Art is good for adaptation

Vera Varieghi
Elan Interculturel

Abstract

The text takes under scrutiny what happens during adaptation to a new cultural environment. The first part looks at the threats, challenges inherent in the situation, but also the opportunities for personal and professional growth that unfold in the experience. The second part looks at what are the psychological processes mobilized during the transition process, which eventually determine whether to what extent the transition will really become an occasion to unfold the person's potential. The final third part looks at how this process can be helped through training, and what is the potential of art in such trainings.

Key words: cross-cultural adaptation, psychological adjustment, socio-cultural adaptation, dialogical self, motivation

Table of contents

Introduction

The text takes under scrutiny what happens during adaptation to a new cultural environment. The first part looks at the threats, challenges inherent in the situation, but also the opportunities for personal and professional growth that unfold in the experience. The second part looks at what are the psychological processes mobilized during the transition process, which eventually determine whether to what extent the transition will really become an occasion to unfold the person's potential. The final third part looks at how this process can be helped through training, and what is the potential of art in such trainings.

What is cross-cultural adaptation?

Asylum seekers, expatriates, global nomads, international students all embark on a journey which at first seems geographical, but soon becomes evident, that all journey is also a journey to the self, and the exploration of new landscapes, new cultures inevitably brings about the discovery of our own cultural baggage and our inner landscapes. The context matters tremendously: fleeing persecution with all our life packed in a small suitcase to the neighbouring country's refugee camp cannot be compared to moving to Paris to open the brand new branch office of our company. Yet, there are common elements even in these very different journeys, for the simple reason that humans are much more "open systems" and much less isolated than the individualist western conception suggests. We construct the self in interaction with a specific cultural environment, concrete interaction partners, institutional frames, and when these disappear or become virtual, the self loses its context and a whole new construction process begins.

Challenges, threats

Crosscultural or *intercultural adaptation* refers to how we feel, think, behave when we find ourselves in a foreign land. A new continent, a new country, or a new region or city can all seem like a whole new planet. Adaptation is about how we react to its newness, and how we change to be able to connect to it. The difficulty of the exercise is that changes are ought to happen simultaneously on many different levels, as if we were inscribed to a psychological gymnastics competition trying to handle vault, uneven parallel bar and balance beam all at once. Being a stranger in Paris for instance, implies that I have to become familiar French grammar, what's worse, an overcomplicated orthography, which uses eight letters to write down a word of four sounds. And beyond the formal rules of grammar there is the big set of less precise rules of politeness, that come with a culture where a much more formal communication style dominates than in my own, where I am addressed as "Madame" which I still find a but funny even after five years. Replacing my usual direct communication with subtle

circumvention of the message still feels mannerist, unspontaneous and distant. At the same time I have to adjust to a very different kind of bureaucracy, which often reminds me of hunting for a mouse with a cannonball. Also, I realize that most of my favourite jokes are lost in translation, and the colours I like to wear become disturbingly flashy against a backdrop where women express subtlety by wearing greyscale.

All in all, the trick is not only that there is a new set of rules, norms but that there is an old one (or maybe even several older ones) with an old sense of what is friendly, funny, and nice. The new norms, values, practices do not arrive into an empty space, but to a space already formatted with the norms, values, behaviours of other cultures. We contemplate, interpret and evaluate the new culture from within the cultures we already inhabit. And from that perspective, the new culture's certain premises, preferences may seem obsolete, unfriendly and ridiculous. And then we face a curious choice: either we adopt behaviours which (again from the vantage point of our cultural vocabularies) seem unattractive, or even wrong, either we do not adopt them, but then risk of being perceived unattractive and wrong in the eyes of the host society. In the coming section we'll give some examples of the challenges that this "choice" brings upon us.

Making meaning out of uncertainty and chaos

"All those changes, those novelties made me tired and I was fed up trying to understand the customs and habits of American people" (Respondent from France, 4C project)

If the human brain is usually a potent meaning-making device, immerged in a new cultural environment it faces a variety of difficulties. First, there is the language: without it there is no interface, no hope of contact and mutual understanding. And to our astonishment, learning the vocabulary and grammatical structures of the other only reveals an unsuspected range of further riddles. In an exploratory study with people living international mobility[1] we have found the following difficulties:

- uncertainty relating to the proper attributions (explanations) of the behaviour of other people (e.g. "are these men holding hands because they are lovers, or such physical contact is acceptable between friends amongst Venda men?")
- awareness of differences, going beyond the universalist idea that we are all the same to realize real differences in needs
- reflecting on one's own stereotypes, becoming aware of how our associations expectations influence how we perceive the other
- handling dissonance – contradiction (e.g. "Nothing I saw in reality matched my expectations").

All these challenges add up to make immersion in other cultures a task with unprecedented cognitive effort, often leading to a sensation of fatigue and being ignorant. Moreover, the cognitive uncertainty triggers feelings of anxiety, and when we estimate the task at hand is to difficult we experience a state of emergency marked by

[1] Intercultool project (2007)

high level of stress. Handling emotions thus becomes the second challenge in adaptation.

Handling distress

According to the first theory of culture shock, proposed by Oberg in 1954 the first period of the installation to new country is replete with fascination, good feeling, and excitement. He called this phase the "honeymoon" phase. Nevertheless recent empirical evidence points to the contrary: it is precisely in the fist period of our stay that we experience the most discomfort and distress.

In fact, stress is a usual travel-mate in life abroad. Why is it so? First of all, because international transitions imply life-changes that are typically stress provoking (Ward et al 2001:73). Indeed, life changes themselves are considered inherently stressful, even without any trans-cultural element[2] (p 48). A new environment is by definition not decipherable, not predictable, and not completely foreseeable. If life changes are replete with potentially stressful factors, cultural distance adds to the distress, thus making the emotional aspects a core theme in cross-cultural adjustment literature (Chang 2007). And it is at the beginning of our stay that we experience the most uncertainty and ambiguity.

Our exploratory studies[3] revealed, that even if positive emotions can surface, generally the uncertainty inherent in intercultural encounters tends to provoke negative emotions: uncomfortable, attacked, consumed, depressed, disappointed, disheartened, lonely, confused were emotions often reported.

Being able to "manage" these emotional reactions in order to overcome them and not being trapped in them becomes the second main challenge in the adaptation process. It is for this reason that theories of cross-cultural adaptation often focus on emotions (e.g. Ward, Matsumoto) and that tests focusing on depression or life satisfaction are considered as reliable indicators of being adjusted.

Behaving "comme il faut"

Even if we are fabulous stress managers, if we go on breaching the same taboos, shocking and getting shocked over and over again with the same behaviours, we'll waist lots of energy on coping and feeling ashamed. Indeed it seems dull not to try to adapt to the behaviour of the locals. Long before our scientists came to talk about stress, old wisdom already phrased the prescription: 'when in Rome…' Furthermore, ignoring behaviour adaptation would be really awkward, as it often happens automatically, effortlessly. Four times you'll be greeted with four kisses; it is likely that the fifths time you'll be used to it. At the same time 'behavioural adaptation' is a shaky ground. Are

---

[2] Researchers often measure life changes with Homes' and Rahe's (1967) Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) that identifies standardised Life Change Units (LCU) to 43 specific life events. The life change experiences of the individual are examined for a given time, and hence can be estimated the level of stress.

[3] Exploratory studies realized within the Intercultool (2007) and 4C (2011) projects

we adjusted in Japan when we bow exactly the same way as Japanese? But how to learn the proper degrees of bows corresponding to each relationship? And are we sure all the Japanese bow the same way?

Socio-cultural adjustment occurs, when we are able to participate in the new environment: interact, make friends, but also work, get entertained, do whatever is needed for a full functional life. No wonder, many models were drawn up with the ambition to summarize the complexity of behaviours into a couple of basic dimensions.

In our own exploratory study, we focused on behaviour within interactions, and identified four critical aspects such as:

- Participation in facework and politeness rituals

"When doing business with Arabs, you need to know that the Arab businessman can never completely lose, if he loses you make an enemy, and you too can never always lose because you will just seem stupid. You need to let him win but also let him know that you know that he is winning and you don't hate him for it" (respondent from Italy, Intercultool project)

- Being aware of communication style

"I was shocked when I saw people in the buses quiet. In Chile people talked to one another regardless of people's anonymity in relationship to me. They did not know me and I neither knew them but we talked still". (respondent originally from Chile living in Sweden Intercultool project)

- Being aware of communication efficiency

Talking across cultures implies being able to push a message through the wide range of cultural differences characterizing communication seen above. It implies being aware of the added difficulties and becoming more attentive:

"I realized that it is not enough to make the things clear beforehand, we have to tell everything again and again..." (Respondent from Hungary Intercultool project)

- Being aware of social rituals

"…the English appear to be very cold, detached, closed, not direct people. then at 5 o'clock they shake off the world of work and everyone goes off to the pub, which is a source of life: the Anglo-Saxons open up in front of a pint of beer, they become themselves, they throw off their inhibitions and become likable". (Respondent from Italy Intercultool project)

Feeling connected

A fifth critical aspect of behaviour reported by the participants of our exploratory study concerned the very personal domain of establishing relationships. Indeed, the loss of the social network is one of the critical challenges people settling in a new country must face. If the social network is important as a daily – logistic support system, it is also crucial from the perspective of basic psychological needs. Baumesiter and Tice propose that a social relatedness is actually the main valid factor of happiness (2001). Accordingly, the constitution of a social network in the new environment is a key competence for all strangers.

"…some of the most problematic aspects lie in the difficulty of creating a network of foreign friends." (Respondent from Italy, Intercultool Project)

"Interpersonal relationships take a lot of effort, because Switzerland and Germany have a colder nature. Everyone gets on with their own lives, they feel no obligation to make you feel at home" (Italian respondent with experience in Germany and Switzerland Intercultool Project)

To serve as a link to members of the social surrounding is actually one of the functions of our identity, the so-called "pragmatical" function (Camilleri). This leads us to the next challenge of adaptation, which is the maintenance of positive identities.

Being 'oneself'

If the change of cultural identity is well documented and researched in the cross-cultural literature, little is said on how the entire self-system is challenged during transition, despite the fact that cultural identity is only one aspect amongst several that are at stake here.

All psychological constructs exist for a reason, to satisfy specific functions, and so does identity. So far there is no consensual exhaustive list of the functions or principles of identity, different researchers have proposed different lists. Because the self system is an inherently open, interactional construct, the change of social environments affects profoundly its prospects to satisfy the different principles:

- being away from friends and family implies that the relational / pragmatical function has to be rebuilt from scratch or reorganised to overarch distance
- unless the change of country is within professional mobility or study plan, our capacity to fulfil the functions of competence are jeopardized by not being able to find a job in our profile, not having our diplomas recognized etc.
- our collective self image is threatened by the stereotypes, prejudice prevailing in the host society concerning our cultural identities (i.e. our ethnicity, our nationality, our religion etc.)

The opportunities

If settling abroad is a challenge in many respects, it is also an opportunity for learning and development on a personal and also professional level. We can look at the opportunities from three different perspectives: considering competence development, focusing on personality development perspective and finally taking the point of view of positive psychologists and look at how the transition can become an opportunity to find more happiness in life.

Learning outcomes: expanding knowledge, developing skills

"I can get myself off the centre of the Franco-French way of see things. At least I try all the time. And this decentration I try to implement it in all areas of my life, family, friends, work ... How? Whenever there is a dispute, a misunderstanding, I make effort to find the

logic of the discourse of the other, I think there is one still" (Respondent from France, 4C project).

International mobility has been considered as a means to acquiring knowledge for a long time: the tradition of the "grand tour" as a big step in the education of young men illustrates well this idea. In our own research sojourners abroad reported learning a lot about the host culture (language, institutions, cultural products etc.), but also about one's own culture thanks to the change of perspective. Newcomers also gain precious experience in the professional domain by getting acquainted with different variations of their professional skills. Finally better intercultural communication skills, adaptability and flexibility are also often reported by sojourners. In fact the transition is not only a means of acquiring new knowledge and cultural skills, it can also induce more general personality development.

The transitional experience brings growth

In 1975 Adler proposes that culture shock should be interpreted as a "transitional experience" ultimately leading to a deep change of the whole identity, the whole functioning of the person. His argument begins with a duality of the modern individual. Our life is characterized by a multiplicity of life spheres, environments, activities roles and identities, leading to a fragmentation of our experiences. At the same time there are psychological tendencies towards "integration, gestalt and wholism". He defines culture as a "perceptual frame of reference" and an environment of experience". Movement into new dimensions of perception and new environments brings to awareness the usually non conscious predispositions and beliefs, and triggers "personality disintegration." Disintegration is considered a necessary component in the development process.

"At the perceptual level, it represents the movement of personality through a symbiotic state of single reality awareness to a differential state whereby there is an awareness and acceptance of the interdependence of many realities. Emotionally, the transition marks the change from dependence on reinforcements to independence, while in the largest sense of self-concept, it is the change from a monocultural to an intercultural frame of reference." (Adler 1975).

Kim moves beyond Adler's proposal, to claim that the outcome of adjustment is not only a 'transformed' but an 'intercultural' identity. She constructs a stress-adaptation-growth model of the intercultural interaction, characterized by a "dialectic, cyclic and continual "draw-back-to-leap" pattern.

The individual is considered "an open system", that cannot be isolated from its environment and its interactions. The natural tendency to resist change comes to contrast with the desire of changing behaviour to reach harmony with the other (p 383). The identity conflict unfolds into disintegration, which is followed by reorganisation and self-renewal. The process includes the integration of "changes in the habitual patterns of cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses" which result in increased "functional fitness" with the new environment and may lead to the development of an 'intercultural identity'. This is a condition where "the original cultural identity begins to lose its distinctiveness and rigidity while an expanded and more flexible definition of self

emerges "(p 391). Once this stage acquired, the individual reaches a "heightened self-awareness and self-identity" and engages in a "continuous search for authenticity in self and other across group boundaries" (p 392).

Can transition make us happy?

Despite the main concern of psychology being the study of what goes wrong and how it can me remedied, a group of researchers dedicated their efforts to the exploration of what makes people "happy". This line of research developed under the label of "positive psychology" proposed operational descriptions of happiness, which make it possible to explore how happiness is connected to cross-cultural transition.

According to Seligman, *pleasure* is the first level of happiness. It is the capacity to experience positive emotions, linked to pleasant activities such as absorbing tasty food, visiting aesthetic sceneries, interacting with agreeable people etc. The two characteristics for which pleasure is not the main attraction is that the capacity to experience positive emotions is partly hereditary, and also the fact that we get habituated to pleasure very easily, and then it looses its impact. Moving to e new country often implies discovering many new pleasures in the gastronomic, artistic, natural landscapes of the new country just as when one discovers a new place during holidays. However, the positive emotions entailed slowly fade out as we get used to these features. For this reason, pleasure is not the centre of attention of positive psychologists.

A second level of happiness consists in the capacity to experience flow – a state that Csikszentmihalyi described as intense concentration on the task at hand, regardless of what the task is. People experience flow in their work, in physical activities, in creating our receiving art. According to Csikszentmihalyi, the flow occurs when the delicate balance between the persons' capacities and the skills required by the task weighs slightly in favour of the skills solicited, i.e. the person's existing capacities are slightly exceeded by the demands of the activity. When the demands of the activity largely overweigh the existing competences, the person experiences anxiety, rather than flow. Cross-cultural transitions can be a source of flow in two ways. First of all, learning the new context, new systems, building new networks can add just the sufficient level of challenges to life to bring about more flow.

Finally, the ultimate layer of happiness according to Seligman is finding meaning in one's life, which he described as organising one's strengths in the service of something bigger than oneself. Choosing a destination in accordance with one's purpose in life is a luxury that most migrants cannot afford. Partners, spouses that follow another person don't have this luxury either. The struggle for recreating meaning from scratch can be a long one, often going through long period of search and stagnation, the re-evaluation and modification of the professional path, and re-entering education. However, the transition can also be an opportunity to take a break from a professional practice that may have become a routine, take a step back and re-craft one's work life to include more of what gives meaning to us.

What are the processes of transition?

If the transition to a new cultural environment is a series of challenges, it is because stepping out of the usual social context poses a threat to different layers of our identity and triggers the alarm of our defence mechanisms. But humans also possess unprecedented potential of growth and development, thanks to psychological capacities linked to learning, accommodation, and adaptation. The reaction to the challenges unfolding in the transition process will be negotiated between the need for defence and growth through a dialogical process of opening and closing, selecting, accommodating and integrating bits of the outside world into the self system. An approach of personality psychology that places this process of negotiation between outer and inner worlds is the approach of the dialogical self (see Hermans).

The approach is based on the recognition that far from the metaphor of the "island man" symbol of the individualist conception well spread in the western world, depicting the person as cut out from its environment, separated from his fellows, the borders between inside and outside are much softer and more permeable. Even the physical body that is supposed to mark the frontiers between the individuals has as big a job in linking them together through the delicate game of engaging in each-other's rhythms, the mimicry of the gestures and movements following the embodied automatisms of interpersonal coordination[4]. Nash (1998) proposes the concept of reflexivity to capture this embodied capacity to react to another person or a cultural environment: the person is not isolated outside of space but is part of space, bodies and places are continuously engaged in mutual constitution.[5]

The approach of dialogical self proposed by Hermans model the self as an inventory of internal and external positions. The internal positions are aspects or "voices" of the self that have taken form during past experiences and dialogues: me the researcher, me the curious, me as stranger, me as French, me as wife, etc. The external positions are individuals and groups that can be real - a father, a wife, a teacher etc – or imagined - "the French", Captain Picard of the spaceship Enterprise - and that took part in the dialogical construction of the self.

It is dialogue that connects the external and internal positions; it is dialogue that frames external and internal into one system. Fogel differentiates creative and rigid frames; the creative resulting in a change, a movement in the positions, the rigid leaves our positions unaffected.

Moving to a new place implies a drastic change in such a self-repertoire, as it imposes an array of new external positions, which trigger the creation of new internal positions. For example, in Paris suddenly I became a stranger, an Eastern European, also a trailing spouse. And when I'm home, I'm the "expatriate", the explorer, and even the "Parisian". Nevertheless, the constitution of the new positions is neither automatic nor random. It is not entirely automatic as there is always a margin of freedom for the dialogue: I may become a stranger, but what kind of stranger? What does it mean to

[4] Bargh et Chartrand 1999 ou Bernieri, Rosenthal 1991 Tomassello 1999

[5] Nash, H. J. 1998 The body as place – reflexivity and fieldwork in Kano, Nigeria. In : Nast, H.J, Pile, S. (Eds) - 1998 Places through the body London, Routledge pp 69-86

me? How do I wear this strangeness? I have at my disposal a whole toolbox of identity negotiation techniques, which encompass a wide range of more or less conscious manoeuvres: modification of the appearance (making myself more similar to other or playing on the difference?) selection of activities (inscribing into a French course or rather frequenting folk dance classes of my native culture?) choice of friends and acquaintances (do I want French friends or will I prefer and international ghetto, maybe the safety zone of my own co-nationals?) etc. All levels of the psychological functioning are involved in this exercise: emotions, behaviours, and thoughts.

So, the rearrangement of our repertoire is far from determined and automatic. However, we do not have entirely free will either: we follow the needs - motives (Fiske) – or principles (Breakwell) that underpin the construct of identity. Up to the present there is no consensus amongst researchers on an exhaustive list of identity motives, rather each researcher has his / her own favourites, here is a selection:

- autonomy, competence, belonging - Self-determination theory (Deci, Ryan)
- relatedness - Sociometer theory (Baumeister, Leary):
- balance between growth and symbolic defence, protection - Terror Management Theory (Pyszczynski, et all 2003)
- optimal distinctiveness – Brewer 1991
- continuity, distinctiveness, self-esteem – Breakwell 1988

What is important to retain is that we are indeed motivated to satisfy some of the needs listed above. As such, they act like built-in compasses during the adaptation process, orienting us to take action in the domains that are neglected. It is this process that effective cross-cultural trainings should help.

Training for cross-cultural adaptation

A first wave of culture-specific trainings

In the youth of the genre of intercultural trainings the focus was on offering as much information and as detailed as possible on the other culture. The ambition of these culture-specific trainings was to equip the expatriates (in the first stages, rather Peace Corps volunteers) to all possible situations and encounters with otherness.

It is an ambition that also proved to be futile: it is impossible both theoretically and pragmatically to pin down a culture into a set of descriptions and prescriptions. Nevertheless we can still find traces of this genre of intercultural trainings. Recently I ran across a list of “do’s and don’t”-s for Englishman traveling to Italy published in a cross-cultural training booklet. Amongst others Englishmen were strongly warned against wearing white socks with sandals.

A more elaborate continuation of the tradition focusing on content and information transmission offers cultural models - such as for instance Hofstede’s model

of the six dimensions of cross-cultural differences – and compares the target culture and the culture of origin along the dimensions of the model.

Still in the similar vein cross-cultural trainings often provide practical and logistic information on the host society; its administration, its economic system, the resource organizations etc. For us, this would be similar to offering information on where you can by the paper, the canvas, and the paint as a means of teaching art.

However, this first wave of intercultural trainings has often proven ineffective, sometimes even having adverse effects (nicely described in Cohen-Emerique 2011). The main reason for failure is that when people are equipped with concrete palpable information (say, on the values and behaviour patterns of collectivist Asian cultures) we form similarly concrete expectations based on this information, expectations that will unavoidably fail us if we meet a Chinese entrepreneur graduate of an American College. There is no description that can be punctual and general enough to cover all members of a given society, because cultures continuously change, because people bear a variety of cultural baggage and they absorb each of them through their own specific life path. What's more, once we're given concrete cultural descriptions we become less open to the surprises intercultural encounters persistently bring.

Development of intercultural competences through art

This recognition led to a shift of attention towards the development of skills necessary for the adaptation process. (REF) These skills sometimes collected under the label of "intercultural competences" include the following three main categories: knowledge, skills and attitudes.

- Knowledge about the dynamics of culture as well as about the psycho-social challenges of adaptation
- Skills of intercultural communication, creating connections, developing networks
- Attitudes of cultural relativity, curiosity, orientation towards the other.

Additionally, in our own research we have found that even people with very highly developed intercultural competences can have a painful adaptation process. This led us to the questioning of the role of preexisting intercultural competences that are independent of the context. In particular this seemed to be the case of people who arrive to a new country to accompany their partner. The dynamics inherent in the situation seemed to raise the need for self-defense and closure towards the host environment, often leading to quite paralyzing self-blame or the scapegoating of the host society. This observation made us focus some of our trainings on the motivational factor behind adaptation and the management of emotions.

Together with the content of the training the range of methodologies also shifted from discussions and seminars to more inclusive techniques such as structured exercises, simulations, role-plays. Art forms started to appear in the toolboxes of intercultural trainers as a means to go beyond the cognitive level of exchange. Without the ambition of exhaustiveness, here are some examples of why art has been / could be integrated in intercultural trainings:

- Drama games

Theater practice can develop our sense of the micro-dynamics of communication: the interdependence of the three levels of content, process and relation. Dramatizing everyday events, conflicts can help to ventilate them, to make a step back and hence better cope with the emotionally charged situations. In our own practice at Elan Interculturel we also use drama elements to facilitate the representation and analysis of conflict situations and critical incidents. Boal's Forum Theater can be a means to work collectively on oppressing situations, in particular for newcomers in a vulnerable situation. As such, it offers empowerment.

- Dance

Following Nash's concept of reflexivity, engaging in dance can induce a better awareness of our own body, as well as an awareness of the changes in body sensations in the new environment. Through de-mechanizing the routines inscribed into our body dance can also enhance our skills of interpersonal coordination: our capacity to get tuned on different non-verbal repertoires than our own: on other rhythms, different movements, new usage of physical contact.

But more than anything, dance captures particularly well the dialogical process. Indeed, the dancer gets tuned on a rhythm, a melody that is outside of her to integrate it in her body through the movement. Similarly she can connect to and accommodate the movements of the other dancers. This outer-inner mechanism is the very essence of the adaptation process. Finally the sensual experience that dance offers makes the person become part of space again, as opposed to being the isolated intruder. Contact improvisation in particular can encompass all the above mentioned goals.

- Visual arts

Video projects: if there is a genre that par excellence compels to connect the inner and outer worlds, it is filmmaking. The narrative comes from the author, and the characters, the scenery are a real (or altered) cultural surrounding, while the film itself is the negotiation between the two.

- Participative arts in communities

When including a mixed participant group with newcomers and members of the host community participative art projects can offer rich meaningful connections to newcomers. And here the emphasis is indeed on meaningful: the shared art activity can drive the relationship to an intimate level that otherwise would require a much longer process.

- Artistic creativity in general: the creativity cycle

An often cited process model of creativity (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi) involves five steps: 1) collecting a subject – a theme, 2) recognizing a pattern – getting a felt sense of our thread, 3) incubation, 4) selection - evaluation, 5) implementation. What is interesting is that this depiction of a cycle can be made quite parallel to the cycle of changes describing transitions. It can be very easily applied to the construction of our life project in a new environment. Similarly, experiencing, living though the emotions accompanying different stages of the cycle of the creative process can prepare to better overcoming the emotions accompanying the stages of the life transition: the impatience, the sense of being lost at the phase of collection, being able to focus on the moment of recognizing something important, the chaos and uncertainty of the

incubation, the anxiety of the need to select, make choices appear in both processes. All in all the artistic creation process offers a similar cognitive and emotional gymnastic than the adaptation process. The question is whether engagement in art creates skills that are transferable to other life domains. The assessment of our pilot project has the ambition to bring some conclusions to that question. This brings me to my own local conclusion.

Conclusion

The understanding of cross-cultural adaptation that I wanted to present here lays on the recognition that a basic dialogical process permeates all human activity: on the one hand there is an opening to the outer world, to other people fuelled by our innate capacity to grow, our innate curiosity and our innate relational character. On the other hand there is the slow accumulation of content: of values, of norms, our favourite flavours, our preferred language, the content of who we are. And as soon as we have some content we are very much motivated to defend it, to preserve it. A continuous dialogue, negotiation between these two needs, these two sides of the coin takes place wherever we go, holding a delicate balance between the defence of what is already ours (who we already are) and the absorption of newness, otherness. However, there are situations which shatter this delicate balance by shifting the weight in one side. Relocating to a new environment is such a situation: when the newness and the uncertainty and anxiety that it brings become overwhelming, our motivation of self-defence triumphs over our openness and curiosity. Unfortunately this happens in a moment when our survival – and happiness precisely depend on our capacity to connect to the new environment. This is the paradox of adaptation: we close in the moment when we would most need to open, our openness would be the key to re-establish the balance, but it is openness that is the most difficult.

Art can be a valuable training ground in facilitating such an opening, for a multitude of reasons, of which I'll recall three here. First of all, most art forms are a par excellence simulation of the dialogical process described above. Indeed, doing art relies in the subtle dialogue between the inner intuitions, creative forces and the outer world accessible to us: the tools and materials we can use to paint, the scenery and characters we present in out film etc. This is as much a dialogue between outer and inner worlds as between thought and sensory experience. Second, art "de-mechanises" us: it takes us outside of the boundaries of our usual repertoire of movements, of self-expression, of perception. In fact it is about continuously trying to push boundaries, and as such it prepares for transgressing our boundaries. Finally, the cognitive and emotional aspects of the artistic creativity process prepare well for the very similar cognitive and emotional processes of the adaptation.

List of references

Adler, P. (1975). The Transitional Experience: an Alternative View of Culture Shock *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* Vol 15 no 4; 13-23

Chartrand, T.L., & Bargh, J.A. (1999). The chameleon effect: The perception-behavior link and social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *76*, 893-910

Fernandez, Bernard, Mutabazi, Evalde and Pierre, Philippe (2006) 'International Executives, Identity Strategies and Mobility in France and China', Asia Pacific Business Review, 12:1, 53 - 76

Gudykunst, W.B. (2005). An Anxiety / Uncertainty Management Theory of Strangers' Intercultural Adjustment In: Gudykunst (Ed.) *Theorizing About Intercultural Communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp. 419-458.

Hillmanm J. 2007**.** *Feeling Comfortable With Strangeness* accessed at http://www.transitionsabroad.com/listings/living/articles/living_in_london_feeling_comfortable_with_strangeness.shtml on 6/12/2007

Kang, SM. (2006). Measurement of Acculturation, Scale Formats, and Language Competence: Their Implications for Adjustment Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology Vol 37; 669

Kim, Y.Y. 2005. Adapting to a New Culture: An Integrative Communication Theory In: Gudykunst (Ed.) *Theorizing About Intercultural Communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp.375-400

Matsumoto, D., Hirayama, S., LeRoux, J., A. In press. Psychological Skills Related to Intercultural Adjustment Paul T. P. Wong and Lillian C. J. Wong (Eds.), *Handbook of Multicultural Perspectives on Stress and Coping*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishing

Matsumoto, D., LeRoux, J.A., Robles, Y., Campos, G. (2007) The Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS) predicts adjustment above and beyond personality and general intelligence. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 31 747–759

Matsumoto, D., LeRoux, J., Ratzlaff, C., Tatani, H., Uchida, H., Kim, C., & Araki, S. (2001). Development and validation of a measure of intercultural adjustment potential in Japanese sojourners: The Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS). *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 25, 483-510.

Tomasello, M. (1999). *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition*. Harvard University Press.

Ward, C., Leong, C-H., Low, M. (2004). PERSONALITY AND SOJOURNER ADJUSTMENT An Exploration of the Big Five and the Cultural Fit Proposition *JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY*, Vol. 35 No. 2, 137-151

Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock*. London: Routledge.

Ward, C. and Kennedy, A. (2001) Coping with Cross-Cultural Transition Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology; 32; 636

Ward, C. (2001b). The A, B, Cs of Acculturation. In D. Matsumoto (Ed.), *Handbook of Culture and Psychology* (pp. 411-446). New York: Oxford University Press

Ward, C., Kennedy, A. (1999). THE MEASUREMENT OF SOCIOCULTURAL ADAPTATION International Journal of Intercultural Relations. Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 659-677.

Ward, C., Okura, Y., Kennedy, A., Kojima, T. (1998). The U Curve on Trial. A Longitudinal Study of Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustment During Cross-Cultural transitions. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 277-291.

Zaharna, R.S. (1989). Self-Shock: The Double-binding Challenge of Identity," International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Vol 13 (1989), pp. 501-526.