the unique mobility and position of high skilled migrants. The steps that countries take to attract high skilled immigrants seem to suggest that they do not exist within the same category as either temporary labour migrants or immigrants in general. Instead of quotas and restrictions, high skilled immigrants face incentives and tax benefits for moving. Therefore a more updated

version of the Historical Structural Model put forward by Saskia Sassen showcases the creation of global cities in a post-industrial era to create demand-driven high-income workers that generate income for the countries that house global cities (2005, 17). The move by countries to attract global capital and by extension multinational companies leads to the creation of global cities. These cities exist due to their unique infrastructure that can exist as a production site for specialized business services and nodes of control for production processes in other parts of the world (Sassen 1994, 73). The global cities are command centers catering to transnational businesses and by extension transnational affluent people and the lifestyles that they desire (Ibid). Global cities are often built to attract a transnational class (the highly skilled, educated and professional class Leslie Sklair highlights as vital to the globalized economy), not to reflect national styles, cultures and attitudes (Ibid, 59). Expats have a tendency to move to global cities in countries, not localized cities within countries. This can make it difficult for a highly mobile privileged class to integrate into a pre-existing national culture that they do not have day-to-day access to (Ibid, 84). The economic interests of these high skilled people are therefore linked not locally or nationally but instead globally (Sklair 2012). However because nothing can be entirely global, global networks connect to value added local areas (Sassen 2000). These local areas serve as points that attract wealth, power, culture and innovation due to the infrastructure that is created by nation states to service the highly skilled people who help to map out and participate in the global economy (Castells 2011). This contrast between the necessity of existing somewhere locally and living within a global city environment can lead to issues integrating within a broader national society which will be explored throughout this thesis.

### Research Question

Immigrants failing to integrate properly are often explained culturally as if failing to integrate is solely due to someone's Turkish, French or other national background (Van Houdt et al. 2011). However by looking at the organizations that expats form, we can look at other intersectional factors to see how an emphasis on ideas of individual responsibility, citizenship and employment are structured within systems so that integration is easier for people of specific educations, classes, races than others (Lukka

and Ellis 2001, 94). Understanding how high-skilled and materially well-off people move, set up connections, and create integration networks to fit in more with local society can help people understand the large disconnect that exists between expats and other types of migrants within our societies today. This is important as countries increasingly rely on highly skilled professionals and global cities to generate income and growth nationally. A failure to understand how and why expats fail to integrate can set up potential conflicts in the future that could inhibit a country's ability to integrate into the larger global economy. This can be particularly of interest to scholarship and society in the Netherlands as they are a country attempting to integrate into a globalized world. Studying expats can help to highlight why barriers to integration exist within the expat community. This can then allow countries to create programs to retain and attract high skilled professionals in the way that they desire. It is this that makes studying expats not just of a scholarly interest but additionally one of societal relevance. In order to provide a useful lens on the manner in which expats attempt to integrate and move I chose to focus on how expats do this through the use of formal and informal volunteer based organizations. By exploring expat communities in this way I sought to find out what roles expats play in understanding migration and citizenship through the lenses of integration, mobility and connectivity. This led to the central thesis of this paper: Expats exist both within Dutch society and outside of it due to their global linkages which leads to unique integration, mobility and connection experiences. The main central question of this thesis is: How does being an expat today create differences in experience when faced with issues of integration, connectivity and mobility in the Netherlands?

In order to do this, this thesis will deal with answering the question of how does being part of a highly skilled professional expat class affect integration into Dutch society? It will then seek to find out what role mobility plays in separating expat immigrants from other groups within the Netherlands? Additionally it will seek to answer the question, what are the motives of people and organizations that exist to connect people within expat communities both online and in physical spaces?

### Definition of Expat and Research Site

Expats will be defined within this research as individuals who have self-identified as expats and have made efforts to integrate into the larger existing expat networks to help or seek help from others with the same self-identification in the Netherlands. This definition was created because although many expats enter the Netherlands on a high skilled worker visa and would therefore fall under traditional notions of an expat, exceptions do apply. These exceptions include people who are students, hold EU passports (and therefore do not need to apply for visas into the country) or individuals who travel with people holding high skilled worker visas such as children and spouses. Due to workers bringing their families/partners with them (most of whom would identify as expats), certain groups of students, and other individuals who would call themselves expats, self-identification is a simpler way to ensure that the breadth of the expat community is included within this definition. Additionally, since most expat social groups are self-selecting, self-identification allows for a clean delineation between the out-group and in-group. It also allows for othering of individuals not in that group. While other individuals can label each other as expats, the ability of people to identify as expats can usually be self-imposed due to the privilege and class that these people within society hold. If one doesn't want to be identified as an expat they simply need to avoid expat groups, and go by official government titles such as high skilled professionals on all forms.

My chosen research site was the city of Utrecht. Utrecht is a city that is adjacent to a global city (Amsterdam) and exists as a physical space with the communication capabilities to allow expats and the companies they work for to be a part of the global flows and nodes that make up the global economy. By studying a space that is so close to global connections and exists within a specific physical country seeking to encourage their own unique culture I was able to pinpoint a group of people who experience the challenges that this dynamic creates. Utrecht therefore exists as an ideal point to study how integration, migration and connectivity work in the context of expats and the local Dutch culture that surrounds them.

## Methodology

For this ethnographic research my focus was targeted towards expats in the Utrecht area that had at one time established a connection to either an informal or formal expat group. Within this thesis a formal group is defined as a group with a formal organizational structure, a board of directors and a mission statement stating in what capacity they are seeking to help the expat community. An informal group encompasses any group I encountered in the Utrecht area that met informally, had no formal organizational structure, and provided low barriers to entry. Most informal groups I encountered were based or started online. My research was carried out between February 1 and May 18, 2017 using the methods of ethnography and participant observation. For me this meant methods in which I as a researcher took part in the daily activities, events, interactions, and opportunities present in my subjects daily life and culture (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002, 1). Although I didn't know it, my first interactions with the expat community started almost immediately upon moving to the Netherlands. As an international student going to international student events I met many people who could be classified as expats. These events allowed me to meet other people in similar experiences as myself, share information and swap stories about attempts to navigate life in the Netherlands. However, my first interactions with any type of formal expat organization in a research capacity occurred the way many connections do these days, online. My research was inspired by Wilson and Peterson's methods of online anthropology, which seeks to connect online spaces to the physical people and spaces that they operate within (2002, 452). The use of expat forums on Facebook (initially Expat Utrecht Facebook page) allowed me to be opened up and connected to a world in which self-identified expats traded information, looked for friends and provided information on a host of any particular subjects. It is through this first forum that I found websites for other formal expat organizations such as ACCESS and the Utrecht International Women's Group. The forum, through my own as well as other individual's questions, also pointed me towards more informal expat groups such as meetup.com events and other more specific expat groups that had branched off from main expat forums (for example Expat Utrecht Runners). From there, connections were made by attending events in person (in Utrecht at cafes, bars and individuals homes), and connecting to



people through volunteering at various expat events and for expat organizations. These events included expat meetup events, bringing baked goods for expat movie nights or answering emails and doing light administrative tasks for more formal groups such as ACCESS, an organization created to answer specific expat questions and provide formal referrals for a myriad of services including child birthing classes, lawyers, real estate agents and many other people.

My research consisted of 20 formal interviews with expat individuals who I met while attending or participating in various expat events. Seven of these interviews consisted of life history style interviews in which not just their expat experience was focused on but time was taken to discuss broader life paths and how they felt that has impacted where they are today. My role in formal interviews was as a researcher with a clearly defined line between interviewer and subject, however all of my formal interview subjects were met through informal situations whether at expat meetup events, or volunteering side by side on particular projects at expat organizations<sup>1</sup>. In most cases it is less likely that these people would have spoken to me in such depth and in such a formal manner had we not previously connected socially and in a more informal setting. Participant observation was also used to both volunteer and participate in various expat events across Utrecht. While I did not immediately announce my presence as a researcher to every person I met at any events, the nature of expat conversation meant that it was very quickly known on almost all occasions. Any information used from informal interviews was used with permission through either direct discussion at the time of the conversation or follow up with individuals afterwards.

During my research it was key to remember that my personal characteristics, background and understandings as a researcher shaped the formulation and encompassed the research project (Diphorn 2013, 203). The fact that I can be classified as an expat, in addition to my age (mid-20's), gender (female) and ethnicity (white), no doubt helped me to be granted access to spaces that other gendered, non-expat, non-white individuals might have difficulty accessing as research spaces. Accessing participants and spaces was also helped by my hailing from a popular and peaceful developed country (Canada). This was looked at favorably by most people and helped in my ability to develop trust and

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<sup>1</sup> For a full list of expat organizations I encountered and participated in see Appendix

rapport that others might have had greater difficulty gaining. Additionally, my ability to connect to expats socially first and on such a large scale through many different types of events ensured that I could gain access to people that I might have had difficulty connecting with if I had simply emailed them directly. The fact that I am a younger woman also helped me in a variety of ways. The ability for older people to speak to me about their integration difficulties and perceptions of the country in what was often perceived as a position of authority for them allowed for a candor I might not otherwise have experienced. Furthermore, since many expat groups are specifically targeted towards women, being able to be viewed upon as a peer allowed for a horizontal relationship between me and the participants in the group. My appearance also enabled me to gain access to many expat groups since I as an individual fitted the criteria of the group (for example groups looking for expats, women, young professionals or higher education students). This was especially key for my participant observation as a volunteer because expat experience is emphasized in groups created to help others navigate the challenges of being an expat such as difficulty with the native language and other issues expats regularly face and these are challenges I could personally speak to.

In addition to participant observation, particular focus was paid to digital and Internet connections with the aim to see how expats form connections in the digital age. Given the increasing use of the online space in every aspect of our lives systematic observation was used over a period of 4 months to analyze online expat forums, websites and other forms of digital communication. This was done in tandem with real life face-to-face interaction with expats, or solely digital observation with others depending on the nature of the group and the extent to which I could participate within it. As the vast majority of expats connect through online spaces, it was important to see how those spaces changed communication within groups, and to see how integration and mobility are affected by building communities that do not rely on physical space. Additionally, as a younger person with the knowledge that younger people often connect on a more informal basis and only through online spaces, it was key for me to ensure that I could compare and contrast different generational and background differences between how individuals in different expat groups meet.

Perfectly objective research is seen by many especially within anthropology as something that is unobtainable due to the fact that human behavior and personal feelings will always play a part in the decisions that researchers make (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002, 25). I came into this research with the assumption that expats were simply a small segment of the larger immigrant population, albeit one with significantly more advantages than other immigrant groups. However over the course of my research I have come to conclude that expats are not simply part of the immigrant population but their own distinct group in society that due to the formation of global cities and spaces deal with unique issues. This research seeks to allow for the understanding that expats represent an other group to both the larger immigrant population and the native population. They therefore require a particular understanding of their circumstances as will be explored throughout this thesis.

Furthermore an acknowledgement should be made that this research in no way encompasses the experiences of all expats within the Netherlands or even in the Utrecht area. Through the interviews conducted I tried to showcase to the best extent possible a representative type of person connected to specific expat organizations at that time and how integration and mobility issues impact them. To be truly representative is difficult but attempts were made to ensure that a sample of people from a variety of countries, ages, marital statuses, and genders are showcased. An organization such as ACCESS which is more formal in nature and operates during work hours had a large sample of middle-aged married expat women who migrated to the Netherlands with their husbands. Because of this attempts were made to ensure that expats from other organizations were interviewed (formally and informally), to ensure people in informal expat groups which skewed younger, and computer based groups and had a high percentage of male participants could also be sampled. The hope was that by striving for a range of informants and organizations conclusions can be reached not just about a specific expat organization but about the expat community in the area generally which may be more useful to policy makers in the future.

### Introduction of Informants

The following people make up core informants that are quoted explicitly in the proceeding chapters. I met **Louise**, 35 (United Kingdom) while she was volunteering at ACCESS. She is a mother of two boys and is a married expat who moved to the Netherlands because of her husband's job for a large multinational company. They live in an upscale neighborhood in Utrecht and she is a housewife. In contrast, **Maya** 26 (Malaysia) had only been in the Netherlands for 6 months at the time of our interview. She is a computer engineer and had moved to the Netherlands from the United States where she had completed her undergraduate and masters degrees. We connected through attending an expat drinks event run through an online meetup group. **Hans** 70 (Germany) was a recently retired economics professor who had lived in the Netherlands for 30 years. He had started volunteering at various expat organizations as a way to fill his time now that he was no longer working. He did not know anyone at ACCESS (where I met him) prior to volunteering, but had jointed to meet more people from the international community. **Eva** 38 (Greece) had worked successfully as an architect in Geneva until her husband lost his job and found well-paying work in the Netherlands. As a result she quit her job and they moved. Due to her difficulty finding paid work as an architect, she got involved at ACCESS and had focused on raising her daughter who was attending the international school. **Deborah** 29 (Australia) was a mother of 2 boys who I met through the International Women's Contact of Utrecht. She had just recently come to the Netherlands a year and a half ago due to her husbands work at a large multinational company. She is a housewife and while she had worked as a teacher before she married, with the mobility part of husbands job (they had been posted in 4 other countries over the past 10 years) she no longer worked as a teacher. **Maria** 57 (Cuba), had been in the Netherlands for the past 10 years, but had initially moved to Europe when she married her Spanish husband. They had met while working at the International Patent Office when she was working abroad on a short three-month posting. Due to her husbands job they had moved to many countries within Europe. She now works part time, but is mainly supported by her husband who comes from quite a wealthy family. **Sarah** 25 (New Zealand) had moved to the Netherlands to complete her studies and then this eventually translated to a career in logistics. She comes from a middle class New Zealand

background, and the Netherlands is her first expat experience. **Simon** 43 (Oregon, USA) is a journalist who had moved to Utrecht with his wife and children in the past month. He utilized several expat organizations and forums both when planning his move and when settling down once they had made it to the Netherlands. They lived in a nice neighborhood near the centre of town, and this is his first expat experience. **Saanvi** 30 (India) had moved to Utrecht with her husband who worked at Utrecht University. Prior to her move she had worked in the financial sector in India in various provinces and in Australia where she had moved to be with her husband. However once he got transferred to the Netherlands due to her difficulty finding work she started volunteering with expat organizations.

### Overview of Chapters

The successes and challenges of integration, connection and mobility within expat communities will be explored systematically throughout the following chapters, with each individual component being analyzed before the intersection of all three coming together to shine a light on the broader expat experience. Chapter one will focus on integration issues expats encounter. Included in this area issues related to social bonding and how people connect with others. Also explored are coping strategies used by different types of expats and how for a certain type of expats (especially those who are highly mobile) the alternative structures that are created to cope with being an expat in new spaces. Chapter two will focus on forming communities in a mobile world. Why expats bother to form communities and integrate given their frequent mobility will be analyzed for both long and short term expats. Further to this the role of global cities and the state in expat mobility will be discussed along with expats connections to global culture. Chapter three will focus on the online expat space. The multiplicity of Internet expat groups will be discussed with a focus on forum culture and how people create local and global connections. Additionally examined will be how the Internet affects mobility and how formal institutions and how media and culture affect migrating and mobile expats. In conclusion, this thesis will argue that expats exist both within Dutch society and outside of it because of their globalized connections, which leads to unique integration, mobility and connection experiences.

## **Chapter 1: Integration: Melding into Local and Global Communities as an Expat**

I met Maya at a local coffee shop in Utrecht city center. She was on a mission to go to every cute coffee shop in the area and after much texting deliberation one was picked. It had small tables and was covered in ferns, flowers and all manner of plants. We settled into two small plush patterned armchairs, ordered beverages and as the smell of roasting coffee wafted above us she told me about how she came to be in Utrecht. She was originally from Malaysia but from her accent you would never guess that she had lived anywhere but the continental United States. After attending an international school in Malaysia she went to university in the States, first Seattle and then Boston for graduate school for computer engineering. After graduating she in her own words took “any job that she could get” given her student debt loads and ended up working in a local Boston firm. Her whole family was from Malaysia and planned to stay there, while she however had wanted to see the world and experience life as a single professional female. A professional technical job in computer engineering could get her there. However to get from the US to Malaysia to visit her family could take in the best-case scenario 24 hours, and although she did not want to stay in Malaysia she did want to be able to maintain a connection to her family there. She figured that if she moved to Europe, not only would the time it takes to visit her family dramatically decrease, but also the time difference when calling or connecting would be much more manageable. Luckily she worked for quite a large multinational company and after a few years she was able to request a transfer to Europe. She had just recently moved to the Netherlands when I met her, only about 6 months, and was in the process of moving soon because her current apartment “was a little bit more than she would like to spend.” When I asked her why she had joined an expat meet up group, she mentioned that while she knew a few of her colleagues in the Utrecht office and had formed relationships with them when she started at the company in the US when she moved to Europe she found that those connections weren’t exactly fulfilling what she was looking for. She stated that while her Dutch colleagues were very nice and she enjoyed working with them at the end of the day they went home to their own families and friends. When she wanted to connect with people, she sought out the international community. It was at an international meetup group that I

had initially met her, and had been introduced to her through a French gentleman, who had just minutes before been gestating wildly with his hands as he told a story. With a glass of wine in our hands and the dull roar of conversation surrounding us, I saw them discussing likes and dislikes and the circumstances that brought them to a meetup group the way that people do when they are taking the first steps toward friendship.

Surrounding us people from countries all around the world bonded over their shared vision of highly mobile jobs, international education and a globalized world. It was the international community that she had sought and international expat groups that she found when looking to become a part of a greater community, to integrate.

Integration into society is a key issue when discussing the impact of immigration in a country. It is generally assumed that immigrants will attempt overtime to become more like the native population in terms of habits, language, culture and understanding (Fechter and Walsh 2012, 14). Expats however face a unique set of challenges when faced with issues of integration. The following chapter will discuss how their global outlook affects their sense of place and therefore impacts integration. This is true in how expats form social bonds, what occurs when becoming a part of expat community groups or the coping strategies expats develop to deal with being present in a new society. Following that, the alternative structures that expats create to cope with integration issues will be discussed with a focus on two areas education and language. This chapter will show that the need for expats to integrate into a wider globalized community takes priority over integration into the local community in which they are living currently.

Integration can be defined as the act of combining with and becoming part of the dominant culture in a particular area (Ibid, 26). So is Maya integrated into Dutch society? By some markers she is, she carries a valid residence permit, has an apartment, a job and says that she bikes to work everyday. However despite the fact that she was able to navigate the entire Dutch immigration system without help, it was expat organizations that she turned to when looking to meet people. To meet government dictated markers of integration is one thing, however to fully socially integrate into a country is another. To integrate in the context of different cultures insinuates changes in attitudes and actions on the part of people to fit into a broader structure as they move to a different physical space (Salt 1992, 491). However for many expats this represents a fundamental problem given

the limited period of time they are in a physical place and the uncertainty of when one will move next. Full changes of attitudes are not always rational choices. For a present day nation state however, integration policies are almost always a rational choice as they represent the opportunity to move people from the them to the us category (from a foreigner to a nation state member) (Favell 2011, 127). A state must be able to distinguish and discriminate against members verses non-members. This is true despite rhetoric that of what globalization and by extension global workers can do for individual places. It is global forces that directly challenge the idea that a place is important. As one expat said to me, I can basically do my work anywhere I just happen to be here now.

Traditional integration and assimilation theory as put forward by Milton Gordon does not work when looking at the expat community. This is because assimilation theory assumes that immigrants become more similar to the main cultural group the longer that they remain in one place, ultimately making them more likely to integrate (Gordon 1964, 30). Expats however often see themselves as existing outside of nation state borders; they are attempting to integrate into the global community (one that has provided them with employment, health benefits and a world view). They do not see themselves as part of the local culture in which they currently live because they do not rely on the local community for benefits and cultural direction traditionally provided for by the state such as a social safety net, or notions of family/religion. Favell calls this a denationalized freedom, one that rests on their profession and mobility more than their ability to synch with the norms of a country and assimilate every time they move (2011, 129). This creates a sort of contradiction for the expat community because while capital is global, and production networks are increasingly found in many nations, the majority of labour within nations is local (Castells 2011). Only the small specialized labour force that makes up expats is truly globalized (Ibid). This challenge then has the potential to create political issues in which it is difficult for a state to create entitlements, and rights if expat communities grow in number or are compressed geographically (Sassen 2005, 20). Not everyone can access the welfare and social systems within a country, and expats often rely on other forces (such as their multinational employers) for goods and security that they would traditionally get from the nation state. To deal with this push and pull of integration, a



number of coping strategies are developed by the expat community. Examples of this will be explored in the next parts of this chapter.

### Social Bonding

During the course of this research, significant attention was paid to social capital both in its bonding and bridging forms. Focus was paid as to how increased social capital can increase integration, but for expats this can mean integration into the global community rather than the local one. In fact it has been my observation that more often helpful information is conveyed through international organizations and expat individuals from many different countries. While this seems to contradict research that points towards people from different social circles and parts of society gaining social capital when compared with the bonds that they form when connecting with like minded people (usually people from the same ethnic, religious or social group or people who have the same mother tongue) (Van Houdt et al 2011, 410), there are a few extenuating circumstances that make the like-minded people better ambassadors for integration in this case. Robert Putnam, defines social capital as connections between groups or individuals formed with shared norms, values and understandings that helps to form connections within or between people (Putnam 1995: 67). Social capital is separated into three groups within literature. The first type of social capital is bonding ties, links between people based on common identity such as family or people who share our ethnicity or culture (Putnam 2001, 43). Secondly, bridging ties are connections that go beyond that of bonding ties, to people who may not share our personal sense of identity, examples of which are distant friends or colleagues (ibid). The third type of social capital is linkages, in which individuals form connections to people who are above or below them on the social ladder (Ibid). It can be seen within literature, such as that by Lancee (2012) and Van Tubergen (2006), that immigrants with greater access to bridging social capital by having social contact with the native population results in not only higher employment overall but also have better occupational statuses.

Expats are a widely diverse group of individuals coming from many different cultures, countries and occupations. However they all share similar stories of travelling from one country to another, absorbing the new customs of the country they are currently

living in, as well as a relatively high standard of living and sense of individualism in most cases. The similarities they share enable them to easily start a conversation and form connections, while the differences that they experience also enable them to form social capital in many areas within which they would otherwise not be exposed to. For people like Maya, this means that they can attend international meetup groups and form not just social bridging ties but also bonding ties with people from all over the world of many different ethnicities given the shared global common identity and culture that they see themselves as part of. They also do not have the difficulty of other individuals in forming social linkages as most people already exist high on the social ladder. Maya as a managing computer engineer already holds a high status job, one that has gained her entry into not just the international community but also the Netherlands itself (through her high skilled visa). This can be explained by processes of globalization that are created within a neoliberal framework which has lessened the importance of countries as arbiters of social, economic and cultural life while countries have promoted the idea of global cities that can participate in a global cosmopolitan transnational market (Jaffe and De Koning 2015, 123). Expats therefore make up the small portion of people that feel strongly identified with the global cosmopolitan culture that exists within the global networks in which they work, in contrast to most other people who instead feel strong regional identities (Castells 2011). Examples of this include how people almost all expats immediately have one thing in common; they are not from the Netherlands and exist within a privileged, educated and individual-focused class. This means that when they move to a new global community (in this case Utrecht as a hub of Amsterdam) instead of having to join local cultural and sport groups to get to know people they can simply connect to the expat community and maintain their own personal interests. Expats create their own American football leagues where Dutch people would play football; they create international English book clubs instead of groups focused on Dutch literature. By creating their own groups expats isolate themselves from the larger local population, creating circumstances in which both their social life and jobs exist in a global international context. This means that while expat groups might facilitate the spreading of information about dealing with local cultures, a lot of expats don't absorb the cultural practices of a local place as part of their own identity. As one expat stated, "I ride a bike

because it is the most efficient way for me to get to work, not because it is a way of life like it is for Dutch people.” More important is the ability to connect and absorb global cultural traditions, those that prioritize the individual, freedom of movement and the ability through education and connections to obtain high skilled jobs.

Expat groups themselves often serve as a valve for people who are not fully integrated socially into their existing community. When you ask expats why they joined an organization or group you rarely get a single answer. Examples include, “I am here to help people, I have a lot of free time, I wanted to meet other people.” Instead more often what emerges is a mishmash of answers, some personal, some communal some for the greater good of others. People will often ask each other why the Netherlands, and then wait to see the answer. These answers are often complicated because it is not simply asking if a person is in the country for here for work or school, it is a question of why they are here and which culture they are attempting to be a part of. Expat organizations therefore not only help with the moving process but can also help individuals move from their societally defined label as say an English woman expat to gradually a more integrated long-term resident and a member of the international community. They can also be places which mirror the global values of the international community that understand the values that expats hold such as the need for freedom of movement, individualism and the ability to prioritize global concerns over local ones.

### Why coping strategies?

High skilled professionals benefit from advantageous policies that make it easy for their family to travel with them to the Netherlands, however this then presents issues for families who now must function within Dutch society often knowing very little and without compulsory integration courses to show them the way. Expats are typically not required to undergo integration courses and have their migration experience fast tracked by the state due to the potential economic capital they bring to the country. Due to this, while having a high-skilled migrant in the family is good for employment for one partner, it can often be challenging for another. This is often bore out when meeting people within expat groups, and is especially an issue for women expats given the large gender disparity for those who obtain high skilled migrant visas. 75 percent of all immigrants

who come to the Netherlands via the high skilled labour immigration program are male and given the privileges extended to this class of people, it is easy for them to sponsor their families (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2017). A situation is created in which the high skilled individual in a family is directly connected to the global/international community through the international nature of their job, while their family must work to form new connections to a community when moving to a new place. When asked why she moved to the Netherlands, one volunteer Eva stated that they moved to the Netherlands because her husband found a job here. Although originally from Greece, they had previously been living in Geneva where she worked as an architect. Her husband however was unable to find work. After sometime they agreed that if he found a job elsewhere that paid more than her position they would move. He did and they made plans to move to the Netherlands. Unfortunately for her this meant that she would have to quit her job, which she did when he found a position. Unable to find a position in her chosen field due to her lack of Dutch language skills, she started to volunteer to fill her time. While an integration course would not have solved all of her language and culture issues, the lack of an integration course necessitated her to seek out other groups that would be able to not just give her tips on enrolling her child in school but also gave her a sense of professionalization and productiveness while she learned Dutch and attempted to integrate into the new country she now found herself. She needed social capital and an understanding of Dutch culture. Since citizenship is no longer something that a person acquires just by residence within a country, an individual must now show that they have the ability to integrate both economically but also socially and culturally (Van Houdt et al. 2011) and most expats are not interested in the long term investment this requires. Without the development of coping strategies such as expat organizations or social bonding many expats such as Maya would be lost on how to even start the integration process for themselves. It is through coping mechanisms developed by the expat community that individual expats can slowly become more integrated into the place that they are currently living. This allows expats to bypass markers of citizenship and culture created by the nation state that surrounds them and form their own expat communities.

### Alternative Structures to Integration

The rise of neoliberal citizenship (a citizenship based on transactional capitalist agreements between individuals and the state) means that citizenship has become less focused on rights given to new citizens and migrants and more focused on the ability of these people to fulfill the duties and responsibilities society has prescribed to them (Ibid). This is especially true when integration policies implemented by the government are moved from the public to the private sphere (Back et al. 2002, 448). It is not true however that all integration initiatives are solely in the private sphere. If one knows how to seek them out government support lines and a wide variety of Dutch government programs can now be found in English. In addition to this customer support lines and government officials are often very available to people who come into the country on high skilled immigrant visas given the perceived need for them within the Netherlands. To those that qualify and understand the system, the Dutch government can represent an enlightening place in which rules regarding taxes, residency and access to benefits are accessible. In fact, expat groups therefore often serve as way stations, pointing incoming or new migrants to the accessible government services already set up to help high skilled workers. This occurred often within Expat Centers, which are set up in the same building as municipality government services. Often people came into Expat centers with questions regarding government programs and could then be directed to a government desk a few meters away that could deal with their problem directly. The centers exist within these specific locations to help people access not just the government services within that building, but also other Dutch institutions they will also have to deal (for example hydro, internet, education and a multiplicity of other institutions and companies).

Despite this, some expats have created what I call alternative structures within their new surroundings that enable them to live in a self directed manner that more often mirrors their values and experiences from their home country or the broader culture of the global economy. Alternative structures can be defined as non-state methods of providing common statewide programs or cultural patterns used by a large portion of the general population (for example international health insurance instead of national plans or cultural practices such as specific ideologies or languages not used by local populations).

Many expats are not attempting to become citizens of the country in which they reside. Therefore these alternative structures can be described as a form of resistance to integration within a nation, because if an expat only uses alternatives structures there is no need to adjust ones behavior to local customs and norms. Alternative structures are often constructed to assume that expat populations are only in the Netherlands for a short period of time and as a result emphasis is put on expat cultural practices and language rather than the surrounding Dutch one. These schools can therefore reflect the cultures that are formed as a result of the communities that are created when a group of individuals live in and benefit from a network of global cities. This can lead to schools who preach the gospel of the benefits of the global economy (Sassen 1994). Due to active citizenship initiatives as well as individual expats themselves alternative structures are set up by expats for expats. The following paragraphs will look more in depth at instances in which expats have created alternative structures for themselves, focusing on the areas of education and language and will discuss whether these new institutions encourage or discourage a form of integration.

### Education as Alternative Structure

When faced with the prospect of the potential for multiple moves over the course of a child's life, the manner in which they are educated becomes more complicated. Aside from certain language barriers that can exist, there are large cultural differences in approaches to education across countries. Because of this parents often seek out educational opportunities for their children in which this cultural change is softer as they move from location to location. They seek out education that ties their children to a global cultural context rather than a local one. "The strategic operation is not the search for a connection with the "surroundings" the context. It is rather installation in a strategic cross border geography constituted through multiple locals" (Sassen 2000, 4). In this way, people's attempts to integrate consist of finding contexts, which are open to creating similar replicable structures (such as a specific type of clinic or service) that they can then understand how to operate within. If this occurs, moving from location to location is much less confusing and stressful since one already knows how to operate within the context of a globally orientated place no matter what the location. Additionally, forming

social capital is much easier due to a common shared globalized background. This idea is replicated perfectly within international schools. International schools are rarely international in the method in which they teach, but they create a specific curriculum that enables people from different culture and countries to find a similar level of education for their children (usually in English) no matter where they end up in the world. In the words of Deborah a mother of two boys from Australia, “We moved here when my husband got a job, but before this posting we were in the UK. We decided to place the boys in the international school because we knew what type of education they would get and the fitting in process would be so much easier. The kids don’t speak Dutch and so they would be really behind and the system is so different here. Also who knows when we will move again, so there is no point putting in all the work if it turns out in 3 years that we are moving back to Australia or somewhere else in the world.” For the scholar De Koning connecting to global culture means creating cosmopolitan capital for your children that creates a familiarity with western cultural codes, some local cultural codes, a fluency in English, knowledge of global consumer culture, as well as the ability to access Western diplomas and higher education in the future (2009). This helps to perpetuate what Leslie Sklair calls the cosmopolitan elites and the children within these schools are the children of the Transnational Capitalist Class (TTC) (2000, 70). The TTC are a group of individuals whose members are linked globally rather than locally and seek to have economic control in culture, business and politics through global consumerist practice and dialogue (Ibid). Through these actions and in international schools children of expats are taught how to integrate into a globalized world in which free trade, increased consumption and a global outlook are emphasized, while local culture is deemphasized. One expat I met at an Utrecht Meetup Group grew up in Egypt from the age of 8 to 18. She told me her parents were career diplomats from the Germany, and so when they moved from their previous posting in the Netherlands, she moved from one international school to another. During that time she perfected her English and as she entered the final years of high school she was pushed to think about applying to universities in Europe and North America. However all discussion of career options were in the context of international options, and history was taught in the context of world history. Although local history was touched on it was not emphasized, and despite taking a few classes she

only spoke a few words of Arabic. The school did not exist to create the next generation of Egyptian citizens, but instead to create an individual globalist approach for a few students. The seeking out and participation in alternative education structures takes on the individualist and neoliberal ideas of a citizen creating their own path to integration, however the end result can be both children and parents that have integrated into an international expat community, rather than an integration into the local society in which they live.

### Language Use as Alternative Structure

Use of different languages for different purposes is something that occurs not just within expat communities but also in many other occasions within the Netherlands. Language is often cited as an important marker of integration (de Vroome and Van Tubergen 2010, 378), however in the case of expats often their existing language skills do not represent traditional barriers of entry into certain parts of Dutch society. The fact that people entering on high skilled visas are already employed by large companies that most often work in English means that English can function as a requirement for employment in a way that you would traditionally think the official language of a country might. This combined with the fact that English is seen as the lingua franca worldwide and such a high percentage of the Dutch population speaks English, means that it is quite easy in some respects for non-Dutch English speakers to be able to speak English in almost all day-to-day interactions that they have. Some government websites are in English, you can speak to someone in English in a grocery store, international schools are taught in English, and most expat organizations run de-facto or officially in English. However this can be both a blessing and a curse for some individuals. This is because while knowledge of English can make it very easy to access and integrate into expat communities, a lack of Dutch can limit people's abilities to get to know Dutch citizens. Further complicating integration is Dutch people's tendency to switch to English should someone attempt to speak to them in bad or accented Dutch. "The language learning process – which may be a necessary if not sufficient part of successfully integrating – is in fact largely controlled by the attitude of host speakers; by those who command any interaction, towards those who are trying to follow it. They can make it welcoming and accessible; or they can



withdraw, and make it purposely difficult (Favell 2011).” Many people expressed to me that they feel as if Dutch people in their attempts to help by speaking English made it paradoxically more difficult to integrate into society by learning Dutch (a major tenant of integration as stated by the Dutch government). One German economics professor Hans, who had lived in the Netherlands for 30 years now said that he sought help from a linguist to work to remove his accent in Dutch. “I was completely fluent but it just made things easier. I was able to understand people within their own context and it helped me to make deeper [Dutch] friends over time.” While Hans may have made the effort to integrate his language skills to the local area, many expats when faced with difficulties simply give up and instead rely on their already existing language knowledge. This then creates a situation that separates them from personally getting to know local people and by extension integrate into Dutch culture. Instead they can simply use English to connect to other globally connected people, having no or superficial contact with those who are only locally focused. As Dutch cannot be considered an international language this is especially true in the Netherlands and so to use the language speaks to a specific local culture and context that is not found in any other country. As one expat stated, “For a long time I knew people at work and then I had my expat friends when I went home. If it wasn’t for the architecture I could have been living in any big city in the world. It wasn’t until I really mastered Dutch and made an effort to speak it day to day that I expanded my horizons and met Dutch people in local organizations... I am now part of a Dutch football league that plays once a week and have come to understand the culture better.” The challenges of language issues can create a situation in which instead of the expat community pushing people towards greater integration through learning Dutch, they can instead form a sort of bubble from greater Dutch society in which everything that they need and have access to can occur in English.

The role of education and language in creating alternative structures are but a few examples of how expats can exist physically within a particular space however completely within their own structures. There exist medical clinics for expats, government phone lines, and even expat organizations themselves (all in English) can create a self-selecting social environment that closes people off from being a part of Dutch society. These spaces do not simply prevent people from meeting other Dutch

people, but can also reinforce social norms such as how to treat one another and who has value within society.

It is only after the Second World War that issues of integration came to be viewed as a pre-requisite for residency. Instead ones foreignness was something that one could almost never overcome (de Vroome and Van Tubergen 2010, 377). Despite the fact that expats are invited to prove that they can integrate into society by the government through passing civic tests, taking part in cultural practices and learning the language, the feeling of being truly integrated remains elusive for some expats. They are not required to learn the language or become citizens and so can instead resist integration by seeking social bonding and coping strategies that face towards global expat communities. Not all expats are like Hans, committed to learn the language, joining local groups and put down roots for a long period of time. The short nature of work tenures for many expats can lead to situations in which people like Maya seek out other expats to integrate and become part of a for global facing community. The presence of alternative structures can serve to prevent people from even looking at and attempting to understand the culture of the country they are living in.

## Chapter 1 - Conclusion

Expats and the structures that are surrounded by can either help a person to integrate into a surrounding physical space or prevent it. This can be done positively in the case of some expat organizations and through social bonding or can be used to prevent integration through the use of alternative structures of education, language and the types of people one makes friends with. Any structure that prevents changes in attitudes and actions to match and accept their new physical spaces by definition prevents integration. In conclusion, for high skilled expats, their connection to the global international community can make it so that they exist within a global culture without the need to push towards local cultural integration. The following chapter will explore how the push and pull created by different expat circumstances can create situations in which specific sets of expats are encouraged to integrate into society, and encourages others to use the mobility available to them to resist integration.



## **Chapter 2: Mobility: Dividing and Bringing Expats Due to Movement**

People today have the ability to travel larger distances faster than they have at any other time on our planet (Harvey 1999). Thus the scales of mobility that were previously extremely restricted have now been lifted in some cases (Bauman 1998). For expats this means that they are now able to both live and visit many places that in the past would not have been possible. This is especially true in the case of expats from less developed countries or minority backgrounds, as expats possess levels of privilege as a class that does not exist within other immigrant classes. The following chapter will discuss what role mobility plays in separating expats from other groups in society. This will be done by discussing migration for expats today, then the role of global cities and the nation states that house them. Finally a discussion of short-term versus long-term expats will showcase how the privileged and mobile position of expats can push expats towards or away from integration.

The movements of people all over the world are products and producers of power (Cresswell 2006). Expats with their ability to dictate when, how and where they not only travel but also live showcases the high class and wealthy position they inhabit within the world. Many expat stories start with the phrase, 'We were looking for new opportunities so we decided to move.' The ability to decide how and when to move and have companies lobby on your behalf for that right gives expats both power and position in society. For Hobbes human mobility was seen as an individual form of freedom, with the ideas of liberty and happiness being tied to unimpeded movement (Hobbes 1839). The more movement you have, the freer you are. This enables a power shift in which an expat has the ability to choose a place that they would like to become a part of out of many possible options, whereas previously a community would decide if they would accept outsiders from different locations. A modern day expat therefore is often billed as a person who is self-made, the master of his or her own destiny, and risks are taken by individuals according to their own definition of truth that they can define for themselves outside of a state (Giddens 2013, 4). A modern expat can choose who to care for and how far their family obligations go. Often it is the expats themselves that opt in to international postings in a wide variety of international companies, picking their next

location for the next four to six years within a series of globally connected cities. If these movements don't work out for expats however, they also have the freedom to leave, be it for personal, employment or political reasons. Expats I spoke to talked about leaving previous positions in other countries because of family obligations, better opportunities, perceived quality of life and even in one case the weather. The ability to choose where and in what way they live means that expats are often less constrained by state and cultural actions than other immigrants within the country (particularly other immigrants) who have less mobility and are not able to leave or violate cultural norms without additional sacrifices.

### Global Cities: One Culture Found Around the Globe

Migration for some expats is not from one country to another, but is instead a continual flow of movement as change and circumstances dictate (Cresswell 2006). For example, expats who move frequently from place to place often speak as a person who goes where opportunities present themselves. One expat when asked where they were from said, "I am not from anywhere. I mean I was born in a particular country (the UK) but my father was in the Foreign Service and we moved around quite often as a child. After university I also moved around quite a bit and so it is always hard for me to answer questions like that." The ability to say you are not from anywhere speaks to being a member of a global elite with the privilege to not be constrained to a particular nation. It however also means that people feel disconnected from any particular local location and at times don't bother to get to know local customs, traditions and language. An expat who worked as a computer engineer stated, "The first couple times I moved to a new country I worked to try and learn the language, make friends, join local teams but now I mostly just stick to getting to know people like me. I know I am going to move soon in a few years anyway, and it is hard to keep in touch. Expats understand this, so there is a different set of expectations."

For a person to have the ability to move from place to place getting expats to move often requires specific types of infrastructure to attract them. Expats or multinational corporations move because of countries attempts to woo high skilled workers with the promise of not just jobs but living conditions and benefits (like the 30%

rule in the Netherlands) that come with living in their country. By using these so called geobribes (the creation of programs and infrastructure to lure multinational corporations into securing offices), countries attempt to create/encourage their own global cities, signified by specific indicators such as infrastructure, communication networks and the presence of multinational companies (Smith 2002, 434). In this way, global cities are often created which “structure a zone that can span the globe but it is a zone embedded in/juxtaposed with older temporalities and spatialities” (Sassen 2011, 4). Global cities exist as hubs that connect the globalized world to local places, spaces for the transnational capitalist classes to dictate capital throughout the globe (Ibid). While Sassen has been challenged in the literature about her proposal that three cities propel the world economy (Tokyo, London and New York), the importance of global cities and the existence of them throughout the world is key to understanding how high skilled individuals end up working in specific places (Leorke 2009, 104). There are much more than three global cities that power the world economy today, however for all of the people who say that they can work anywhere, there are the practical realities that modern day jobs require internet, communication and structural infrastructure not available in all places. As hypermobility and space/time compression become greater priorities for international companies, it comes down to specific temporal spaces and individual governments to create concentrations of material and immobile facilities and infrastructures to accommodate them (Sassen 1994). Due to these realities expats are often moving from one fully outfitted global city to another but never beyond these created bubbles, as countries rush to create cities with similar amenities to cater to a culture of those in the cosmopolitan elite (Sklair 2000, 73). In this way nation states instead of setting the tone for how expats should integrate into their society accommodate the global culture of the expat to attract the investment that global flows often bring. Overtime this leads to a shift in power in which instead of individuals being beholden to the state as exists for local populations, it is the state beholden to expats but and other members of the transnational capitalist class (globalizing professionals, bureaucrats, politicians, consumerist elites and owners and controllers of transnational companies) (Ibid, 69). One expat stated, “If I have any issues I just ask my company to deal with it. I was important enough to be brought here so they can usually figure something out with

the bureaucracy.” Nation states therefore must deal with a situation in which a segment of the population is connected to global networks that create value and wealth for a country while everyone not connected to these global networks face inequality in the form of lesser opportunities, more citizenship requirements and more regulations (Castells 2011, 113). This tension has yet to be solved today, as states often deny the privilege afforded to the expat community and deem their concessions as necessary to maintain the economy of the country (Ibid). Due to their mobility, expats often exist in a globalized culture separated from the local one that they inhabit, they have access to separate government programs, expat organizations and other services for the time they are in one place. Pressures to integrate into the societies can therefore take on a different tone with expat organizations suggesting learning Dutch, but it not being a necessity to continue to stay in the Netherlands. The global city makes it so that integration locally is a choice and mobility often consists of moving from one city to another within the same cultural bubble.

#### The State: Facilitating and Preventing Migration

Successful free movement is inherently a marginal phenomenon within today’s world (Favell, 2011, 94). If everyone had the ability to move to any place in the world at any time social structures within countries would be challenged by new burdens, not to mention logistical governmental problems that would accompany creating borders in a borderless world. Who would vote where, what would it mean for defenses, regulations and natural resources? It is for this among other reasons that governments keep a tight grip on mobility, as it has traditionally been seen as a threat with the potential to create chaos and stress within society (Cresswell 2006, 55). Despite this, modern governments often rely on immigration to inject new human capital and specialized knowledge into the nation. In the words of a government press release “Entrepreneurs create new products, services and jobs. The government wants the Netherlands to participate more effectively in the global economy. So innovative entrepreneurs and scientists are being encouraged to come to the Netherlands (Government of the Netherlands 2016).” Modernity in today’s technological world is a struggle between the forces of order (usually the state) and constant change as technology improves the ability for people to be mobile and

communicate (Taylor 1999, 63). Due to this there is a right way and a wrong way to be mobile in today's society and as Cresswell (2006, 22) states the pervasiveness of mobility makes it possible for certain types of movement to be seen as natural and others as unnatural. Within this world it is perfectly normal for a North American businessman to work abroad in Europe but unnatural for an undocumented migrant from a third world country to cross into Europe seeking work. For expats this means that they do not have to think about issues of migration, because they have the privilege of benefiting from the inherent inequality between themselves and other types of migrants. In the words of Janet Wolff, "the suggestion of free and equal mobility is itself a decision, since we don't all have the same access to the road (1993, 227)." For mobile professionals whose credentials are accepted by the government, government institutions and organizations can often support the road to mobility and seek to make the transition from their home country into their new country as smooth as possible (Fechter and Walsh 2012). Expats often experience the smoothing of this road as they move from place to place, with expats stating that the government was very accommodating to their wishes and questions when moving. Their ability to be mobile creates different treatment standards between them and the restrictions that other immigrants face. Whereas integration courses and family reunification programs can take months or even years for some immigrants, expats sponsored by their companies often are approved within a few weeks. However while mobility plays a role in every expats journey in coming to the Netherlands, the duration of their stay and their personal mobility in the future greatly influences the ways in which expats attempt to integrate into Dutch society.

### Short Term Mobilities and Connections to the Global Community

Due to the constant mobility of expats, and their uniquely unrooted position within society, short term expats tend to focus on connecting with the global community rather than attempt to integrate into the local area in which they are living. Short term expats often focus on helping each other, enabling other expats to settle, form connections with other expats and then as needed leave a community. It is this combination of mobility and shallow integration facilitated by expat volunteer networks and organizations that makes expats unique. For expats there is always another location,



another place that they could be posted in. Due to this, often expats will focus on forming connections with others who understand their mobility and the uncertainty they face about where they are going to be in the future. Many expats mentioned that while they like to get to know Dutch people, but it is often hard to form long-term friendships with others when their families are moving every five years or less for work. In this sense, ones immediate family often becomes a stabilizing centerpiece and the focus of community and wellbeing in an already existing global identity. As a mother at the International Women's Contact of Utrecht said to me, "I don't know if I would have gotten involved in this group if I didn't have children, but they really helped me to find my way when it comes to putting our kids in school, planning for the future when we don't know how long we are going to be here. It was great to find support through people that know what you are going through." In this way, services and connections are found as a result of needs within the family. This exists alongside the relative affluence and stability that comes with working for international companies who often provide aid when it comes to housing and visas in a new country as mobility occurs.

A focus on immediate family as well as people who are undergoing the same immediate experiences as yourself often leads to phenomena in which people segregate themselves not by the culture of a nation state, as was often done in the past with guest workers in the Netherlands, but instead by expats existing status within society. Interestingly, Indians who come to the Netherlands through the high skilled worker program are often separated from the rest of the Indian community and traditional ethnic groups within the Netherlands that other types of recent migrants often seek out (Van Meeteren 2013, 53). This was reiterated by many of the Indian expats that I met while volunteering. Many said that they actively chose not to get involved with Indian organizations or "little India" as one informant called it. Instead they said that they joined international expat groups to broaden their experiences and so that it was not like they were "living in India within the Netherlands." They felt as if their living experiences didn't coincide with that of other immigrants from their home country since they don't know how long they will be here and in their current working experience they like in their own words, "interacting with many different people from many different places." They wanted to connect with people in the global community not the culture of their

native country, and by taking a stand of separation from other Indian immigrants of different socioeconomic background they showcased the privilege and class they are a part of.

The differences of people's cultures and backgrounds are often emphasized within expat communities by both participants and groups as a sort of cosmopolitan point of pride. However in reality there is limits to this cosmopolitanism and individuals within expat groups tend to mirror their own socio-economic class and family make up quite closely. This can be seen not just in how much money individual expats make, but also in the fact that people seek out others as social contacts and help from people that are very similar to themselves. Younger single expats tend to gravitate towards social drinks meet up groups. People involved with the International Women's Contact of Utrecht tend to be middle-aged mothers, and people involved with ACCESS tend to be former professionals who moved as a result of their spouse getting a job in the Netherlands.

For single expats their ability to be mobile often represents a sense of freedom, while for married people with families spouses following their partners this means constant uprooting to a new place that they would not have necessarily chosen. This can lead to feelings of isolation compared to how "normal" people live both back home and in the new place that they find themselves. It can also keep expats within global cities, and preventing from forming connections with their surroundings. For the countries in which they live, this is a negative as a lack of loyalty and contract between them and the state can therefore lead to brain drain as quickly as they came.

Seeking out expat communities therefore allows expats to experience an instant comradery with other people without the difficult work of overcoming cultural, language and experiential barriers. People seek out other people that mirror their own experience in the world, and for expats this then leads to them spending time and forming connections with other expats and often not with other individuals in broader Dutch society. In this way expat communities can facilitate mobility and community for a short period of time while providing a buffer to the difference in life experiences that attempting to integrate with local people can bring when in constant mobility.

### Integration over time for long term expats?

Long term expats can often find that expat communities provide a road to further integration within the new society that they are living in, allowing them to toe the line between continued mobility and the limits of mobility that they experience.

While many expats experience mobility as an ongoing flow across countries and cities for years at a time, other expats find that they move much more infrequently and find themselves in a position in which they will stay within a country for decades or the foreseeable future. This can be due to a variety of factors, but often in the case of expats coming from countries experiencing economic difficulties or a lower standard of living it is simply a question of opportunities. Many expats from southern or eastern Europe said that they would love to go back but it is just not financially available to them. As scientists, business people and highly trained specialists many of them understand that they are part of the brain drain that trickles from poorer countries once people have been educated to richer countries where there are more job opportunities. Being people of a specific class and location provides meaning and power that can enable them easier mobility across nation states (Cresswell 2006, 3). The education that they have gained enables them to have the power to move from one country to another. However in the case of some expats, their wealth and mobility does restrict them to a specific set of locations in which they can use the skills they have for monetary gain. An expat from Romania who worked for a large multinational oil company constantly talked about his trips whenever we saw one another. Travelling from Brazil to the US to other parts of Europe was not only part of his job; it was part of his identity and an opportunity he would not have access to if he had stayed in Romania. When asked what he would do if he no longer had to travel for work there was a long pause before he answered, "I am really not sure, my job is kind of who I am right now." It can be argued that this is a personal choice and expats could choose to stay in their home countries but would have to sacrifice wage levels or professional enhancement. For these reason a variety of factors often lead expats to stay in the country they have migrated to for the long-term. These factors can include a spouse from another country; high unemployment rates back home, and social pressures to live up to ones potential both at home and abroad.

In many of these cases expat communities serve as a sort of way station when navigating from one culture into another. It is through the process of getting to know other expats that have been in the country longer and have experienced the same migratory patterns that they have that can lead to increased knowledge on how to integrate into local society. Additionally the subtle social pressures to integrate over time and in new ways can be helpful to people newly settled within a country. Expats often ask very pointed and specific questions about what school a fellow expat is sending their children to and why, what sort of transportation they are taking and how it compares to the locals, how their Dutch is coming along and how a person can improve over time. This continual ‘check’ on other people’s progress helps to encourage people new in the country to interact with organizations and local structures. It also helps people to fulfill neoliberal ideas of citizenship in which people are responsible for their own integration into a new society, something pushed by the local Dutch government (IND 2009). Expat organizations form a bridge to other Dutch social groups, and can lead to members encouraging others to participate in Dutch spaces whether it is football leagues, art groups or other Dutch spaces. Imitation can be common when experiencing new things, and often speaking with a person who has experienced something before or an encouraging email detailing how to join other groups can lead expats to put down greater ties in the local community. One expat said of their experience joining a squash league, “I was kind of hesitant at first because my Dutch wasn’t perfect and I was worried that people would just think who is this outsider. But after speaking to someone I met at an expat meet up they mentioned that they were a part of the club and encouraged me to join. They said that people were really friendly, there was a mix of expats and Dutch people and pointed out that my Dutch could only get better the more I used it. When I showed up the person I had met previously was there and now I have made some great friends ... both from other countries and locals.” The ability of long-term expats to help recently arrived expats form connections and access services helps people to form deeper integration ties to the country in which they now live.

While one aspect of continual mobility may be curbed by expats settling to a new country long term, the freedom of movement that comes with being an expat often

continues and plays a key role in how people experience the new countries that they have moved to.

### Going Back Home – Physical Connections to the Global

The ability to go back to one's home country is something that expats often have access to because of the status, money and employment opportunities that they have. One expat originally from Cuba, Maria, said that when she married her husband she specifically stipulated that if they were going to live in Europe she had to be able to go back to Cuba at least once every three months. She had met him when working at the International Patent Office, and although she loved him very much moving across the Atlantic Ocean to a new country represented an enormous sacrifice. She has now travelled back and forth for the past 10 years, and she said that although she loves her husband she could not have made the effort to live in the Netherlands and form a life here without the opportunity to also experience life in Cuba. For most expats the idea of 'going back home' is very important as it represents not just links to family and friends that they grew up with but also a sort of cultural comfort separate from the foreign one that they live in. "You can just sort of feel it," said one expat to me. She went on to expand, "You instinctively know how things work, what people mean exactly when they speak and even though things change over time you still have shared experiences with people." Even if expats don't go back to their home countries with the frequency of Maria, most attempt to make the journey at least every few years and spend considerable time and effort to go back. This represents a mode of thinking within global culture in which one can when one wants, to where one wants anytime (Cresswell 2006, 57). One woman described it to me as a refresher, "sometimes it takes a lot of effort to fit in, make new friends and figure out how things work. I think that is why I found it so helpful to travel somewhere else, especially in the beginning."

This sort of privilege is something that is not available to many other types of migrants, as Maria elaborated on. Her nephew had recently come to visit them from Cuba, and while he was here she made specific efforts to make sure that he understood the special position that she had in life that enabled her not only to travel back and forth so often from Cuba to the Netherlands but also maintain a specific standard of living in

Holland and global connections to the rest of the world. “I wanted him to go out and see how other people move around in this country because mine is not a typical story. We live in a really privileged position in this country and many other immigrants do not have the same advantages that we do. This is true not just of other Cuban immigrants but also people from other countries.” For expats the ability to visit and travel to their home country and other places represents a marker of status and success, a connection to a global mentality in which mobility is an important component.

## Chapter 2 - Conclusion

Expats represent a privileged class when it comes to the mobility they have access to. Often this leads to countries and cities designing programs to encourage that they view as ideal candidates for residency to come to their country. “Highly talented and original people will only move as long as their originality is recognized (Favell 2011, 94),” and nation states therefore attempt to adopt rhetoric and programs that recognize this small group of individuals by trying to form global cities. This highlights a tension between nation states attempts to attract global individuals and the integration they expect from their own citizens. Not all types of expats adopt the same strategies of integration. For short-term expats a focus on insular expat communities helps to provide a root to global culture until they move to a new posting, while for long term expats, organizations and expat connections often encourage them to make more steps towards integration into local communities. The ability of expats to travel highlights the privilege and separateness of expats from other groups of individuals. The continued mobility of both types of expats fosters connections not just to their original home countries, but also to the possibilities of having to break connections formed when they move again. This cycle of mobility and connectivity can be illustrated by the ways in which expats connect in the online space. The next chapter will examine this dynamic and analyze a key intersection of mobility, integration and connectivity.



### **Chapter 3: Online vs. In Real Life: Forms of Discourse and Connection to the Global and Local Online**

The Internet creates a unique forum in which the concepts of organizational structures, integration and mobility can be observed in one space. The reach of the Internet today allows for the almost unlimited reach of people, while addressing the specific structure and culture of people in a very physical reality. This chapter will show how online spaces can either connect expats to the local realities in which they live, or provide the ability to connect to global realities. This will be done through looking at expat forums, forum culture, and how formal institutions use the Internet.

In the last few decades, digital technologies have created a dramatic rewiring of the infrastructure present in our world (Horst and Miller 2013, 25). The focus of many organizations and the site of connections has changed from a very visible physical space to an at times more hidden digital one. That being said, information and opinions abound on expat life online. Whether through traditional organizations or independent expat groups, connections are being formed between people of this privileged and specific group. Networks are not new, however digital networking technologies, a hallmark of the Information Age, form new social and organizational networks in ways that have allowed for multiplying expansion and reconfiguration of expat groups (Castells 2011). Further in this chapter, the types of groups/networks formed and culture of these connections will be explored.

#### **Expat forums: One for Every Type of Expat**

Today almost every expat organization has a foot in the digital space. Whether through the use of traditional web pages as in the case of ACCESS and the International Women's Contact of Utrecht, or through the use of whatsapp groups stemming from meetup.com groups, people within expat communities come together through the use of technology. These groups can be small and specialized, as in the case of the private Facebook page solely for ACCESS volunteers which numbers a few hundred to the over 10,000 people who are in the Utrecht Expat Facebook forum. Smaller than this are the subgroups oftentimes created from these larger groups. Groups for people with specific



hobbies or interests include beginner runners groups and board game groups with less than 20 members. These groups can be a few weeks old (as in the case of the running group) or have existed since 2009 as in the case of the Utrecht Expats page. Expat groups allow for more specialized and localized communities to form outside of larger organizations that usually focus on a wide range of broader issues. While the total width and breadth of how expat organizations use technology cannot be completely explored within this chapter, a few phenomena such as forum culture and how people use the media can highlight the ways in which the integration and mobility of expats to local and global culture are impacted through the use of computers.

### Forum Culture: Connecting People Locally and Globally

Internet forums can show how individuals can both be pointed towards connection to both expat and local communities. Within expat forums people often pose questions based on what they experience in their everyday life, one woman who recently moved to the Netherlands wrote, “How do you feel when cycling in Utrecht? Safe? My boyfriend (Dutch) says it is completely safe, I should cycle fast, take my priority but I have had many "accidents." Or I see people doing strange stuff, all these scooters on paths etc... Just today, next to Neude, I was cycling and a car appeared on my left (I had priority) the driver was riding and looking to his right (I was on his left). Fortunately I stopped as I saw he was not looking in my direction. But what if it was night or crazy rain, when I don't really see drivers' faces? Few moments later some Asian tourists entered a biking path and I hit one of them (not much as I was almost stopped, but it happened).”

The post was extremely popular by the Utrecht Expat Facebook standards receiving 39 comments with additional replies to individual comments. However, even within this discussion a whole breadth of different interactions exist. This can range from the quite snippy, “If you don't feel safe in Utrecht on a bike then better don't ride one ever nowhere...” to the more positive, “Give yourself a bit of time. After a while, patterns will emerge from what might look like utter chaos to you now. And you'll begin to know from which directions you can expect traffic, cars and bikes, to come from. And with that knowledge you'll know where to look out. Cycling in this gorgeous city is a real treat.” When faced with specific topics such as the forum post about biking noted above,

people within expat forums are particularly helpful and kind. These types topics tend to include standard integration issues such as general tax questions, issues with biking, real estate recommendations and schooling tips and help expats navigate within the local culture in which they live.

However often when topics branch from the typical integration questions and instead venture into cultural or personal territory then a change in discourse can be seen. For instance there was one woman Sarah on the forum that posted about how she had adopted a cat but due to difficult circumstances in which she had to move she was trying to give the cat away to someone on the forum. She explained in her post that she had only had the cat for a month and a half and her new place didn't take animals, she was heartbroken to have to let it go but unfortunately she didn't see any other options. People posted their options freely in response to her post, and instead of discussing options as to what she could do with the cat the comments became a large discussion on how irresponsible that she was. A general consensus could be seen within the expat group, highlighting the common cultural values of personal responsibility and individualism that they shared. They discussed how she should have planned better, and in one person's words, it is not fair just to dump a pet because things get a little bit difficult. When talking to Sarah later she said that she really didn't expect the vitriol in response to her post. She later posted a short message on the forum saying that she had not expected such a strongly negative response before deleting her posts entirely. "I just wasn't expecting people to judge my life so quickly based on three sentences in an expat forum," she said. "I had seen other people post pet related things in the past and I just wanted to make sure that I could find a good home for my cat. In the end I don't think that it was worth it and I actually got very emotional about it. From now on I will only look at forums if I need to find something in particular and just read other people's posts not do my own." Sarah's experience led her to go from a participating member of a community to a silent one as she was not seen as a member of the community holding similar cultural values. This experience prevented her from connecting locally to other expats, as well as learning proper local conduct within the context that she lived.

In an online forum it is easy to be a member of an online forum for a specific place while being located in another one entirely. This can be extremely beneficial for a

portion of forum members, as it gives them time to ask questions they have before moving to Utrecht, form global connections with people who live in the place they are moving to before they arrive and in general prepare in a way that in all probability would take much longer if they had waited until they physically moved to Utrecht to find out. One man, Simon wrote of the group, “I have to say, Jane Smith (my wife) and I have gotten the biggest kick out of the many people from this group who have made a point to say hello, seemingly out of the blue, on the street, the latest being a French family, the mother Helen having followed my explorations over the past year+. What a lovely bunch of people you are, thanks for your warm welcome.” Simon stated that being able to join the forum before his move and make connections with people helped to prepare him for many things that he wouldn’t have otherwise thought of. From large issues such as immigration for his non-EU wife to smaller ones such as what the best place and type of bike to get for casual cycling around Utrecht the group really helped him since he is in his own words a planner. “It was really helpful to feel like when I moved to a new place I had the ability not just to ask questions and receive answers from people online but also had the ability to meet those people in person and form friendships. I think that it has made the move much easier and has encouraged me to go out and explore Utrecht in a way I might not have otherwise.” By having an already existing feeling of community when he moved to a place Simon was able to integrate and find roots faster within a local expat community by connecting through a global one.

In contrast expat forums can also help people vent their frustrations when they are not integrating as they would like. Online forums give people the opportunity to vent frustrations, and speak truths (or what they see as truths) to people who are often in the same circumstances as them. As one Indian woman Saanvi stated online, “In a country where even if you want to inculcate your hobbies and pursue it professionally, it costs a fortune. Even the professional finance money from the previous job of 4 years seems to be of no use so what does a person do...seek to internet and continue the 9-5 job search and be reminded of the exchange rate of Indian currency. So just a thought, next time either take birth in a developed country or earn and save in that developed country in this birth for another 10 years to pursue any hobby as profession if you want!!!” The difficulties faced especially by the spouses of expats who follow their loved ones to a

new country can be real and can lead to difficult transitions to settling in a new country. For Saanvi her experiences make it harder to connect to Dutch people who live and in her perception have created the system in which she is having so much difficulty. For this reason, her focus has been on finding connections to expats who share the same difficulties finding jobs and integrating as she has. Additionally, her difficulties feeling at home in the Netherlands are made both harder and easier by access to people back home through the Internet. As Saanvi said, “It is really great to be able to talk to my friends and family back home, especially since it is so expensive for us to travel back and forth all the time. But it is also kind of hard for me, I used to have a good job back in India and I can see all of my former colleagues doing things together and at work while I am struggling to find a job here.” Overseeing an integration process as an individual can have unique difficulties within the digital age pushing people towards expat and local connections.

Expats can additionally become more connected to local spaces through digital platforms. Expats who leave a site in which they have spent a period of time do not have to leave that space forever. While they may never or rarely visit the physical space in which they spent time again, in many cases they are still connected to the place through the digital connections that they have made. Leaving does not automatically mean losing contact with not just people but also communities that have ties to online groups. While this exists within a privileged space that people who do not have the technology and time may not have access to, it does redraw what it means to move and take part in a community. Leaving does not automatically cause the leaving of specific online spaces. A woman Anna placed on the Expats Utrecht page, looking for refugees and teachers to fill out a questionnaire on teaching/taking their inburgerings exam. In response another gentleman Joe wrote, “Yeah what’s about leaving the Facebook world and entering the real world? You are studying them get off your couch and find them personally if you wanna question them...” This response is a bit aggressive for posts usually placed on the page, but upon closer inspection the post takes on an initially more unusual tone. Joe does not live in Utrecht, while he did for about a year and a half from 2015 to 2016, he currently lives in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. He works as a film producer on mostly commercial and advertising based products. So why would he feel compelled to express such a strong opinion on a large forum based group when he no longer lives in

that place and what one person is writing their thesis on will not affect him in the slightest?

Online spaces and especially groups have the ability to make people feel that they are still connected to the physical space in which they have spent time. By commenting, being a part of and reading other peoples ongoing experiences online a person can feel connections to not just individual people but also a physical space and broader community. By joining an expat group, an individual is stating that they are people of a specific means, background and class and this enables them to form connections with others in their surroundings. In many ways this speaks to the recognition of people that they are connected to distinct communities all over the world by virtue of their ability to move about the world as they wish without facing the integration barriers of other people. Their self identity is not formed entirely by external influences but is instead is characterized by an individuals ability to reorganize time and space to meet their need (Giddens 2013, 68). This then creates mechanisms that separate the way in which individuals have social relations from specific individual locations (Ibid, 2). Within this context it is not unusual for a stranger hundreds of miles away to chastise another person within an online group, they are simply voicing their opinion within the context of a community and place that they still feel that they belong to. In this way, while online groups can be very beneficial in keeping people connected to not just their families and friendships they have formed back home and abroad they can also help to foster a broader feeling of belonging within expat groups for good and for ill.

### Institutions and the Use of the Internet to Connect People

Arjun Appadurai (1996, 67) has argued that migration combined with new electronic media has created “diasporic public spheres, phenomena that confound theories that depend on the continued salience of the nation-state as the key arbiter of important social changes.” These theories state that with the digitization of media, migrants especially do not have to experience local media and therefore are not shown the proper ways of conduct within culture that people can integrate into. This then creates a situation in which people don’t integrate into local culture and instead are surrounded by the culture that they already know. For Appadurai, people can exist within media silos

with for example expats only consuming international media no matter where they live in the world (Ibid). This thereby can create a scenario in which one never has to “leave home” despite migrating across large distances and cultures and being encouraged to integrate within the physical culture that you live in. However while much has been made by Appadurai about the loss of power of the nation state in making key social changes these circumstances have not come about due to increased access to international media. Increased liberalization laws and new civil rights directives over decades has already created scenarios in which public opinion can be shifted in new ways to create social changes. Laws regarding for instance the recognition of the right to marry for gay couples did not come from national media outlets as dictated to them by nation-states, but instead from small marginalized media cultures similar to the media silos in which people worry affects integration today. In the same way, although media cultures consumed by expats can lead to a focus to more global communities rather than local ones, this does not pose the threat to states in the ways that they fear.

People operate in territories that interfold between actual and digital space (Sassen 2005). Nothing is exclusively digital, this is why even in Facebook forum groups people attempt to get to know one another in real life. The need to form human connections face to face is still a powerful motivator for people in the digital age and plays a role in how expats form connections to the broader expat community. When I encountered individuals at all of the institutional events and organizations that I went to almost all people said that meeting other individuals face to face was why they sought out from expat institutions and groups in the first place. As one expat said, “I just wanted to meet people, find some people who I had something in common with, who were like me.” The use of the Internet for larger groups and institutions therefore serve as an initial filtering phase for individuals of a specific identity and class. As people meet one another within this phase further distilling is done as people find common ground in motherhood, age, hobbies, or even board games and then separate themselves from the larger general expat organizations such as ACCESS and International Neighbor Group Utrecht. This filtering occurs not just in the physical space but also the digital one, allowing for new online groups and spaces to form alongside the physical ones of formal institutions. These groups can then push individuals towards greater integration and new connections

with people in their local communities (such as joining groups that encourage outside engagement) or allow for exclusive group silos to form within the expat community isolating themselves from the topographical community that surrounds them.

### Chapter 3 - Conclusion

Saskia Sassen writes that global cities are “a border zone where the old spatialities and temporalities of the national and the new ones of the global digital age engage (2005, 18).” This is also a good explanation for what occurs within most forum and digital spaces within expat communities. This chapter has shown how online spaces can either connect expats to the local areas that they live, or provide the ability to connect to global linkages and culture. What were once a few specifically global cities now has the potential to spread to many parts of connected cities around the world through the Internet. Expats can also connect to individuals within the same physical community as them, commiserating and sharing insights on how to navigate within the new environments in which they find themselves. Individuals can also challenge old ideas of temporality by contributing to communities hundreds of miles away, or forming specific online communities in tandem with real life experiences. This changing of zones and borders creates a shift in how people connect to one another and to the spaces in which they find themselves whether in the media they access or the forums they visit. For expats the ability to be highly mobile, and the frequent ease in which they do not need to conform to specific integration markers can push them towards either local or global connections. Online spaces provide a tangible example of cultural realities for expats.





## **Conclusion**

In the book *Stars and Eurocities* Adrian Favell states, “Migration is a purely spatial movement from a to b, that only becomes formalized through immigration, asylum, legal and illegal status and so on; by extraneous political and legal conceptualizations that draw lines between types of movement that states want to classify, distinguish, regulate and thereby control” (2011, 98). The control in this case however does not lie with states, and it is for this reason that expats show the unique instances of integration, mobility and connection in Dutch society, while existing both within the Dutch and global communities. This thesis set out to showcase how expats exist both within Dutch society and global culture in three parts. First this was accomplished by answering how being part of a highly skilled professional expat class integrates into Dutch society. Second it examined the role that mobility plays in separating expats from other groups within the Netherlands. Finally it looked at the motives and methods that expats use to connect to both local and global communities through the Internet. After answering the main research question the limitations of the research conducted will be discussed. Following this it will conclude with an examination of the relevance of this thesis.

## Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 showed how expats both succeed and fail to integrate within larger Dutch society. Though for a state it is a rational choice to insist on integration into wider society, for many expats integration into a global community outside of nation state borders is a more rational choice given the long term nature of their jobs and mobility (Favell 2011, 135). Social capital and bonding were explored as ways to further integration and community links, as well as coping strategies needed by expats to deal with their new environments. Alternative structures such as education and language used highlighted to show how this phenomenon can be used to prevent expats from integrating into a wider national context and instead keep them contained within a global one.

Chapter 2 highlighted how expats form communities despite their highly mobile lifestyles. Further to this, the role of global cities with similar infrastructure, employment opportunities and cultural practice demonstrated how expats stay within global cultural

bubbles as they move from localized physical topographies in different nation states. The tension for today's Dutch state was then discussed. The state must deal with issues related to attracting expats through programs that facilitate global capitalist goals, while nation states also insist on the necessity of integration programs for other parts of the population. Short term verses long term settlement for expats showed how for short term expats integration to a global community is more often chosen, while long term expats are more likely to take steps to become part of local culture. Finally, the physical mobility of expats showed how mobility constraints do not exist in the same way for expats as they do for other groups in society, giving them the privilege of choosing how and when they would like to integrate locally.

Chapter 3 analyzed the online expat space and by doing so discussed how the Internet affects integration, mobility and connectivity by virtue of being able to speak with people all around the world. This was illustrated through the manner in which individuals use expat groups and forum culture. For some this meant reaching out to other expats as to how to practice local customs, to others it means venting personal grievances to an international community that they believe understands their frustrations. Media and culture in today's digital age was then discussed, as was how institutions are now using the Internet to connect people.

### Limitations

Every expat has a different story, and due to this the scope of this research is limited to the people I encountered and the stories they told. Similarly while this research included all of the Utrecht area, there are expat communities and groups that I am sure I was not able to include in my research. Due to the fluid and spontaneous nature of especially online expat groups, the scope and sample of the expats that I spoke to has been limited within this thesis. Additionally, in analyzing my data contained within the Utrecht area and tying that to themes of global cities and communities, a larger focus on other major cities in the Netherlands and their expat populations could help to highlight the interplay between Dutch and global culture.

Through this research I have tried to showcase the most honest representation of expat experiences and realities today. However all informants used within this thesis are

presented with the use of pseudonyms, which can lead to a dehumanization of individual people. It can also present opportunities for their initial quotes to be interpreted and analyzed outside of the broader context in which they were given, something that I was not able to do given the constraints and limits included in writing a thesis. Finally this thesis focuses on expats, a privileged, well-educated and upper class group of individuals. They represent a very small portion overall immigrants to the Netherlands and due to their privilege have very different migration experiences than other people. For this reason conclusions reached within this thesis are limited solely to expats within the Utrecht area and cannot be extended to other immigrant groups in the Netherlands.

### Discussion and Relevance

Despite the assertion of some, expats are not from nowhere. They exist within a specific culture formed by globalization that seeks to benefit from and contribute to the global economy. By being a part of expat culture as well as a home country expats then have the opportunity to choose how much they would like to integrate and form connections with the local community in which they are posted. This is affected both by their mobility, personal circumstances and the infrastructure that surrounds them in particular the global cities. For theory going forward this means that more focus should be taken on not just the big three cities highlighted by Sassen (Tokyo, London and New York) but also on the process of how countries seek to attract expats and high skilled workers when attempting to build global cities. The creation of global cities and global communities within countries will affect all local areas differently and people from expat communities will experience different privileges in different cities. In order to refine theory on global cities more attention should be paid to the differences between different global cities and their local context so that a globalized picture can be mapped. For Utrecht and the Netherlands focus on what global cities can bring creates a situation in which national governments incentivize privileged expat individuals to integrate into global culture, while holding other citizens and immigrants in the country to a different standard. In practice this research can be used to challenge narratives put forward by the government about the equality and integration they say they want for all citizens. It can also help expat communities understand how and in what ways individual expats connect

to both local and global communities. It can also help to prevent potential conflicts in the future due to a failure to misunderstandings about how expats integrate as this could inhibit a countries ability to integrate into the larger global economy. This can be particularly of interest to scholarship and society in the Netherlands as the Netherlands is a country attempting to integrate into a globalized world. By working to understand expats, programs and organizations can be tailored to help expats understand the privilege they exist within and the part it plays in shaping global cities and culture.

This research showed that expat culture and Dutch culture do not have to form an antagonistic relationship with people needing to choose one or the other. In many ways whether through the Internet or formal organizations, expat organizations can help to connect expats to Dutch society, and Dutch society can perhaps in the same way be enriched by individual expats making their mark within the country. Despite the barriers that mobility and integration may form for expats when entering society the human need to connect both within local and global groups can occur leading to unique specified experiences.



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## **Appendix**

### Expat Organizations and Networks

#### **ACCESS**

ACCESS is a not-for-profit organization supporting the international community in the Netherlands for the past 30 years. ACCESS is run entirely by a team of volunteers who have themselves been expats. Their vision is to provide essential, comprehensive and unique services in the Netherlands, through the experience of their volunteer expatriate community. Their international team of experienced volunteers seeks to give out practical information, advice, support and services to assist with all aspects of moving to, or living in the Netherlands.

<http://www.access-nl.org>

#### **Information Desk Expat Center Utrecht**

The Expat Center Utrecht is a one-stop shop for international people living in Utrecht. They offer services in two main areas:

- Government formalities at arrival in Utrecht (for example residence permits and municipal registration)
- Practical information and referrals to reliable service providers.

There are currently eight official Expatcenters in the Netherlands. Each one is a government organization that offers an accelerated procedure in arranging the residency and municipal registration of highly skilled migrants and their accompanying family members. The desks are created so that all international residents of the Utrecht region are welcome to use the information desk of the Expat Center Utrecht.

<https://www.utrecht.nl/city-of-utrecht/living/expat-center/>

#### **Expats Utrecht**

Closed English language Facebook Group with 4 administrators and approximately 9000 members that serves to connect Expats both within Utrecht and moving to Utrecht in the future on practical and social matters. Members are part of group by approval of the administrators and consist of expat residents in Utrecht, those who are planning to move to Utrecht and those who previously lived in Utrecht but have stayed in the group after leaving the area.

#### **International Neighbor Group Utrecht**

The International Neighbor Group organizes social activities for international staff, Ph.D. students and Master's students at Utrecht University, the Utrecht Medical Centre and related research institutions. Additionally, they have a mailing list, which they use to send out information about activities and a Google Group UURING, which is used to find or offer housing, bicycles, household goods, etc.

<https://sites.google.com/site/ingutrecht/>

### **International Women's Contact of Utrecht**

The International Women's Contact Utrecht (IWCU) was established in June 1992 to promote contact between English-speaking women living in the Province of Utrecht. Their purpose is to provide a place for women to meet each other, find support and information, make friends and socialize. They are structured to be open to women of all ages and nationalities, those with children and those without, single and married. All club activities are in English and are organized by members for members.

<http://iwcu.nl>