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# Transnational mobility and rootedness: the upper middle classes in European cities

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**Abstract** *Some authors argue that 'mobilities' form the distinctive feature of late modern societies and represent a new social cleavage between cosmopolitan mobile élites and urban residents more rooted in their local neighbourhoods. One assumption in contemporary discourses of rootedness is that this new transnational or global society entails an ongoing process of uprooting individuals and a mainly mobile élite packing up and relocating. In this article, we draw on empirical comparative research to examine the patterns and dynamics of mobility and belonging across European borders among upper-middle-class managers in four cities – Paris, Madrid, Milan and Lyon. We suggest that these new urban upper-middle-class managers display flight responses, or 'partial exit' strategies, which operate at various levels to enable them to protect and control their interests while holding onto the reins of power in their local communities. Our study adopts a micro-level perspective to explore individual experiences, strategies, motivations and values based on interviews with 480 managers in these cities.*

**Keywords** MOBILITY, EUROPEANIZATION, TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS, MIDDLE CLASSES, CITIES, ROOTEDNESS

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Once upon a time, a London Business School professor, Ian Angell, impressed and amused by his former students, wrote *The new barbarian manifesto: how to survive the information age* (Angell 2000) to offer these aspiring young middle-class high-tech workers a few tips. To survive the digital age, he suggested, they should make the most of community resources and local facilities in their neighbourhoods and cities, while holding back from any long-term investment in them. He also advocated

a managerial policy of privatization and short-termism for running as many projects and facilities as possible. Who were these so-called ‘new barbarians’ in charge of our globalized world? Are they the rational transnational mobile agents who act as free riders in any urban setting through which they happen to pass?<sup>1</sup>

This question is particularly pertinent in the European context given that the sociology of continental cities stresses the persistent importance of neighbourhood attachment and social networks (Bagnasco and Le Galès 2000; Crouch 1999; Favell and Guiraudon 2011; Kaelble 1990; Kazepov 2005; Le Galès 2002; Le Galès and Therborn 2010). What is clearly apparent, especially in central and southern Europe, is the role played by enduring and entrenched links between local businesses, kinship, friendship networks and knowledge of local politics (Crouch et al. 2001). In this landscape of continuity and stability, the UK, known for its comparatively high levels of geographical and social mobility, proves to be the exception to the rule.

We base this article on the findings of some explorative and comparative empirical research carried out in four continental European cities on a specific upper-middle-class social group – managerial service workers. Our findings reveal that the image of free-floating, upper-middle-class workers, suspended in their transnational networks, is very different from the managers’ actual lives. The managers we interviewed presented a very different picture, for they talked about their sense of attachment, rootedness and of belonging to their local community. Mobility clearly constitutes a key aspect of their professional lives, but they also stressed important elements of continuity, not just mobility and change. Our research relied on the classical sociological urban conceptual toolbox (namely city and neighbourhood, and the classical urban cleavages of city centre versus periphery) deployed within a comparative framework. From a methodological viewpoint, this research makes a significant contribution to the field, as there are no data available to examine entwined factors of mobility and rootedness as we understand them. Thus, we were compelled to generate original data combining qualitative analysis with a quantitative component – a relatively large sample, selected with precise comparative criteria and based on typological features. Indeed, a crucial characteristic of our research is precisely its exploratory nature and objective.

We have divided this article into three sections. In the first, we deal with the question of mobility, the uprooting process going along with it and the importance of mobility as a new form of social cleavage in our societies. In the second, we put forward the partial (temporary) exit hypothesis, arguing that one way this social group has to use mobility is to combine exit along with rootedness strategies. In the third, we present the empirical results of our research.

### **How important is mobility for understanding contemporary societies, class and social differentiation?**

The issue of mobility raises questions about both the social structure of national societies and the life strategies of individual actors (Kennedy 2010). Some social theorists, notably John Urry, see ‘mobilities’ as a distinctive feature of late modern

society under increasingly globalized conditions. He suggests that the classical idea of the nation-state society is dead and, with it, traditional concepts of class, reproduction and regional attachment. Sociology, according to Urry, should go beyond societies and focus on 'the diverse mobilities of people, objects, images, information and wastes and on the complex interdependences between, and societal consequences of these diverse mobilities' (Urry 2000: 187). We understand these mobilities as crucial flows across national borders for purposes such as work, housing, leisure, religion, family relationships, criminal gain or asylum seeking. Others see globalization as forcing European societies to undergo dramatic changes. Here mobility is a key factor, indexing the forging of a global or cosmopolitan society despite the environmental and emotional costs that mobility entails (Elliott and Urry 2010). Social theorists of globalization emphasize the reshaping of exchanges, transactions and strategies of individual and collective actors in a global arena. Giddens (1994) explains how social relations are becoming more *disembedded*, detached from socio-spatial markers at the individual level, while at the macro level traditional institutions are becoming more detached from the local national context and gradually replaced by global ones. Beck (1999: 81) argues that society no longer connects to a specific geographical entity and suggests a shift of paradigm in sociology from a nation-state centred approach to a cosmopolitan perspective because 'a new kind of society and personal life are in the making'.

These discourses rely on the implicit assumption that this transnational, global or cosmopolitan society, as in turn it is defined, entails a process of uprooting, which affects both individuals and organizations. This process strains and weakens people's ties to their local communities or country of origin as their allegiances shift to a more global sense of belonging and social, economic or political interests and concerns.

From this perspective, highly mobile workers, whether migrants or upper-middle-class individuals, are supposed to be the first to experience these changes and are the ones best placed to benefit from them (see the growing literature on transnational migration, for example, Guarnizo et al. 2003; Levitt et al. 2006). Because these business people, the new global elite, join transnational/global networks, they escape involvement and participation in their local communities as active citizens in local/national politics. These globetrotting professionals appear incapable of forming lasting attachments and commitments, either to a place or to people, as well as unwilling to pay taxes or to contribute to or get involved in their local communities, which often entails sacrifice (Angell 2000).

From a completely different theoretical stance, some depict these high-powered movers and shakers as uprooted professionals who constitute a new transnational capitalist class (Beck 1999; Robinson and Harris 2000; Sklair 1995, 2001). Sklair (1995: 62) defines them as 'an international bourgeoisie: a socially comprehensive category, encompassing the entrepreneurial elite, managers of firms, senior state functionaries, leading politicians, members of the learned professions ... plus the media, culture, consumption'. Within this framework, they see mobility as a new form of capital, which may play a vital role in the formation of social class.

Mobility appears as a form of new social cleavage, which pits traditional

categories of *locals* and *cosmopolitans* against one another. *Locals* are limited by and confined to their neighbourhood, bound to their local patch, while *cosmopolitans* relate to a global world and are detached from their residential area. As Castells (1996: 415) puts it, 'elites are cosmopolitan, people are local'. This, some sociologists argue, may have serious implications for local politics and social cohesion (Gustafson 2009): some upper-middle-class groups are bypassing national and local constraints to obtain greater personal or collective benefits.

Despite the effects of dislocation and uprooting mentioned above, multiple transnational mobilities and networks might quite possibly be a growing feature of European citizens' everyday lives and of upper-middle-class individuals in particular, though we have yet to confirm the assertion empirically. Steffen Mau, for instance, has shown how in Germany transnational mobility tends to favour the most educated (Mau 2010), which is consistent with Fligstein's (2008) findings on the making of Europeans, and Medrano's (2011) research on class and Europeanization. Our empirical research gathers evidence on the extent to which we can consider a specific upper-middle-class social group as transnationally mobile.

However, as Hannerz (2003) or Burawoy et al. (2005) ask, does it make sense to study mobility without thinking about local lives or neighbourhoods? Much of the mobility literature explores change and new developments, which may have considerable long-term effects but could also be explained or mediated by individuals' sense of belonging or rootedness to a specific area. To avoid falling into the trap of seeing change where there is none, sociologists researching mobility empirically highlight that they need to investigate this phenomenon in relation to rootedness, locality and local lives (Kennedy 2007; Mau 2010; Savage et al. 2005). Mau shows how even the most stable and immobile section of the German population is becoming transnational through interacting with migrants.

Following the Savage et al. (2005: 207) argument, a study of how embedded and rooted individuals are in their local communities can often illuminate other aspects of mobility such as patterns of leisure, work, sociability or schooling. Furthermore, as the growing phenomenon of mobility takes on new meanings, we need to refine the concept of *local*, which global processes are now affecting more than ever (Kennedy 2010). In this respect, Michael Savage and his colleagues make a fine contribution with their concept of 'elective belonging'. Their hypothesis is that increased mobility, along with the capacity to access a range of social spaces and networks, considerably expands the playing field of possibilities in terms of how individuals experience their sense of belonging to, and negotiate their involvement in, a given locality. Meanings of belonging clearly differ according to the social groups in question. Among the more rooted, their attachment to a neighbourhood can be so taken for granted that they are barely aware of it, whereas for mobile upper-middle-class managers it may be far more a matter of free choice. In their study of Manchester's middle classes and various social groups' practices of 'elective belonging', Savage and his colleagues explore residents' deliberate decisions about where to live and whether to get involved in specific local social networks (Savage et al. 2005). What they note is how, with their access to economic, social and human resources, the upper middle classes

can choose to promote and articulate their interests at various levels, whether local, metropolitan, regional or national, and in several spheres, be they cultural, educational or political.

This article follows this route by analysing two sets of dynamics operating within neighbourhoods and cities – transnationalization and rootedness. How mobile are Europe’s urban managers? How embedded are they in transnational networks? Are they adopting new transnational practices while still rooted in their local and national communities? Our findings suggest that these groups have an above average likelihood of being mobile (see Favell and Recchi 2009; Mau 2010) and that their mobility seems to allow them to develop ‘partial exit’ strategies, thus requiring us to pay as much attention to dynamics of transnational mobility as to processes of urban rootedness. If one is to highlight how embedded individuals are in social networks, how much they take part in activities, and which services they need and use at every territorial level (national, regional and local) it is necessary to look at their experiences of mobility as well as at their ties to their place of residence, whether nation-state, city or neighbourhood.

### **Transnationalism and rootedness: the ‘partial exit’ hypothesis**

Statistics on European residential mobility fail to indicate a generalized trend of geographical mobility among the continent’s population. Only 1.5 to 2 per cent of Europeans move to another country each year. While the proportion is increasing gradually over time, it nevertheless remains among the lowest in the world (3 per cent at the global level). Moreover, while 7.2 per cent move house every year (compared with more than 16 per cent in the USA), half of these remain in the same residential area. Mobility conceived of this kind affects a small fraction of Europe’s population. The figures Favell and Recchi (2009) provide show the small scale of transnational mobility within the EU, but the high significance of this limited mobility.

Mobility is far from being an evenly spread phenomenon among European populations. Although small pockets of retired people spend part of the year in their houses abroad in search of milder climates, and modest numbers of young people live abroad as part of their educational trajectories, the most mobile Western Europeans belong to the upper middle class and the majority rarely venture far from home (Gustafson 2009; Mau 2010). Our aim is to look beyond media stereotypes of a super élite of highly mobile managers who shuttle between global cities and airport VIP lounges (for frequent flyers only) bringing evidence of how transnationalization and rootedness can, in fact, coexist. In the light of this, we revisit the classic *local–cosmopolitan* cleavage on which many sociologists rely to depict these groups: this pairing may still prove useful to ascertain just how invested these high-flyers are in global or transnational networks, and to what extent they may be losing their attachment to their local communities.

Savage et al. (2005) argue that their increasing mobility has allowed the upper middle classes (which have economic, social and human resources on which to rely) to choose how to promote and articulate their interests at different territorial scale

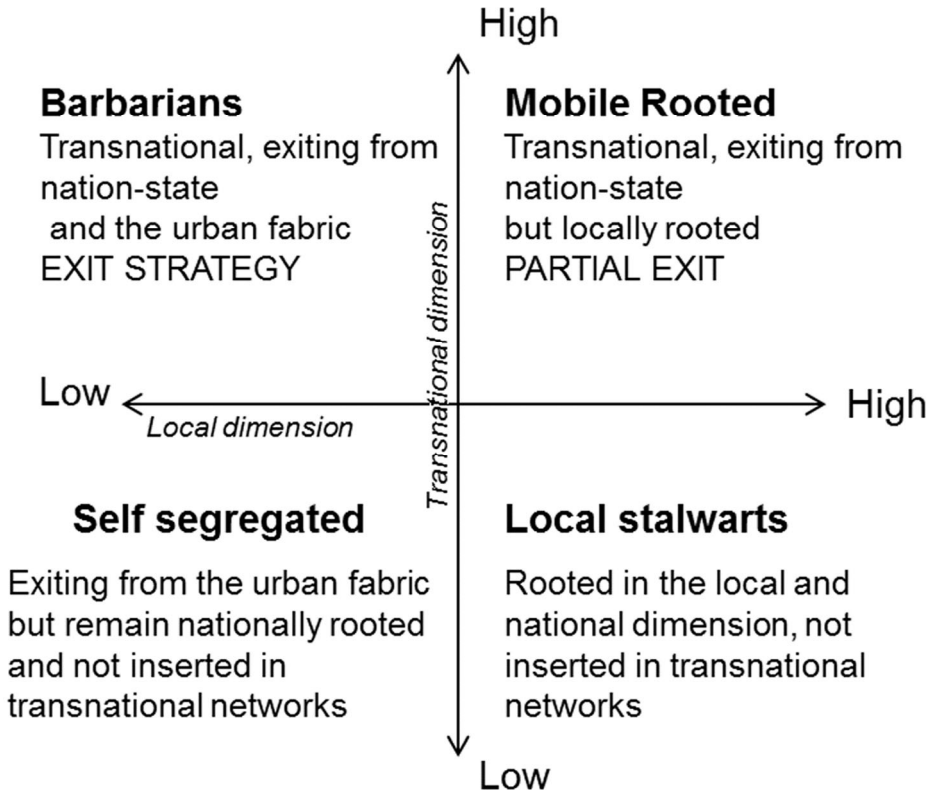
levels. We argue that one possible way for this social group to promote its interests is to implement ‘exit’ or ‘partial exit’ strategies (Bartolini 1998, 2005), both at national and local urban levels. Individuals can choose to ‘exit’ their home country through physical migration, but this option remains relatively rare and costly (even in a Europe without borders and with freedom of movement) (see Favell’s 2008 study of ‘Eurostars’). They can choose from among a variety of ‘partial exits’ through consumption, friendships, job strategies, housing, children’s activities and education, or via financial investments. Thus, individuals belonging to these social groups may, for instance, choose to send their children to a transnational school or university (one kind of ‘exit’ option), or avoid using the national public services (such as health services), preferring instead to use other facilities. When viewed as a whole, the sum of these personal choices has huge implications at the collective level, affecting how public services function. Opportunities for ‘partial exit’ allow these individuals to (re)negotiate their position within the national social structure, for example to protest against or escape what they may perceive as high levels of taxation, to secure property or invest income outside their nation-state and to campaign actively for health or educational reform. Individuals can also opt to ‘exit’ from one sphere rather than another, thus producing a complex set of decisions that need to be examined at different *levels* – local/urban, national/European or transnational/global. Individuals might, for example, ‘exit’ from their national public health system but decide to get involved in local politics either at ward or borough level. As the urban literature shows, urban elites partly define who they are according to *location* (the street, neighbourhood, district, city, or urban region in which they choose to live). One extreme form of ‘exit’ at the local level is, in fact, to choose to live in segregated places (such as gated communities).

Viewed this way, some upper and middle-class groups seem fairly well placed to manage such ‘exit’ strategies from their home city or country of residence. Other groups, by contrast, have neither the resources nor the potential to escape their city or district. Education, mobility, travel, professional and social networks all provide means to secure a ‘partial’ (or temporary) ‘exit’ from the social constraints that come with urban living. In Figure 1, we attempt to account for mobility through two sets of dynamics, namely transnationalization and rootedness. The transnational dimension is strong when individuals adopt transnational practices and join transnational networks; rootedness is high when individuals use local facilities and services and integrate well into formal and informal local networks. Exit strategies appear as by-products of both these dimensions combined.

This simple diagram gives rise to four possible social ideal types. At one extreme, are the highly mobile *nomads/barbarians* operating at a transnational level and hardly committed to their local community – ‘exit’ strategies are very common among them. This type recalls Angell’s (2000) ‘new barbarians’ mentioned above. At the other extreme, we find the *local stalwarts* who are anchored in their local communities, rarely deploy any ‘exit’ strategies and do not perform on national or transnational stages. The *self-segregated* practise exit strategies in a local context (for instance they live in ‘gated communities’ or do not use public services) but have no transnational

networks; they retreat into their private social lives, which remain anchored in the traditional national context. Finally, the *mobile and rooted* are in transnational networks and deploy certain ‘exit’ strategies (what we label ‘partial exit strategies’), while remaining locally rooted. They tend to favour investing their time and energy in their local and sometimes their national networks; they try to get the best of both worlds. As we shall see, this profile best fits the managers we interviewed.

**Figure 1: Upper-middle-class exit strategies – combining the national and the urban scale**



In the following sections, we show some evidence to counter the hypothesis of the rise of a class of new displaced barbarians.

### **Measuring mobility**

This study, which adopts a micro-level perspective, looks at the individual experiences, strategies, motivations, values and narratives of upper social strata living in four European cities – Lyon, Madrid, Milan and Paris. The approach is qualitative and the sample non-statistically representative, but it nonetheless enables us to identify clear and revealing behavioural patterns. We conducted 120 semi-structured in-depth interviews in each city, therefore 480 interviews in all.



The category of upper middle class is quite large and covers different social groups in relation to economic, financial, human and social capital, thus also in terms of social status and prestige. There is considerable debate about the nature and characteristics of these groups (for instance Bagnasco and Negri 1994; Butler and Savage 1995; Goldthorpe 1982; Martin 1998; Pinçon-Charlot and Pinçon 2000). For the purpose of our comparative research, we chose the category of managers, restricting the focus of our analysis to individuals working as employees (either in the public or private sector), and leaving therefore aside those professionals and entrepreneurs who in fact belong in the same social strata. We retained three other criteria to define more precisely the group we chose to make our interviewees more comparable. First, level of education, selecting informants with at least a university degree and more often than not a master's degree; second, autonomy in their jobs, meaning the capacity to manage time, and the content of their work; third, responsibility at work, for example, coordinating a team or deciding on the careers and salaries of other workers. All the interviews conducted in the four cities fulfilled these criteria.

Our research focuses either on managers who never left their country of origin or on those who decided to come back. Our sample therefore excludes the most internationally oriented individuals who have not returned (and may never do so). Nevertheless, our decision to look at transnationalization and urban rootedness in relation to the dimension of 'exit', justifies our choice. (For further details on the selection of upper-middle-class groups, see Andreotti and Le Galès 2008a, 2008b; Andreotti et al. 2010.)

Dynamic metropolitan urban regions were the most appropriate locations for our research on the articulation of manager lifestyle strategies in Europe. In line with the literature on globalization and global cities, Paris and London seemed obvious, indeed unavoidable, choices as European global cities. Given that Tim Butler had already conducted studies in London, first with Savage (Butler and Savage 1995) and then with Robson (Butler and Robson 2003), we decided to focus only on Paris, but to contrast our results by drawing on their published London material. Meanwhile, we included Lyon, Milan and Madrid in our selection to represent dynamic, relatively large and international European cities, although they do not display quite the same global features as Paris and London. Our selection thus contributes to understanding whether there is any difference between the largest urban regions such as London and Paris and other European cities, which is something that the globalization literature has emphasized. Within each city, we planned to select four neighbourhoods and to conduct 30 interviews in each one of them.

We based the choice of neighbourhoods on two criteria – location and social structure. The classic city centre–suburb dichotomy discussed in the urban sociology literature raises the question of whether any differences or similarities actually exist in respondents' strategies, whether it is indeed possible to identify what David Lockwood (1995) used to call 'the urban seeking' versus the 'urban fleeing' middle classes. For this reason, we selected two neighbourhoods within the city limits, and two outside the city in residential suburbs. The other variable we took into account in selecting the neighbourhoods was social structure. Therefore, in each city, we identified two neighbourhoods with the highest concentration of upper social strata, and

two neighbourhoods with a more mixed social composition, one each in the city centre and the suburbs respectively. We based the choice on census data in each case. By homogenous neighbourhoods, we mean that concentrations of upper-middle-class and middle-class residents are very high. In the typically mixed neighbourhoods we selected, by contrast, those groups comprise less than one-third of the households. Therefore, in each city we interviewed respondents in the following areas – a highly homogenous city centre neighbourhood, a highly homogeneous suburban neighbourhood, a city centre neighbourhood with a mixed population, and a suburb with a mixed population. In this article, we neither elaborate on specific urban questions nor enter details of centre–periphery cleavages.

We based the interviews on a semi-structured questionnaire including both closed and open questions allowing interviewees to express their ideas and feelings on all issues and structured the grid of the interview around five themes. We interviewed managers about their career experiences abroad that had lasted for more than six months, about their flexibility to relocate, their reasons for moving and their preferred countries. To explore their residential trajectories, we enquired about their choice of city and of the neighbourhood in which they lived. To understand sociability patterns, we paid attention to family and friendship ties, which are a crucial aspect of transnationalization and Europeanization (and which allow us to compare national and local relationships with transnational ones). Regarding managers' contacts with more formal networks and organizations, we asked them about their involvement in local, national, European or transnational associations and political parties, initiatives and public bodies.

We analysed their *daily practices* to get a sense of the European or transnational dimension of their consumption patterns. These included watching television, listening to foreign radio, reading newspapers, using the internet for voice and video conference calls. We assessed their knowledge of foreign languages and looked at their travel itineraries, for example the number of journeys they had taken abroad over the last year, how many flights they took each month, the destinations and durations of their trips, and whether they were for business or leisure. We asked them about their children's education. Had they opted for private, public, national or international schooling for their children? Where were the schools located? What foreign languages did they learn? Did they study abroad? Lastly, we asked our interviewees about their own identities, values and attitudes to national and European politics, in particular their views on EU integration and enlargement. One final methodological point deserves to be mentioned. As we noted above, all the respondents had to fit some common criteria and some were deliberately clustered in particular neighbourhoods. However, although we were not necessarily aiming for a representative sample, an important element in the selection was to avoid any snowball effect (namely selecting respondents with personal connections with one another). Because of our emphasis on networks, we needed to avoid interviewing people who knew one another and had similar social practices, friends or values. We thus used a range of sources to find our respondents, depending on the local context examined: we drew on alumni associations, lists of former students from universities or *grandes écoles*, public lists

of engineers and local occupational associations of managers, as well as basic door-to-door sampling techniques, or visiting schools at which respondents might have enrolled their children.

### **Transnationally mobile or rooted? Managers and mobility in a virtual global world**

The managers we studied clearly belong to a globalized world: they rely on the internet and new mobile technologies, and their consumption of transnational mass media is unmistakable. Most conduct business via international conference calls or email, and some watch foreign TV channels (CNN or BBC), partly to improve their English and partly to obtain a fresh perspective on current affairs. Some regularly read the foreign press<sup>2</sup> and most speak English (half our interviewees speak a foreign language). In effect, they belong to a ‘global’ world of professional transnational networks. However, our findings about mobility, as they experience it in their daily lives, reveal another side to this.

On the question of mobility, our empirical evidence suggests a more complex picture. This makes it difficult to see our interviewees as forming a homogeneous social group, even among those living in the same city. Unexpectedly, our research indicates that half our respondents have surprisingly little if any involvement in a mobile transnational career lifestyle.

We cannot define these managers as leading a transnational lifestyle *tout court*. A significant proportion had lived abroad for longer than six months for either career or study reasons, a far higher proportion than the rest of the population (Table 1; see also Favell and Recchi 2009).

**Table 1: Percentage of respondents with foreign experience of more than six months by city\***

	<i>Paris</i>	<i>Lyon</i>	<i>Madrid</i>	<i>Milan</i>	<i>Total</i>
Experience abroad	57.4	38.5	42.4	42.6	43.8
No experience abroad	42.6	61.5	57.6	57.4	56.2
Total	100.0 (N. 61)	100.0 (N. 117)	100.0 (N. 66)	100.0 (N. 108)	100.0 (N. 352)

\* We base the figures on an analysis of two-thirds of our database.

Paris stands out for having a higher than average number of upper-middle-class residents who have worked abroad, which might reflect its role as a transnational urban hub and as a node in a virtual network with varied opportunities on offer for employees. Madrid and Milan rank second, while Lyon appears to lag behind. In part, professional experience abroad also seems related to the sort of company for which our respondents worked: the larger the company the higher the chances our managers had of working abroad. Fewer women than men in our study had worked abroad: once

again, Paris scored highest (45.5 per cent), and Madrid lowest (21.7 per cent) (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Percentage of respondents with foreign experience by gender**

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
Experience abroad	47.1	36.8	43.8
No experience abroad	52.9	63.2	56.2
Total	100.0 (N. 238)	100.0 (N. 114)	100.0 (N. 352)

Overall, working abroad for six months meant posting to New York, Paris (for non-Parisians), London, Brussels and, to a lesser extent, to British, European (including Madrid) or other North or South American cities. Few respondents had worked in Africa or Asia, though some had spent time in Japan or China. These career secondments appear largely confined to the Northern hemisphere, with Paris and London looming large as key destinations for Milanese upper managers.

The managers stressed the importance of their experience abroad in their narratives, and those with prior experience of this kind appeared the most likely to relocate if given another chance. Yet, they spoke eloquently about the challenge of adapting to new countries and mores, especially for their families. In this case, our findings overlap with Favell's (2008) vivid descriptions of expatriates' trials and tribulations.

Working abroad offered these managers avenues for improving their job prospects within the internal (national and local) labour markets. Far from seeing their transnational experience as a planned permanent move, interviewees viewed it more instrumentally as a way of gaining expertise in an international setting to boost their future career prospects once they returned home. This preliminary finding appears to clash with the uprooting hypothesis, which, if it were true, would diminish the role of national and local spheres as arenas where careers soar to new heights; if this were the case, these managers would have envisaged each country as a springboard to new pastures. In fact, when managers describe their transnational leaps and moves, these seem inextricably bound to their home terrain (whether their home county or neighbourhood): hardly ever do they picture themselves 'here, today and there, tomorrow'. In their words, 'tomorrow' invariably amounts to 'my home turf' (or 'hometown'). Furthermore, for the majority, their preferred option was to remain in their current location and do short trips abroad (rather than to relocate abroad).

Questions on mobility aspirations reinforced the contrast between managers who wanted to go abroad, those who were potentially available to move, and the small group available to move without conditions. Members of the 'rooted' group gave very contrasting reasons for not wanting to move, including family commitments and linguistic shortcomings. Also, and particularly in Paris, those who have reached a

high rank in the hierarchy do not want to bother any more. The second group comprises managers who, if asked, might go abroad under two conditions – a limited period abroad and a favourable country, which mainly means Western Europe, the United States and, in very few cases, China. Hardly anyone mentioned Africa, South America, Australia and the Middle East. This is a major contrast with the Savage et al. (2005) study of Manchester, where Europe ranked far lower than Australia or New Zealand.

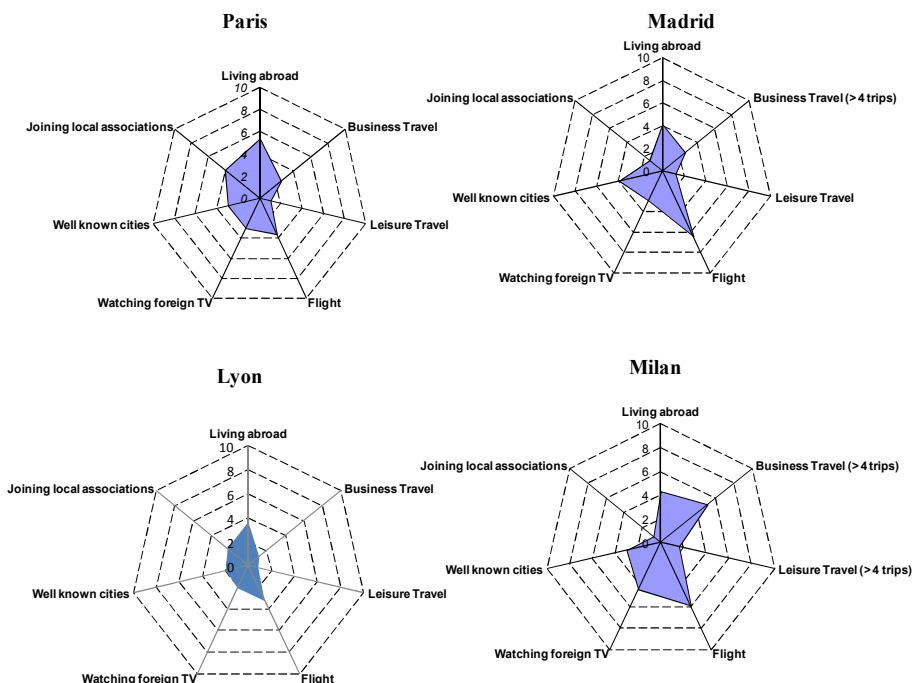
In our sample, these profiles are almost transversal to the hierarchical and life course positions. Managers with heavy workplace responsibilities seemed unlikely to move, as were younger managers (especially Milanese) and older ones. A crucial factor seemed to be the company in which they worked: energy or construction engineers are more likely to be available to relocate and to have worked abroad irrespective of age. Those with previous foreign experience abroad are more inclined to accept relocating for a second time. Some accounts emphasized the influence of earlier secondments, despite the strain of having to adapt to new circumstances and cultures, especially for their families. Some managers alluded to these pressures when describing the breakdown of their marriages. Those who have not worked abroad are less inclined to consider that option. Combining these two variables (experience abroad and availability to relocate) reveals two polarized groups – a rooted group with no international career experience or intention of gaining any, and the globetrotting nomads still seeking new horizons.

The analysis of business and leisure trips give very similar results (see Figure 2). These managers made short trips to London, Paris, Madrid, Barcelona or New York, as well as to other European capitals. They felt they had reasonable knowledge of at least one other city, mainly European – London and Paris topped the list with Prague as the runner up in Eastern Europe. A third of our respondents mentioned North American cities, namely New York, Los Angeles, Boston and Chicago. Several mentioned South American cities (Buenos Aires, Bogotá or Caracas) and a few mentioned Asian cities. Cities from other countries lagged far behind.

Comparing mobility patterns (of duration and destination) among our managers shows the existence of two groups – a group of worldwide travellers in the year prior to the study (about 50 per cent), and another with no foreign trips at all during that time (the remaining 50 per cent).

Contrary to what the discourses about upper-middle-class mobility might infer, a large proportion of our sample showed few signs of transnational jet-setting (Figure 2). This ‘rooted’ group was apparent in Lyon, where senior managers with high-level workplace responsibilities seemed less likely to travel and where younger managers were unwilling to relocate. In the Milanese contexts, youngest managers were unwilling to relocate, and were more rooted than those from the other cities. The respondents we interviewed in Paris seemed less mobile than the ones we interviewed in Milan and Madrid, which is interesting. A possible explanation could be related to the fact that Paris is a hub amid global capitalist networks where many European multinationals site their headquarters there, therefore generating a smaller need for managers located there to travel elsewhere.

**Figure 2: Graphic representation of the differences between the cities**



**Key:**

- Living abroad* = percentage of interviewees with experience abroad of more than six months.
- Business Travel (>4 trips)* = percentage of interviewees who did more than 4 trips abroad for business the year before the interview.
- Leisure Travel (>4 trips)* = percentage of interviewees who did more than 4 leisure trips abroad for the year before the interview.
- Flight* = percentage of interviewees who flew the month before the interview.
- Watching foreign TV* = percentage of interviewees who watch foreign TV.
- Well known cities* = median number of cities interviewees declared to know well.
- Foreign friends* = median number of foreign friends interviewees declared to know.
- Joining local associations* = percentage of interviewees who join some local associations.

To our surprise, a large number of the managers we interviewed hardly travel, if at all. These findings question some taken for granted ideas about the mobility of Europe’s upper middle classes. We cannot depict transnational mobility as falling into a simple clear-cut divide between ‘upper-middle-class’ and ‘lower-class’ groups of employees, or between an ‘élite’ and the ‘people’.

**Managers as barbarians or deeply rooted in their cities**

Our empirical findings suggest that most of our managers are very rooted in their local communities. One indication of this is the extent to which they rely on family

networks when selecting a neighbourhood in which to live. We wondered whether, as the gentrification literature hints, income was a deciding factor and apparently it is not. In all four cities, family ties, especially being near parents, seemed to be the most significant reason for choosing one area over another: about 20 per cent live in the same neighbourhood as, or near that of, their parents, sometimes even in the same patch in which they themselves grew up. We rather expected to find this in Milan, given the strength of the influence of kinship ties on living arrangements in Italian society: population statistics show that 28 per cent of Italians live within one kilometre of their parents, and the majority within a 16 kilometre radius of them (Istat 2010). What is striking in the case of Milan is that our sample not only presents the same features as the general Italian population, but it also illustrates how vital a role family ties play, even when Italians enjoy a relatively comfortable lifestyle. Our managers had sufficient economic (as well as human and relational) resources to choose their place of residence freely, though, in some cases, they seemed compelled to settle in an area that was not of their own choosing. It was as if the possibility of living elsewhere had not even occurred to them. For all the managers born and still residing in Milan, however mobile they may be, the neighbourhood in which their parents live emerges as the neighbourhood of choice, irrespective of cost or location. When their parents die, their neighbourhood attachment grows into a sort of 'inherited belonging' in that they feel a strong link because they know the area well and, in most cases, do not want to move away. When they talk about moving, it is because they need a larger apartment, but preferably in the same area or street.

We identified a different pattern among managers who moved to Milan from other parts of Italy for educational or professional reasons. They tended to be more mobile, to shift between urban spaces and to consider several factors when selecting a neighbourhood. These were proximity to the university or workplace and, once they had become familiar with the city's facilities, the price and prestige of their preferred location.

We see Paris and Madrid, both high status capitals and economic drivers in their national economies, turning into 'escalator urban regions', a metaphor Savage et al. (2005) use for London and the southeast of England. Paris's elite universities also affect urban patterns of upward mobility; we noticed a similarity in Madrid where universities offering specialist degrees unavailable elsewhere in Spain benefited students who stayed on to work after completing their studies. In these two cities, higher education emerges as a key factor in the residential strategies of managers who settle in these capitals for professional reasons.

In structuring the residence patterns of many of our managers, Madrid and Milan share certain features, of which one is proximity to family networks. In Paris, where 50 per cent of our interviewees come from other French regions, we were surprised at how much family ties still affected the residential patterns of nearly one-third of our respondents.

A second sign of rootedness is the extent of the managers' reliance on public and private facilities in their neighbourhood and city more generally, such as transport, schools, healthcare, social services, libraries, sports and leisure centres. With some

exceptions, there is no clear pattern of shunning public sector facilities. On the contrary, many informants were committed to the public services, wanted to see their quality improve and their own needs as users better met. If anything, our managers seemed keen to invest in their communities and certainly did not appear to be withdrawing from the urban facilities on their doorstep. Nevertheless, we noticed differences in each city. In Paris, our respondents emphasized their involvement in city life and their participation in community social events, with the vast majority making regular use of local facilities such as schools and public transport. This pattern reflects a relatively homogeneous social composition of the neighbourhood. In areas with a higher presence of upper-middle-class residents, our managers made more use of the public services than in those with more mixed populations, where they were more likely to turn to the private sector, especially private schools.

In Milan, participation in neighbourhood activities is almost non-existent, though some interviewees use services in the public and private sectors when needed. In Madrid, while many of our managers made considerable use of public spaces such as parks and city squares, along with other public facilities, we noticed a heavy reliance on private charter schools, on private specialist health care, but public healthcare for hospital stays. Our data on managers' involvement in local national and transnational neighbourhood associations reinforces this ambivalent relationship in both city and neighbourhood. In none of the four cities did any of our managers participate in neighbourhood events or community organizations (practically none in Milan or Madrid and fewer than one in ten in Paris). These findings show that our managers are not formally engaged in civic or political local activities; they do not seem to endorse 'participation strategies', at least not in traditional local public arenas.

However, as mentioned above, our managers rely on public services both in their neighbourhoods and in the city at large. In this sense, they use urban facilities, see them as essential and are even prepared to get involved as users and to voice their views. Yet, overall, they do not actively take a stance or organize collectively (though French manager parents will do so with respect to their children's schooling).

We noticed other trends towards greater participation in local organizations, although in a rather private way. The majority declared an interest in politics, said they had voted in the most recent elections, had discussed politics during the previous month and, despite their varied political allegiances, backed moves towards making local and national politics more meritocratic. These managers would attend local meetings and social events only if they addressed their concerns and priorities. Aware of the benefits and opportunities on offer, both locally and in the larger city, they were willing to take advantage of them, but less willing to get involved in issues that did not affect them personally.

When we analysed sociability patterns, informal friendship and neighbourly ties,<sup>3</sup> we found that in each city our managers led active social lives, had numerous friends whom they visited regularly, almost on a weekly basis, and enjoyed long lasting bonds, a large portion of them dating back more than twenty years. Most of their friends lived in the same city or even neighbourhood. Predictably, our respondents belonged to a homogeneous social network of friends from similar educational and



professional backgrounds. This was noteworthy in Milan, where the respondents' social networks were numerous and extensive, based on childhood friendships and deeply embedded in their local community.

The social networks of the Paris respondents are more porous and diverse than those of the other cities. Those of Milan are the least so, with Madrid and Lyon lying midway between the other two extremes. These findings apply to all interviewees, the highly mobile as well as the more rooted. On this point, our results differ quite substantially from those of Savage et al. (2005) for Manchester, and Butler and Robson (2003) for London. These authors' respondents saw their best friends less often, shared fewer regular activities and were more likely to live in other cities; moreover, 'maintaining friends requires the persistence and the ability to be abstracted from time and space so it can endure over these two dimensions' (Savage et al. 2005: 242). Persistence, investment, time and space were prominent in our study, although in a different way. While several respondents in the Manchester study felt their friendships becoming distant because of geographical separation, most of our Milanese managers appeared very rooted and attached to their local communities.

This portrayal of an active social life does not extend to immediate neighbours, with whom our respondents interacted very little. They rarely invited them in for drinks or a meal and did not turn to them for help: their interactions were restricted to polite greetings or borrowing salt and this was the same in all four cities. How long people have resided in the area or the type of dwelling in which they live appear to have no bearing on neighbourly relationships. In fact, even those who had been living in the same building for many years hardly knew their neighbours; socio-economic characteristics did not seem to be a factor in this respect, for many respondents perceived few differences between themselves and their neighbours. While rooted in their local communities, these managers see their loyalties as divided because neighbours compete with friends for time and attention and they tend to prioritize their friends.

### **Conclusion: urban barbarians, urban hierarchies**

Our findings answer some of the questions about mobility we raised at the start of our discussion. First, the empirical material reveals that not all managers are internationally mobile, though many (both the most and least mobile) rely heavily on new virtual transnational methods of working. One group we identified adopts transnational practices, but on a virtual level – they are heavy users of the new digital technologies; managers belonging to this group rarely deploy 'exit' strategies from their home terrain. We label this group the *virtual transnational*. We identified a second group that also depended on the portable new media to conduct business, but these managers are also transnational in the real world; they travel more intensely as international jet setters and 'partial exit' strategies are more common among them.

Second, we found no evidence of uprooting, or of free-riding barbarians escaping national constraints. Most of the managers we interviewed clearly feel part of a virtual global society, yet they strongly anchor their daily lives in their local communities.

About 50 per cent had some experience of mobility; most travel (a little) and enjoy extensive kin and friendship networks close to home. Those with professional secondments abroad reported positive experiences, yet were happy to return to their home country. Many spend time in foreign countries, maintain friendships there and feel committed to forging new virtual global environments, though they see this as applying more to the educational and job prospects of their children than to their own futures. The distinctive regional markers associated with each city largely conform to our expectations.

The manager profiles emerging from our empirical findings only partially correspond to the diagram we used. ‘Barbarians’ were not evident, but we spotted some ‘partial exit’ strategies among several individuals played out on both the local and transnational stages (see the vertical axis of our diagram). The *mobile rooted* is the most widespread type to emerge from our mobile transnational managers.

Differences between manager groups in the four cities were also apparent; country-specific social structures clearly still matter. Parisian managers display more transnational patterns, with a large proportion fitting the *mobile rooted* type. Milanese managers seem more polarized, with some fitting the *mobile rooted* type and deploying ‘partial exit’ strategies, and others fitting the *local-fixed* or *self-segregated* type, profoundly rooted, almost tethered to their local neighbourhood. In Madrid we also noted ‘partial exit’ strategies but with different permutations – a mixture of transnational trends with partial involvement in local and city associations on the one hand and weak or non-existing (virtual at most) ‘exit’ strategies from the national sphere on the other, but with some elements of local and urban participation clearly visible. Across the board, we found elements of a European upper middle class in the making among younger generations, especially in managers’ strategies regarding their children.

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## **Notes**

1. We thank Adrian Favell for this insight.
2. All of them read national newspapers on a daily basis.
3. To ascertain relational networks, the questionnaire explored four dimensions – friendships, neighbourhood ties, hierarchical position in respondent’s family, and social networks. We used the eliciting name method for the first two dimensions. In other words, we collected data on the socio-economic characteristics for every named person, that is their sex, age, place of birth, place of residence, marital status, education, profession, the length of the respondent’s relationship with him or her and where they had met.

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*Transnational mobility and rootedness: the upper middle classes in European cities*

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