Global talent responses to city internationalization: Expatriate strategies of navigating institutional practices of macro talent management

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Abstract

This article advances research at the intersection of macro talent management (TM) and the career capital of expatriates. It does so by reporting the findings of a qualitative study of self-initiated expatriates' strategies of engaging the practices of a city-level TM institution to facilitate career capital formation. Strategies of engaging city-level practices of TM have diverse, at times paradoxical implications. Self-initiated expatriates employ strategies of engaging institutional practices to (1) support global career mobility without considerable adjustment, (2) develop local networks and careers in the host country, and (3) even actively escaping an expanding sphere of international institutions. The article explains how dynamics of career capital formation occur as (un)anticipated consequences of being exposed to institutional logics of adopted TM practices. Corporate and market-oriented logics of TM realized in an international city institution ambiguously combined with community logics, for some self-initiated expatriates resembling those of traditional expatriate institutions.

Keywords: career capital; macro talent management; expatriates; institution; institutional logics; expatriation; city

Introduction

This article explores and explains the strategies of skilled self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) in engaging practices of macro talent management (MTM) at the local level of an internationalizing city, and the consequential effects in processes of career capital formation. SIE research concentrates attention on those professionals who undertake international mobility on their own (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008; Lee, 2005). SIEs have, since the inception of self-initiated expatriation as a field of study, been characterized and defined by their individual agency in pursuing a career across borders (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Carr, Inkson, & Thorn, 2005; Thorn, 2008). The area of research was, thus, established in the attempt to accommodate a perceived limitation in extant research's focus on expatriation as assigned and structured by an organization. SIEs are considered to be those professionals who on their own initiative (Andresen, Bergdolt, & Margenfeld, 2013; Froese, 2012) obtain jobs in a foreign country, often with no planned time period, where the legal employment decision is made by a new work-contract partner (Andresen, Ariss, & Walther, 2013; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Lee, 2005). Based on the notion of this type of expatriation as informed by strong personal agency of professionals, research efforts were early on expended on accounting for relationships between factors inherent to the individual, such as motives for expatriation, and various outcomes, such as adjustment or performance (Cerdin, 2013; Froese, 2012; Thorn, 2009).

Recent years of research, however, has witnessed a growing interest in the significance of context for self-initiated expatriation, reflected in most current calls for research on communities (Gaggiotti, Case, & Lauring, 2023) and broader contexts (Andresen et al., 2022). For example, while organizational boundaries may at times be less salient, other institutional structures may impinge upon, in terms of being both constitutive and constraining of, global mobility and careers of professionals. Research on institutional barriers provides evidence that institutional regulations significantly may limit the opportunities for SIEs (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010). Diverse regulations imposed on migrant workers are thus a basis for variation in how careers develop (Scurry, Rodrigueza, & Bailouni, 2013). Scurry et al. (2013) show, for example, how a highly regulated environment, reflected in the policy of Qatarisation, affects SIE experiences in Qatar. While institutions constrain career mobility of expatriate talent, research also reveals that those who develop their professional careers across organizational boundaries rely on broader institutions and structures that thereby actively enable those individuals to exert agency in their careers and mobility (Zeitz, Blau, & Fertig, 2009). Recent calls thus encourage research that contextualizes self-initiated expatriation, for example in terms of the broader social and institutional settings in which SIEs operate (Andresen et al., 2022: Gaggiotti et al., 2023; Mayrhofer, Smale, Briscoe, Dickmann, & Parry, 2020). Meanwhile literature on talent management (TM) has sought to better account for how TM activities reach beyond individual firms (Sparrow *et* al, 2018) and are conducted through multiple, nested systems and institutions. Indeed, research on global talent management (GTM) at diverse levels is required (Khilji, Tarique, & Schuler, 2015). MTM research has over the past decade sought to explain how TM activities are conducted beyond a single employer, and comprise activities of managing talent at local, regional, national, and transnational levels (Evans, Rodriguez-Montemayor, & Lanvin, 2022; Metcalfe, Makarem, & Afiouni, 2021). This novel research stream has opened a new space of study for TM scholars to engage and further develop their theoretical and methodological resources – a space previously left to other disciplines such as economics (Evans et al., 2022: 109). MTM comprises practices for attracting, developing, and retaining talent, with high levels of human or career capital (Sparrow *et al.*, 2018), in a country or city and building the enabling context for this to achieve 'talent competitiveness' (Evans et al., 2022). While MTM has most extensively been studied at the country level (Vaiman et al., 2018), it also involves TM at regional and city levels (Dickmann & Parry, 2019; Evans et al., 2022; Sparrow et al., 2018; Zhao, Cooke, Chen, & Xiao, 2023). The dominant work in this area, however, is still conceptual, calling for empirical research (Caligiuri, Collings, Cieri, & Lazarova, 2024: 405). More TM research is thus needed at lower contextual levels, such as the city level.

The present article addresses a relevant research problem at this intersection of calls for more contextualized SIE research and (M)TM research at the local level of cities. The article does so by exploring how SIEs respond to changing institutional practices of TM at the city level, as a city is internationalizing and expanding its sphere of institutions servicing highly skilled international professionals. Deeper knowledge on how international talents respond to institutional practices of MTM is relevant, whether it be at the level of cities, regions, or countries, and the consequential implications for career capital formation. The article, therefore, seeks to impart new conceptual and empirical insights to the literature on highly skilled SIEs and city-level TM institutions. Accordingly, the objective of this article is to explore the following question: *How do SIEs engage an international TM institution and its institutional practices at the city level and with which effects in processes of career capital formation?*

This is an important question to address. Deeper insights into this research problem will help advance understanding of how institutional practices of TM at the city level interact with expatriation processes and how SIEs become attracted and retained by the broader institutional surroundings of their employment. Such knowledge is, in different terms, of significance to a wide array of countries and companies in the capitalization on global talent flows (Thorn & Inkson, 2013). The article follows Richardson (2009) and other scholars in shedding light on strategies or 'modes' of engagement, capturing how SIEs respond to and navigate differently within the same institutional setting.

This does not necessarily imply a focus on how expatriates create or shape that setting, being beyond the scope of this article. Indeed, the institutional practices in focus for this article are rather implemented by a city coalition of MTM actors. The qualitative study accounts for the complex and, in many cases, unanticipated consequences of one of the international institutions that SIEs often navigate in their efforts to cope with and advance their process of global relocation for work: SIEs' strategies of engaging an implanted TM institution serving as a centre for many of a city's MTM efforts towards international talent. Focusing on an international city institution of TM, and the web of institutions it binds together, allows for deep insights into the ways in which such institutions appear in and influence SIEs' global mobility experiences. This allows us to account for (1) the range of responses towards changing institutional practices of TM at the city level among SIEs with different career orientations, (2) the varied strategies used by SIEs in engaging the institution to cope with and promote expatriation, and (3) the effects of these strategies in processes of career capital formation.

The article makes different contributions to research on MTM, SIEs, and career capital. Overall, it shines a spotlight on how an expatriate institution, implanted as part of TM efforts at the city level, is formative of a range of social processes that enable and is partly constitutive of SIE agency (Giddens, 1979). The article contributes novel insights into how a city-level TM institution moderates interactions for SIEs, and therefore capital formation processes (processes of identification, networking, translation of knowing-how, etc.), building of organizational and institutional ties and the translation of career capital to local labor market. An interesting finding is unpacked concerning unanticipated gains and losses, not being part of an intended strategy, for example in both contributing to and limiting the realization of professional and social goals for different groups of SIEs, relative to the sense of purpose orienting their global career moves. The paper contributes knowledge on how some SIEs employ strategies of escaping the expanding sphere of international city institutions, and the values and categories of identification associated with them, yet paradoxically must deal with networks that pull them back into their sphere. The study thus advances research on the career capital of expatriates by showing and explaining new dynamics of how knowing-why and knowing-whom interact in career capital formation. These dynamics were in the context of the city-level TM practices partly shaped by the institutional ambiguity reflected in simultaneously integrating corporate and market-driven logics of TM and elements that, for some SIEs, resembled a more traditional expatriate communal institution. The research thus reveals how prevailing corporate and market-oriented logics of MTM when adopted through institutional practices at the city level aimed at leveraging international talent may combine with community logics, associated with more traditional expatriate community institutions. The research advances MTM research by showing how MTM 'practice levers' for attracting, developing, or retaining talent (Evans et al., 2022) are underpinned by different institutional logics with consequentiality for how talents engage with them.

The structure of this article is as follows. The next section accounts for the theoretical background of the research. The methodological considerations are then explained. The 'Findings' section presents dynamics and effects of SIE strategies of engaging the international city institution to cope with and further their expatriation process. Finally, the article discusses theoretical additions to extant SIE and TM research, including research directions that can be profitably explored in future studies. The research provides practical inspirations to strategic human resource management at the company level, the management of TM institutions and governmental policies for attracting and retaining international talent.

Theoretical background

To explore how SIEs engage a TM institution, representing changing institutional practices at the city level, in processes of capital formation, the present study blends inspirations from theories of institutions and capital formation through a practice-near lens that is sensitized towards strategies of highly

skilled SIEs as capable and knowledgeable actors in engaging institutions (Giddens, 1979). Such theoretical inspirations have inspired research streams in the broad field of career studies (Barley, 1989; Tomlinson, Muzio, Sommerlad, Webley, & Duff, 2013; Weick, 1996) and more recently in SIE research (Andresen et al., 2013).

Institutional environments of self-initiated expatriation

As institutional infrastructures vary between countries and cities, they likely exert diverse influences upon the mobility patterns of professionals who build their careers across countries (Scurry et al., 2013; Zeitz et al., 2009). Institutions that influence the international mobility and work experiences of SIEs can be of regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive character (Scott, 2008). Previous contributions on self-initiated expatriation have revealed how SIEs' learning and adjustment do not happen in an institutional vacuum, but for example differs between the organizational contexts of local and foreign employers (Selmer, Lauring, Normann, & Kubovcikova, 2015), and how SIEs interact with institutional contexts at the national level (Bjerregaard, 2014). Research has demonstrated how national regulation and political pressures (in the context of a Visa programme) can lead to the formation of insulated global worker communities (Ryan & Sylvanto, 2023). Relatively fewer contributions have illuminated institutions at the city level. SIEs encounter regulatory systems that may constitute formal structural opportunities and constraints on mobility (Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Scurry et al., 2013), yet SIEs also gain support from and even are constitutively bound up with different institutional frameworks, such as public systems and communal institutions. Far from merely imposing constraints on social action, institutions are thus constitutive and enabling of it (Scott, 2008). Thus, institutions are not merely sources of support, but also more profoundly cultural-cognitive structures and norms that shape processes of interaction, identification, and cognition (Scott, 2008). Institutions that enable and shape the global mobility and work of professionals exist at different levels and for example comprise transnational community institutions (Djelic & Quack, 2010), national regulatory and cultural-cognitive institutions (Akram Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Noiriel, 1988), the institutional infrastructures of (expatriate) communities, and the variable instituted micro-practices of organizations and institutions in which the SIE participates (Owen-Smith & Powell, 2008; Small, 2009). We do not have sufficient knowledge about how and the degree to which institutional features of the broader settings moderate self-initiated expatriation, such as processes of identification, network, and knowledge formation, forming part of the knowing-why, -whom, and -how forms of career capital (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994).

Lower-level institutions surrounding international professionals' mobility

Expatriate research early on explored expatriate communal institutions as part of the formation of distinct expatriate communities (Cohen, 1977). Communities, local or international, are characterized by different degrees of institutionalization. The institutions of expatriate communities, including associations, clubs, schools, kindergartens (Cohen, 1977), have different outlook across time and space. Early research showed how the degree of 'institutional completeness' of international or ethnic communities conditions how individuals become absorbed into a given international or local community and are required to conform to either local circumstances or to relatively separate transnational cultures of distinct international norms, codes, and values, which segregate them from the host country communities and cultures (Breton, 1964; Wagner, 1998). A focus on expatriates' interaction with institutions thus serves to direct attention towards communities' ability to absorb, integrate, and facilitate the mobility of individuals. Expatriates may shape their micro-institutional environment in the host country to suit many of their needs and develop and maintain their lifestyles (Cohen, 1977: 59). Moreover, research on the institutional structures of expatriate communities differentiates between communities implanted' by sponsoring organizations and natural' communities (Cohen, 1977). In some planted expatriate communities, the sponsoring organizations tend to enclose

the individual entirely within their institutional domain (Cohen, 1977). A special case is the importation into the host society of a system of home institutions by sponsoring actors, such as the examples provided by the American military (Cohen, 1977).

Some nationally based institutions, such as national language schools, may serve to create institutional continuity with the country of origin (Djelic & Quack, 2010; Wagner, 1998). Other expatriate communal institutions are entirely transnational in their practices, norms, and the clientele they serve, responding to the commonality of experiences and needs of expats achieved by working abroad, such as some international schools and associations (Wagner, 1998). The expatriate club, as one type of transnational social space, has been shown to be an important space for work-related and social activities of expatriates and for everyday maintenance of their values and identifications of cosmopolitism and transnationalism in 'world cities' (Beaverstock, 2011). Researchers have examined expatriate communal institutions as 'freestanding polities' that 'offer an open door to those with no entrée into other social networks' (Hindman, 2013). Expatriates may use expatriate institutions to create coherence across their multiple moves (Hindman, 2013).

Overall, Cohen (1977: 41) described expatriate clubs, associations, and spouse organizations as some of the most important expatriate communal institutions, which internally structure the life of expatriate communities and externally signal their distinctiveness. The research has thus dedicated attention to how expatriate communal institutions sustain lifestyles by creating and maintaining expatriate community (Cohen, 1977), often through an array of recognizable institutional practices (Hindman, 2013). In this vein, such traditional expatriate communal institutions tend to reflect variations of what Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury (2012), and other scholars (Georgiou & Arenas, 2023), have conceptualized as community logics, being characterized in terms of a common boundary, inside which trust and reciprocity (sources of legitimacy) and internal commitment to membership and values (sources of authority and norms) inspire members to connect with fellow members (source of identity) (Georgiou & Arenas, 2023). Recent contributions have provided more fine-grained classifications of variations community logics (Georgiou & Arenas, 2023). Institutions may thus also be characterized by their 'logics' (Bjerregaard & Jonasson, 2014; Thornton et al., 2012). Overall, institutional logics have been conceptualized as means-end frameworks that define activities considered appropriate for achieving a given end in a field of activity (Boxenbaum & Battilana, 2005). Institutional practices are posited as carriers of institutions and their logics, which they reproduce or modify when realized in action (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012). However, as the forms and patterns of global mobility evolve, so do institutions in which mobility happen (Hindman, 2013). In the words of Hindman, 'the institutions of expatriate life, from Sunday school groups to the bulletin board of Expat Exchange, thus provide neither a set of rules nor an absolute boundary for the community' (Hindman, 2013: 206).

As TM at the national, regional, and city levels increasingly have become a concern for firms and governments, often in TM coalitions, other concerns, actors, and means-end relationships to a higher extent become involved in the formation of institutions in which expatriation occurs and becomes embedded. This implies that other logic constellations come to underpin institutional practices supporting expatriates. This article devotes attention to a particular kind of institution in terms of an implanted institution that, as part of the city-level TM efforts of a coalition of actors, seeks to attract and retain international professionals and further develop their social and professional capital. TM is a newer field of activity, emerging in the late 1990s from multiple actors' efforts, not least consulting firms that initially drove the 'war for talent' discourse (Chambers *et al*, 1998).

TM emerged by reframing HRM strategies and practices as a means for competition (Sparrow, 2021). Various recent contributions characterize the institutional logics that underpin TM practices. These studies address TM within organizations (Tyskbo, 2021) and in inter-organizational collaborations on TM (Grant, Garavan, & Mackie, 2020). For example, in a study of inter-organizational collaboration on TM, Grant et al. (2020) account for how TM practices are underpinned by dominant market-based and corporate logics, 'focusing on profit, performance,

competition, effectiveness, efficiency' (Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006). They show how implementation of these logics in specific public sector contexts may create tensions with bureaucratic logics (Grant et al., 2020). Depending on the context of adoption, TM practices may thus potentially also become infused or collide with for example professional, legalistic-bureaucratic and community logics (Grant et al., 2020). MTM tends to be underpinned by dominant market and corporate logic components whereby TM practices are means to increasing competitiveness by attracting, retaining, and developing talent (understood in terms of high levels of human or career capital). As governments, from national to local levels, and companies perceive a need to proactively attract and retain highly skilled, mobile professionals through MTM in the global intercity and country competition for talent (Florida, 2005; Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001), they take initiative to develop institutional infrastructures and practices aimed at facilitating the mobility, integration, and retention of international talent.

The international infrastructures of constraints and opportunities in which SIEs' global work experiences and careers develop imply that the mobility of highly qualified professionals is not an arbitrary flow determined purely by individual volition, motives, and free choice (Andresen & Biemann, 2013; Friedmann & Wolff, 1982; Wagner, 1998). Rather, they aggregate into a variety of patterns (Thorn & Inkson, 2013), which in the present research are examined in the nexus of a city-level TM institution and strategies of navigating them. When residing in so-called natural communities, expatriates are often more dispersed institutionally than other migrants and less organized through 'collective representation' (Cohen, 1977). The institutional arrangements that surround international professional mobility thus far from determine expatriation processes, though they may have a significant salience within them.

Strategies of engaging institutions in capital formation

Elaborating on Cohen (1977), Brewster & Pickard (1994: 34) noted that individuals 'do not all use expatriate institutions to the same degree, nor are they equally desirous of the protection of the environmental bubble'. Cohen (1984) for example identified expatriates which he termed 'drop-outs', referring to those who do not belong to an expatriate community anymore nor have gone fully native. Due to the often low cohesiveness of such communities of transients, how institutions enable and constrain global mobility and careers is likely mediated by expatriates' strategies of engaging with them. Hence, while global mobility and work processes are moderated by variable institutional settings and conditions in which they are embedded (Small, 2009), global careerists employ diverse strategies of engaging them to achieve different resources. Over the past decade, TM scholars have particularly sought to advance our understanding of career resources through the tripartite notion of career capital, comprising knowing-why capital (sense of reason informing actions), knowing-whom capital (social and professional ties and networks), and knowing-how capital (professional and technical expertise, etc.) (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; Dickmann et al., 2018; Lamb & Sutherland, 2010). TM research has accorded attention to how employers seek to develop and leverage career capital through TM systems and practices, often considered relevant for both the individual careerist and the employer, and how careerists develop and deploy capital within individual as well as a series of work experiences (Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Dickmann et al., 2018), constituting a career. For example, expatriates use career capital to accomplish different stages of a single expatriation while they at the same time may develop such capital (Dickmann & Harris, 2005), thus feeding into their subsequent career. Research has revealed how different subsets of SIEs are guided by different mobility and career orientations, career 'anchors', and experiences (Cerdin, 2013; Froese, 2012; Inkson & Myers, 2003). Such orientations relate to the knowing-why of careers, comprising personal identifications, values and interests that give sense of purpose to and guide how individuals navigate in their (global) careers (Bjerregaard & Klitmøller, 2016: Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; Inkson & Arthur, 2001). These can also be expected to inform how SIEs enact their relationships to the institutions in which they are embedded (Bourdieu, 1981; Owen-Smith & Powell, 2001). The concept of

strategies of engaging institutions has been used to conceptualize the ways in which SIEs approach and work themselves through the various institutional settings in which they operate (Richardson, 2009). The implications of participating in institutional settings surrounding expatriation, as contexts of capital formation (Owen-Smith & Powell, 2001; Small, 2009), are thus likely far from uniform. Rather, the salience of institutions in the SIE process and capital formation depends upon the strategies mobilized by SIEs as capable and knowledgeable agents who are both enabled and constrained by broader institutional systems (Bourdieu, 1972; Giddens, 1979). SIEs' participation in the same institution may have different implications, depending upon their strategies as oriented by values, identifications, etc., including unanticipated consequences in capital formation (Small, 2009). Furthermore, the sociologist Small (2009) showed how substantial shares of people's networks are formed by institutional conditions they often do not control, and thus are not the immediate effect of intended strategy. The formation of social networks thus depends on the seemingly mundane, but influential practices, norms, and regulations of institutions and associations, which actively enrol participants into networks (Small, 2009). These institutional conditions comprise the instituted practices, regulations, and norms of for example firms, associations, schools, day care centres, clubs, gyms, churches, etc., in which people participate and that shape their interactions, and, therefore, emergence of social and professional ties or 'capital'. Capital formation is thus shaped by institutional and organizational embeddedness (Nee & Ingram, 1998) in purposive as well as unanticipated ways (Small, 2009).

This conceptual background provides the conceptual anchor points for exploring SIE strategies of responding to and engaging changing institutional practices of TM at the city level. In the following sections, the usefulness of this conceptualization for theorizing and studying the stated research problem is demonstrated through the findings of a field-based interview study of how a city-level TM institution appears in and shapes the global mobility and work experiences of SIEs.

Methodology

A qualitative study is suited for examining an institution as instantiated in the lived practices of SIEs. Hence, field-based interview research can provide contextualized data on social processes, such as capital formation, as shaped by institutional practices (Thornton, 1999). This research comprised interviews, observations, and documents.

Interviews

Personal interviews can potentially bring to light how people engage with societal structures in their everyday lives (Crowley & Weir, 2007; Rouleau, 2010). Interviewees were recruited through snowballing and newsletters. The studied TM institution was situated in an internationalizing city in Denmark. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. Interviews were made with 38 SIEs. The length of the interviews was from 0.5 to 2.5 hours. The majority of the interviews lasted 45 minutes to an hour. In addition, some spouses (11) were interviewed. Sampling additionally sought to achieve variation to ensure breadth and depth. This was chosen to generate a rich picture of the variable strategies of using the institution.

The majority of the SIEs held jobs in the public sector. Most interviewees (nine) came from Germany, and four persons came from India. The SIEs were otherwise from a wide range of countries from all continents. Fourteen of the expats were early career expats, 8 SIEs had been in Denmark for less than a year, while 19 SIEs had been in Denmark for 1–3 years. Fourteen expatriates were on their first expatriation. The expatriates were divided equally by gender, which contrasts with previous statistics where the men tend to dominate international transfers (Harris, 2002; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Yet this resonates with numbers showing that women are relatively better represented among SIEs (Froese, 2012; Tharenou, 2010). Interviews were also made with some representatives of institutions such as the expatriate institution.

Participant observation

Participant observation is fertile in researching the social structures of communities (Whyte, 1993) and for understanding the diverse meanings and uses participants infuse into practices instituted in such communities (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2009; Zilber, 2002). Participant observation was carried out within some practices of the institution to gain knowledge on the interaction processes of SIEs occurring in the context of different instituted practices (e.g., monthly social events, tax seminar, spouse events, etc.).

Analysis

Analyses of transcribed interviews involved different analytical tasks. The interviews were coded using the qualitative data analysis program NVivo. The coding process evolved between pre-concepts derived from literature reviews and emergent categories from new coding processes. Overall, the analytical process was thus abductive in that the empirical data collection and analysis started out relatively exploratory. In the process, additional conceptual and theoretical inspirations were engaged to further make sense of emergent findings. Coding was first conducted by one researcher and then checked by another to enhance validity. The relatively open coding involved *in vivo* codes developed through close engagement with the data as well as categories inspired by sensitizing concepts of extant research on self-initiated expatriation. Codes addressed, for example, motivations orienting mobility moves and careers of the SIEs, perceptions, uses, and effects of the TM institution and its practices, networking, motivation to stay/leave, etc. These codes and the narrative reading of individual interviews were interpreted through concepts of knowing-why,-whom, and -how capital, whereby patterns identified through coding were connected with patterns through another analytical process (Locke, Feldman, & Golden-Biddle, 2022: 268). Concepts of institutional logics were subsequently integrated in the analysis, to further make sense of and specify SIEs' different perceptions and uses of the institution, as well in the analysis of material communicating the purposes and practices of the TM institution. The interviews were also analysed through a careful narrative reading of each interview for its meaningful structure in its entirety, in order not to lose sight of individual SIEs' mobility and career experiences as expressed through their narratives. The overall analytical process was thus not only reliant on coding. The analysis combined creativity, to develop, make sense of and exploit emergent findings, and systematicity (Jarzabkowski, Langley, & Nigam, 2021), among others to achieve an overview of the different patterns in SIEs' engagement of the TM institution (Locke et al., 2022). This involved iterativity in coding and the overall analytical process, rather than following a standardized and stable 'template' for analysis (Locke et al., 2022).

Triangulation between data was used to illuminate possible variation (Flick, 2007). Triangulation was applied in different ways. It allowed for discerning, comparing, and explaining different SIEs' perceptions and ways of participating in the same institution and its practices. This generated insights into different patterns of interaction between SIEs' strategies and institutional practices in capital formation. This also revealed how SIEs had different perceptions of and responses to salient logics underpinning institutional practices. Flick (2007) showed how triangulation can be useful in generating insights into possible differences and interplay between the realms of institutions and interactions. Notes were taken from field observations and triangulated with data from the other data sources. Triangulation was thus also involved in assessing interrelation and possible variation between institutional framework, as conveyed in official descriptions and communication, SIEs' perceptions of institutional practices, and observed SIE participation in them. Hence, the aim of triangulation was not to achieve convergence between data in a strategy of validation, as in perhaps more positivist uses of triangulation that seek to increase validity through convergent data (Flick, 2007).

Context of study: institutional infrastructures for international professionals at the city level

A stream of studies has dedicated to international professionals in 'world cities' as the apex of the international city hierarchy in the global competition on talent (Beaverstock, 2002, 2011).

The research proposes that expatriate institutions of global cities constitute social spaces for transnationalism – an institutional sphere of shared supranational norms and values beyond national cultural identifications (Wagner, 1998). The present article reports the findings of a field-based interview study comprising interviews and observations of SIEs' use of a TM institution dedicated to serving international professionals in an internationalizing city and thereby helping firms to attract and retain 'international talent' by creating better conditions for this. The institution is thus part of the internationalization efforts of a coalition of firms in the greater city area and the municipality, being represented in its governance. This city is characterized by a nascent, yet expanding sphere of international institutions and services built by public authorities as well as private firms, including large MNCs in the city area. As part of city internationalization strategies, they thus actively collaborate on MTM to develop environments that are more favourable to the attraction, retention, and further development of internationally mobile professionals in the global intercity competition on talent. This particular situation, with an expanding sector of international institutions, entailed specific institutional constraints and opportunities for SIEs in managing their global mobility and work experiences. While MTM in Denmark has been effective in supporting the internal development of talent, the country has also faced challenges in attracting and retaining external, global talent (Minbaeva, Andersen, Lubanski, Navrbjerg, & Torfing, 2018). This constitutes what has been referred to as a TM paradox at the national level (Minbaeva et al., 2018). Making internal talent growth a top priority has hence not translated into strong MTM towards global talent (Minbaeva et al., 2018). Denmark is attractive to MNCs, not least because of the quality of the internally grown talent base, but also faces certain shortages of relevant high education skills, which may push jobs to be outsourced (Minbaeva et al., 2018). Denmark is not a top expat destination (Minbaeva et al., 2018). Regulatory-policy institutions have over time shifted between relaxation and tightening of frameworks for foreign skilled individuals, while government and companies through MTM also have proactively advanced the development of institutions, such as international schools, associations, and international public services, to facilitate the attraction and retention of mobile international professionals.

The city institutions dedicated to attracting and retaining international talent have been characterized by a comparatively thin density. However, the companies, local government, and some of the major institutions in the city have joined forces to improve the institutional conditions for attracting and retaining international professionals through MTM. An expanding sphere of international institutions includes a TM expatriate institution serving as centre for many city-level TM efforts towards international professionals, international public services, and international school and kindergartens.

Findings

As part of city internationalization efforts, a coalition of firms, such as large MNCs, and the municipality were collaborating on MTM to create institutional conditions in the city area conducive for attracting, developing, and retaining international talents. These efforts were reflected in a growing number of international institutions servicing the international labour force. Formal descriptions of the TM institution's purpose reflected the dominant market-based and corporate logics of TM, also being expressed in its governance, which mostly consisted of corporate TM professionals. The overall framework was thus particularly underpinned by market-oriented and corporate logics of TM, according to which adopted practices were considered means to compete in the intercity and -national competition on talent and to support the local pool of international talent.

A range of practices had thus been instituted in the expatriate institution to attract highly skilled SIEs and anchor them culturally, socially, and professionally within the greater city area. These practices comprised practices for career capital formation, in terms of social and professional networking practices, practices for translating career capital to the host-country labour

market (such as for developing CV writing skills), seminars about the country and the city, seminars on paperwork, career development sessions, interaction with the public systems, and assisting companies with global talents, etc. The practices were targeted expatriates as well as their spouses:

> Most of them come with their spouses, trailing spouses, they usually come without work, and it is a great opportunity for them also to find some contacts in what we offer them. Also getting a new job. And we have a lot of events in relation to spouses, we have a community for spouses, we organize many professional events (…) We have arranged something in relation to career development. (Representative for institution)

At the same time, the institution had adopted a strong emphasis in its communication and practices on building 'community' of internationals. It had adopted institutional practices and organizing principles also resembling those characterizing more traditional expatriate communal institutions, reported in studies as being used by expatriates for creating 'community' and a degree of social cohesion abroad. These involved ongoing communication of a 'community' of expatriates, practices for meeting-up, socializing, and building connections between new and old members of the institution in informal settings, including the casual coffee-hour like exchanges between expatriates (Hindman, 2013) and monthly bar events, spouse community and clubs, practices for welcoming and receiving new internationals to the community, community newsletter, etc.

The development from an international urban milieu characterized by some formal voids regarding institutions dedicated to servicing international professionals to an emerging web of international institutions was reflected in the personal narratives of some of those SIEs who had resided in the city for some years. As experienced by some SIEs:

> It was different some years ago. The Institution for Internationals was not started yet but now I'm also attending some of their events. (SIE)

> When I came here there was not something like this to make use of. Only individual persons who I was asking for some advice, but not an organized program. (SIE)

In the following, we explore SIE strategies of responding to changing institutional practices of TM at the city level, being reflected in the expanding international institutional fabric of the city, in furthering their global relocation for work.

SIE strategies of navigating the TM institution

SIEs with different career orientations for their relocation had very different stances towards the local institutions for expatriates. SIEs' strategies of engaging with the institutions surrounding their expatriation comprised efforts to facilitate initial integration with the prospect of enmeshing themselves into the host society, maintaining an international social and professional life without considerable adjustment, and efforts to actively escaping the formal institutions of the expatriate community. These responses of SIEs to the changing international institutional infrastructure of the city are accounted for in the following.

Engaging the institution to further integration and a career in the host society

A group of SIEs engaged international institutions such as the TM institution upon initial arrival to the city as a means for integrating in and advancing their work opportunities in the host society within the expected horizon of a longer-term stay. Yet, institutional categorizations of them unintendedly also in some cases risked contributing to sustaining expatriate identities as distinct from those of the surrounding society. Due to their career orientations, these SIEs were often driven by wishes to

engage more extensively in the host society, and often used the institution, and practices underpinned by logics of TM, as a first means for this:

> I would say that the Institution for Internationals has offered great support in social terms. I've been going to monthly get-togethers. I have also been attending some of their talks and seminars that they are conducting. They have conducted some kind of CV-writing seminars that I haven't been able to attend.

Moreover, market-based and corporate logics of TM underpinned practices of brokering job opportunities and relevant ties, in terms of knowing-whom capital, for expatriates. Hence, the institution brokered and facilitated, for instance, useful institutional ties to other organizations and institutions for this group of SIEs as well as the translation of career capital for the local labour market:

> So, I have found friends and through the Institution for Internationals, I have found information on how to develop my CV for the Danish job market. I've gone to some network events. I've basically gone to everything they do and spent a lot of time there asking questions about various things. So, I've used it for networking and information gathering. (SIE)

Some SIEs entered the institution and achieve unanticipated gains in terms of institutional or organizational ties to other organizations and institutions by being exposed to its instituted practices (Small, 2009), thus not being effects of intended strategies. Instituted practices served to actively structure useful ties to other institutions and organizations for the individual participant, without the SIE necessarily intending this to be so. As reflected in the experiences of an SIE, they would participate for vague or other reasons than what turned out to be actual gains achieved from their participation:

> When I first joined the Institution for Internationals, my goals were more vague—I didn't really know what I would get out of it. I have, however, gotten something out of it, such as connections to other organizations. (SIE)

In this vein, some SIEs achieved unanticipated gains from participation in the institution and being exposed to its instituted practices structuring the emergence of social, professional, organizational, and institutional ties (Small, 2009). As noted by an SIE spouse: 'I found this young, creative entrepreneurs' club actually through this institution so that works in that sense'. Yet, the purpose of the institution was much more vague to some SIEs, but the presence of the international institution provided an atmosphere and feeling of safeness:

> I found it very helpful. The idea that someone is thinking of you is very important. Don't forget that we're just foreigners here in Denmark. You have the Institution for Internationals which is a very vague, abstract institution looking out for you. It makes you feel a little bit better. (SIE)

However, this group of SIEs, using the institution to further a career orientation of longer-term local career development, also at times encountered some unanticipated adverse consequences. Thus, by participating in this setting, they also became associated with institutional categorizations that accentuated expatriate identities despite their intentions. Hence, despite various institutional practices aimed at attracting and retaining SIEs, participation in the institution also generated unintended capital losses in some SIEs' expatriation, including in their formation of social networks, cultural learning, etc. Useful local networks of host nationals were, for instance, largely developed at work where SIEs came to learn about the Danish culture. The expatriate institution was, in contradistinction, by some SIEs perceived as an international institution for meeting other internationals characterized by a commonality in experiences as expatriate. The acquired learning about the host country culture and network formation at the workplace was as a consequence more effective with

regard to making the SIEs prolonging their stay beyond the period intended than the retention efforts of the international institution. As experienced by an SIE:

> Right, through work and not Institution for Internationals, even though that should have been the ideal answer, I think [laughs]. But it is through my colleagues that I have also come to learn about the Danish culture because they invite me to their house and such and I really have a nice time with them. That's really the treasure for me; that's the reason that I decided that I wanted to be here more than just one year. (SIE)

In some instances, a division of work emerged in the networking activities among SIE couples. Thus, expatriates were often networking with Danes at work while some spouses were building international social ties through the expatriate institution and other international institutions and organizations. The social relationships developed within the workplace often became more important than those brokered by the institution. As observed by an SIE:

> I get to interact with Danes through my work and colleagues, but my husband is basically stuck at home all day. But because of those Danish classes he gets to go out and meet other, well, he doesn't get to meet other Danish people because only foreigners attend the Danish class [laughs], but he gets to meet people and make friends there, so that seems to be working out for him. The Institution for Internationals has a spouse club. So, he's going to some of their events. Here at work, they have a staff association and I have been using that quite often. (Expat)

While a central purpose of many of the instituted practices was to generate knowing-whom capital, in terms of useful social and professional networks for the SIEs, in order to support their retention and career in the city, in accordance with logics of TM, the type of relationships developed through the international institution was often characterized by relatively weaker ties low on mutual obligations and reciprocity. This group of SIEs used the institution as a setting for networking until they had established a network of internationals, which often would then relocate again. Their emergent local network generated through the institution consisted in some cases entirely of internationals, making the networks highly transient and fragile. As noted by a female academic SIE, 'I used it [the institution] more when I came here, then I met friends and started to spend more time with them until they left again' (SIE).

Accordingly, SIEs staying for more than three years at times came to experience that the social relationships they developed were not sufficiently durable for fulfilling their social and professional needs and goals, the knowing-why of their current career development. Rather, the time and resources spent on building the networks vanished with the international relocation of the network. After experiencing that their personal social networks would opt to leave for work opportunities in other countries, they often changed their approach to networking by focusing more on gaining host country friends and professional relationships. This did not occur out of a suddenly perceived need for 'adjustment', but out of a desire to gain continuity in their social life. However, the international institution was often perceived as being of relatively less support for such a change in SIEs' approach to forming social networks:

> The thing is, I never found it very difficult to meet the other expats. Most people do not know other people in the area, so it is pretty easy to meet expats. It was meeting the Danes that was a bit harder. I never felt the need to go to the Institution for Internationals or others. (Expat)

Mobility without 'adjustment': sustaining career orientation of internationalism through the TM institution

A group of SIEs pursued entirely international career opportunities and was often employed in highly internationalized work settings, some of which had no more than one host national employee. One example consisted of researchers in internationalized university research labs with almost no host

national employees who only sought international career advancement. They often did not attach any value to the particularity of the local context of their global mobility. Consequently, they experienced less need for so-called 'adjustment' to achieve professional or personal success from their expatriation. Expending time on participating in host country institutions, and even merely social activities outside of work, were perceived as detrimental to achieving their personal or professional goals and building capital relevant to their career, with the knowing-why of their career revolving around transnational identifications and values. As expressed by an SIE:

> When you work at the university, it's easier because you can speak English, but when you go outside to other companies it's different and more difficult because you have to learn Danish at some point.

The international institution facilitated global mobility and work experiences without considerable 'adjustment' through its community-style practices and logic of community building, and by serving as a kind of meta-institution bridging a myriad of international circles of professionals and their spouses and embedding these circles within each other. Some members of the international institution were involved in national expatriate institutions in order to establish a degree of institutional or cultural continuity with their particular country of origin. As explained by an SIE:

> What I have done is to find such a Danish-German union to join. But that's mostly because I of course speak German with my child, and I thought that my child must not only have the language from me, but it must be embedded in social relations. And they have such a family group, so that we can go and meet once a month. (Expat)

A group of SIEs were strongly embedded in multiple transnational social spaces, and their 'local' networks were highly international, consisting of foreign professionals in the local area. As one example, an international parent circle solidified their social relationships developed in an international primary school through the practices of the institution:

> The Institution for Internationals has been great, because we—my friends and I, the moms that I've met through the international school—we quite often will go to events put on by the Institution for Internationals. We do have a mom who lived in Denmark for six years, and who knows a lot, and we're quite an active group of mums. We go for coffee, probably once a week, we go to international clubs—I mean, activities, like, on Thursday we're going to make glass.

Through community-style practices and by serving as a meta-institution in bridging different expatriate circles, the international city institution contributed to making the different emergent international networks of these SIEs highly intertwined and multiplex:

> Well, now they're so intertwined. For example, I will be leading this after school activity in theatre and choir and the new international kindergartens that have just started up, and I found that through Institution for Internationals and the company's Spouse Community. Also, I probably heard about it through two friends of mine. That's the type of example which makes me think that I must be developing a network because there is some kind of overlap. It's the same thing with the program that I went to yesterday.

However, the institution was, in this vein, in the perception of a different group of SIEs, contributing to integrating its members into a relatively self-enclosed community by making SIEs circulate among other internationals. Thus, the institution added some unintended non-cultural bounds on

the everyday life experiences of certain SIEs by socially segregating the networks and interactions of SIEs within the ambit of the international institutions of the city:

> I went to this international meet-up, one of those where they welcome new people. Fine, but I think that you have an expat community here, which is not integrating with the local community … and it is not really what I wanted. I wanted something to put roots down within the city—to meet Danish people, not other internationals. So, I think that, if you could make those two networks coincide it would be better. Because, as I said, it is difficult to get into a local network if you don't speak Danish. Part of that is cultural, part of it is that you just don't necessarily move in the same circles. (SIE)

Through institutions serving several expatriate communities, the different national expatriate communities and networks become interdependent in the institutional sphere. However, a group of SIEs also experienced some less attractive consequences from such institutional enclosing of international circles. The selfsame practices instituted to facilitate the retention and anchoring of SIEs in locally embedded career capital and society disembedded some SIEs from local networks and institutions. Due to the disembedding effects of these additional social-institutional mechanisms beyond culture, some groups of SIEs came to experience a need to break with the international institutions of the city to really integrate in the host culture:

> It is a very English-structured community. And if you want to take part in the Danish society, it is more interesting for us to come away from this secluded community. It is interesting and nice to meet them, but this is not in the way that we will go there every week, or so. (SIE)

> You don't know any people and maybe you don't want to just meet up at this bar event but maybe also some nice cultural experience. This was something that was very nice in the beginning, and I also think that it is a different channel to meet other people. For me, I would say that I met different people. Some people just don't go to these bar events because they think it is stupid to just sit around a table and drink beer. (SIE)

However, such delicate challenges also surfaced for participating HR-professionals. As for example, recounted:

> I went to one of their meetings. It was the HR mangers (of one of the MNCs), the university and people who employ foreign workers, and they were debating this issue: How can we help families to stay here. That was my first of experience that not all families stay. Some people cannot stay because it's too difficult. I heard them talking about that if we [the Danes] help people too much they will become dependent on us. They were more worried about helping too much than giving the appropriate help. That was the debate, about not holding people's hands too much, but at that time I had no television, no phone, no Internet, and no information about how to get these things. (SIE)

International networking without being 'international': Strategies of escaping the expanding sphere of international city institutions

A group of SIEs enmeshed themselves in international networks, but did not identify with being an 'expatriate' or promote themselves as 'internationals'. They experienced that members of the institution were made to interact within international circles, somewhat institutionally circumscribed and segregated from the host society. In their perceptions, it often attached and accentuated institutional categorizations as 'expatriate' and 'internationals' to its members, thus potentially interacting in adverse ways with the knowing-why, i.e., motivations, orienting their career development.

A group of SIEs thus observed that, in order to integrate in host society, they had to break with the institution. This was due to its perceived character as a rather English-structured community.

Some SIEs perceived meanings and logic of 'community' in the institutional practices of the TM institution which they associated with more traditional expatriate communal institutions of creating and sustaining 'community', a degree of cohesiveness, member categorization, and distinctiveness. These comprised adopted community-style practices for receiving, socializing, and building ties between 'internationals', and the constant emphasis on 'community' in its communication. Hence, a group of SIEs found it more appealing to socialize with Danes than to sustain an international style of socializing and categories of identification, and networking in the context of the institution:

> The information on the legal system and the common dinners are absolutely nice. But it is not so attractive. It would be more attractive for us, really, to come in contact with Danes. So, for example, my wife would like to start some tai chi—she has previously done some tai chi, and she is now interested to find a tai chi group here in Denmark. (SIE)

Hence, they appreciated practices that for them were associated with TM logics of building career capital, in terms of networking to build useful social and professional ties without 'community'. The TM institution, together with other expatriate communal institutions, in their perceptions risked to incorporate them into an institutionally self-enclosed transnational community culture and associated categories of identification as 'international', 'expat', and related interpretations of expatriate categories. For this group, participating in the institution was to some extent perceived as being contrary to achieving their professional and social goals and sense of purpose with their career mobility. As expressed by an SIE and spouse:

> I went to a Spouse Community event at the art museum last week, but they were really trying to motivate all these depressed housewives who were forced by their husbands to come here.… Well, I don't think I'm the target group. (SIE)

> I kind of think that I'm in this city in Denmark because I have chosen it, myself. Then I'd like to talk to Danes. Not like that: you are now international, so you have only international friends, and don't talk to Danes. (…) And then I have no need for an association or club. (SIE)

Hence, efforts to disengage from the institution and its practices did not occur in response to the overarching TM logics of building social and professional networks, but rather organizing principles perceived as giving rise to what resembled traditional expatriate communal institutions. These SIEs employed a strategy of socially distancing themselves from the institutions of expatriate communities, in terms of formal associations, clubs, schools, etc., in further developing their knowing-why and -whom capital. One group of SIEs engaged networks of internationals in their professional and social life, yet did not identify with being an 'expatriate' or 'international'. They perceived the formal institutions of the expatriate community as exposing some tendencies towards closure around an international culture and signalling a form of international elitism, thereby adding to the segregation of the SIEs from the host country and city. Hence, they perceived that it as an expatriate community institution negatively affected the knowing-why capital, i.e., motivations, values, identifications, they sought to realize through their career and mobility. To sustain knowing-why orienting their cross-border career, they were flexible when it came to building social networks with international and local residents, as long as such networking (knowing-whom) did not imply explicit categories of expatriate and international identifications. This shows how they perceived subtle normative difference between types of knowing-whom capital, between more formalized international social and professional networks created in the context of explicit expatriate institutions and 'community', on the one hand, and informal networking with international and local professionals, on the other hand. Their career-capital strategies thus reveal intricate dynamics of interaction between knowing-why and knowing-whom in career capital formation. They sought to advance knowing-why of their careers around localized career and personal identifications and values, circumventing institutions of expatriate community, while still building a mix of international and Danish social and professional ties.

These SIEs thus employed a strategy of distancing themselves from institutions sustaining formal communities for the international labour force:

> I do not cultivate such things. For me it is counterproductive. But also, because I do not have a background in the diplomatic community or the military community—they just live within their own small worlds. I do not adhere to the *American wifes' club* and the alike. […] I know personally many people from the diplomatic communities where the parents have had such jobs, and they have been at international schools and so forth. But I think it is a strange form of elitism, which I do not think is particularly great or am particularly attracted by. (SIE)

In this regard, a group of SIEs did not identify with a particular nation-state or international culture, and also explicitly distanced themselves from expatriate 'community' (Friedman & Randeria, 2004). They neither considered expatriation as a meeting between national cultures nor wished to be involved in formal expatriate institutions. As reflected in the experiences of an academic SIE:

> But it is also because it is self-chosen being abroad and then being here, it is self-initiated. I do not have a strong state-attachment…I will not go to *Stammtisch* at a local German bar to speak German with some people whom I otherwise have nothing in common with. It is extreme in Cambridge, for instance, where each nationality has its own *society* and *club*. I simply do not want that, never! In many cases it is counterproductive with regard to integration. (Expat)

These SIEs developed local international social and professional networks, but distanced themselves from formal institutions of community they perceived to be involved in creating and sustaining expatriate community and signalling a more secluded-expatriate identity. Hence, they disassociated themselves from formal community-style practices facilitating social interactions between expatriates, which for them were not merely about being there (e.g., socializing), but as much about being categorized and perceived as an 'international' (Bourdieu, 1984; Goffman, 1971):

> I have no need for a formalized international network. […] I have my own international network at the department, and that is very nice. If you want to watch some German football, you are not alone. But I have also Danish friends; I will not just be 'international'—I am mostly myself and not my nationality in that way. (SIE)

Some SIEs furthermore referred to networking through the institution as reflecting 'a collecting approach' to social relationships. Hence, some SIEs experienced networking in the institution as a means of 'collecting people', with consequences for the composition of knowing-whom capital, rather than a setting for building strong social ties:

> I think it is more about collecting people than about actually meeting people and building a relationship. It is more a check-box approach rather than, you know…I have some very good friends here, so I am not looking for collecting people. I want to actually make friends. And this was—last month I think, when a lot of the girls were away on business, and I was—[laughs]—I needed someone to hang out with. So, I thought I would give it a go. But it is not really my scene. (Expat)

A few expatriates, for example an expatriate from Columbia, perceived the building of formal institutions for networking and meeting-up as an attribute of Danish society, also often described in popular discourse as a society of associations and their members, and were not familiar with home country institutions like the TM institution.

In summary, as demonstrated when looking across SIEs' experiences, diverse strategies of engaging with the changing international institutional practices of MTM of the city emerged. These were

at least partly informed by different career orientations and had differential implications for career capital formation processes of SIEs.

Discussion

This article set out to explore how institutional-contextual features moderate self-initiated expatriation, with a particular focus on institutional practices of TM at the city level seeking to shape capital formation of international talent. Early research on SIEs often revolved around the factors that inform and shape individual agency when accounting for global mobility decisions and adjustment. More recently, efforts have aimed at re-balancing individual agency and contexts in the SIE literature. This article contributes an integrative account connecting SIE strategies, institutional practices of TM at the city level and capital formation processes in global careers. Rather than concentrating merely on individual attributes or institutional-contextual features, this research makes an addition to scholarly knowledge by demonstrating how these elements interact in the experiences of SIEs. The article, in this vein, contributes new conceptual and empirical insights into the dynamics of interaction between self-initiated expatriation and TM practices instituted at the city level. Different contributions emerge from this study, providing important inspirations for the further study of self-initiated expatriation, career capital and TM beyond the firm.

First, a contribution can be drawn with regards to how aspects of the surrounding institutional environments interact with self-initiated expatriation. Over the past decade, MTM has emerged as a new, significant focus for TM research, though many contributions thus far are of a conceptual nature and more empirical research is warranted (Caligiuri et al., 2024: 405). The study advances this new research stream and the research on career capital of expatriates. The article has focused on one element of the institutional fabric of a city, in terms of a TM institution created by a coalition of actors doing TM at the city level to manipulate the institutional environments in favour of attracting, developing and retaining internationally mobile professionals and their professional and social capital. The implanted TM institution is enabling and formative of a range of social processes in self-initiated expatriation that potentially facilitate SIE agency (Giddens, 1979). Integrating corporate and market logics of TM, its practices facilitate and moderate interactions for SIEs, and thereby processes of capital formation (processes of identification, networking, professional knowledge translation, etc., forming part of career capital), the creation of organizational and institutional ties and interactions with the public systems, the transfer and translation of career capital to local labour market and the weaving of webs of international institutions. Oleskeviciute et al. (2022: 401) recently reviewed extant research on factors impacting international transfer of career capital and found influential factors within individual firms and at the country level, but generally a lack of research on this in relation to SIEs. The present study has contributed new knowledge on TM practices at the city level that seek to facilitate the transfer as well as further development of career capital of international professionals. It has done so by explicitly analysing SIEs' strategies of engaging city-level TM practices in processes of career capital formation. However, while the city-level TM institution opens significant opportunities for SIEs, it also to a certain extent unintentionally limits the realization of some professional or social goals for certain SIEs, depending on the knowing-why, in terms of identifications, values and interests, providing sense of purpose to their global career move. The institution potentially envelops some groups of SIEs within relatively fragile and transient networks of international professionals, thereby partly distancing them from the culture, institutions, and networks of the host society. Such structures of support that concentrates the joint MTM efforts of public and private actors enable certain groups of SIEs to exert personal agency in undertaking international relocation for work without considerable adjustment, while it seemingly is a potential source of some unanticipated capital losses for other groups of SIEs (Small, 2009). The influence of TM practices at the city level on SIE experiences adds further nuances to the consequentiality and independency of individual factors and agency in the SIE literature. The various – and, in the present case of an internationalizing city – expanding institutions of expatriate communities moderate the influence of other

cultural and social factors on SIE experiences. While the overall means-end relationship of the institution was characterized by corporate and markets logics of TM, it also adopted institutional practices which for some groups of SIEs resembled more traditional expatriate communal institutions, characterized by logics of community building. Previous research has revealed how institutional logics of TM may blend or collide with other logics in specific contexts of adoption, such as public sector organizations (Grant et al., 2020). The present research has shown how dominant corporate and market-oriented logics of MTM realized in city-level institutional practices targeted at international professionals may ambiguously combine with community logics, resembling those of more traditional expatriate communal institutions. This institutional ambiguity had significance for different groups of SIEs' participation in the institutional practices, as accounted for below. The article thus contributes theoretically relevant insights to wider MTM research by showing how MTM practices, i.e., 'practice levers' for attracting, developing, or retaining talent (Evans et al., 2022), are infused with institutional logics and meaning with consequentiality for how (international) talents engage with them in processes of career capital formation. Hence, one way to further advance the research field through empirical research, as called for (Caligiuri et al., 2024: 405), is to explain such intricate dynamics through which TM practices may be infused with other logics in addition to more market-based or corporate logics of TM. This is likely to involve empirically rich research of the contexts of adopting TM practices, whether it be at local or country levels.

Second, the article explores and explains the diversity of SIEs' responses to aspects of their institutional environments, in terms of changing institutional practices of TM at the city level, through their participation in a TM institution planted by a coalition of TM actors, and differential implications for their global mobility experiences. To this point, we argue that SIEs deploy differential strategies of engaging with institutional settings in which their mobility is embedded to further their international work experiences and careers. The research thus demonstrates that SIEs' strategies of responding to the changing institutional fabric of an internationalizing city, and institutional practices of TM, are too rich to be fitted into a singular dynamic. How and to what degree, in this case, an MTM institution dedicated to international talent becomes instigated in the social and professional practices of SIEs is mediated by various strategies employed to cope with and promote expatriate experiences and careers, as oriented by knowing-why. The study thus contributes new insights to research career capital of expatriates by answering recent calls for more research on how knowing-why (identifications, motivations) interact with how people deploy and develop their social networks, knowing-whom, in a new career context (Oleskeviciute et al., 2022: 408), here in the context of a city-level TM institution. This institution serves as a platform for a broad array of SIE groups on diverse global mobility and career paths who deploy different strategies of engaging with the institutions that surround the SIE process. Where the international institutional mosaic is elaborate, SIEs may not necessarily be compelled to considerably 'adjust' to institutions and norms of the local host society. To succeed, some SIEs perceive little need for 'adjusting' to a given host culture. Certain groups of SIEs with strong global career orientation and identifications and employment in internalized work settings did, for instance, not confer significant value to the particularity of the local context and host country of their work experiences. Rather, they conceived their current work experiences as one element in a series of interchangeable international workplaces in a global career. In this case, the international institutional infrastructures of cities may be engaged to facilitate successful mobility for global work experiences without considerable adjustment and exert a positive influence upon their expatriation. The international institution contributed to global mobility with relatively limited adjustment through its community-style practices and logic of community building. It facilitated mobility and transposition of international lifestyles and knowing-why across countries by socializing participants into an international culture somewhat institutionally separated from national host-country communities and maintained by other international institutions. It may even be detrimental to the professional and social goals of such SIEs to expend resources and time on adjusting to the host country. This contrasts with some cross-cultural management literature on national cultures and adjustment (Adler, 1997; Hofstede, 1991; Torbiörn, 1982), particularly assumptions that conceive

such encounters as clashes between disparate national cultural characteristics and predicts relationship between general adjustment and performance. Yet, Beaverstock (2011) showed how expatriate clubs in a world city comprise cacophonies of different nationalities and have an incessant turnover of departing and new members. They may thus serve as social spaces in a city that on an everyday basis sustain transnational life worlds (Beaverstock, 2011). However, for some SIEs who orient themselves towards a longer-term expatriation to the host country, and to some extent come to see their careers as directed towards the national opportunity structure (Merton, 1995) of the host society, participation may potentially over time become an obstacle to integration and a source of some unanticipated career capital losses, even if initially useful. This is contrary to the stated MTM goals of embedding SIEs' capital formation in local professional and social networking, seeking to increase not only their host country career embeddedness and community embeddedness (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), but more particularly their local city embeddedness. Such possible local embeddedness otherwise impacts the sacrifices that global careerists must make in leaving a location, in terms of useful professional and social networks specific to the location (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). The TM institution contributed to embedding some SIEs in impermanent networks of individuals and may potentially contribute to creating a social bubble that is sustainable in the shorter term. SIEs may thus lose some of their invested resources and time when their network relocates again. This research thus adds insights to Small's (2009) seminal research on institutions as sources of unanticipated capital gains. Low embeddedness in the host society may more likely prompt the repatriation or further relocation of SIEs, as among others shown by Tharenou & Caulfield (2010). This group of SIEs faces a delicate balance of using and breaking with the TM institution when the time is right.

Yet, an entirely different group of SIEs deployed a strategy of actively disassociating themselves from the formal institutional attributes of expatriate communities that for them signalled a secluded identity. They particularly perceived elements of more traditional expatriate communal institutions in the adopted practices of the TM institution which they did not identify with. This occurred as some SIEs perceived the institution and its practices in association with an emerging web of other, more traditional expatriate communal institutions, including international schools, international kindergartens, etc. They were rather reflected about not promoting themselves as 'expats' or 'internationals', or as any given nationality by participating in communal institutions of expatriate 'community'. Still, however, they immersed themselves in international networks without granting any particular value of identification to them. The sense of purpose, knowing-why, of their border-crossing career was to a low extent associated with realizing globalized identifications and values. They attempted to actively escape the institutions of expatriate communities, but were, paradoxically, at times drawn into their sphere by their personal network dynamics. Their strategies of building useful professional and social networks were often aligned with corporate and market TM logics of building career capital, and thereby specific practices of the TM institution, but they tended to respond negatively to institutions creating or sustaining 'community' among expatriates and sought to escape from networking practices underpinned by community logics. The study has thus contributed new knowledge on how knowing-why and knowing-whom interact in career capital formation of expatriates, particularly by revealing the subtler and less obvious dynamics of a strategy that combines disengagement from being 'international' expatriate, as informed by knowing-why, with forming networks of international and local professionals, yet only to the extent such networks are not formalized or infused with logics of (expatriate) 'community'. The study further contributes insights into how escaping categories of identifications associated with a growing sphere of international city institutions and their symbolic boundaries (Peltonen & Huhtinen, 2023), when tied up with them through network formation, add to the potentially challenging work of breaking expatriate bubbles (Van Bakel & Vance, 2023). Multiple paradoxes thus appear to be produced within the nested systems of MTM in Denmark, with previous research highlighting those at the national level (Minbaeva et al., 2018). Dynamics and management of such paradoxes could be further uncovered by studies.

In short, changing institutional practices of TM at the city level prompted quite diverse responses among SIEs. This was in the context of the city-level TM institution in part tied together with the

institutional ambiguity reflected in simultaneously integrating corporate and market-driven logics of TM and elements that resemble a more traditional expatriate communal institution. Different groups of SIEs with diverse career orientations project different meanings, logics and uses into the same practices (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2009; Zilber, 2002). However, as pointed out by Kraatz and Block, most organizations may, to a certain extent, be considered institutionally pluralistic and must be 'multiple things to multiple people' (Kraatz and Block, 2008: 534). The present paper has shown how this adds complexity to institutional practices of TM at the city level instigated by a coalition of TM actors. The study, in this vein, also adds insights relevant to the debate on how local or regional conditions become conducive for attracting, developing, and retaining talent, by showing that such MTM factors are likely to differ for different talents (Andersen & Rasmussen, 2022), rather than being universals. The research adds to research on the interplay of context and capital formation of international professionals. Rodriguez & Scurry (2014), for instance, showed how national policies and social structures, in the highly regulated context of Qatar, can impede capital formation among SIEs, thus not necessarily being the product of individual agency. The present study has further provided insights into how, even in a less regulated context, important aspects of career capital composition are not merely reflections of agentic strategies of individual global careerists but unanticipated gains and losses from exposure to higher-order institutions that shape processes of interaction, identification and knowing how. Networking is thus not value-neutral, but as argued by scholars of institutions, such as Small (2009) and Owen-Smith & Powell (2001), infused with meanings and institutions, their categories and logics.

A limitation of this research pertains to its character as a field-based interview study within one city context, which suggests opportunities for further research. A topic for future comparative research concerns how differences in the institutional structures of local or transnational communities (Djelic & Quack, 2010), cities, or countries potentially generate differential effects in SIEs' experiences of relocating to otherwise relatively culturally similar areas. Particularly, it begs for cross-comparisons of the effects of institutions at the community, city, or national level on global mobility and work experiences of SIEs (Marquis & Battilana, 2009). Quantitative research could survey the broader patterns of how institutional environments interact with and possibly moderate the influence of other factors on different dimensions of self-initiated expatriation, e.g., how institutions from global to local institutions exert diverse influences upon individuals and the organizations within which they work (Marquis & Battilana, 2009). Moreover, a possible direction for future studies is suggested by the diversity of responses to the institutional environments of expatriation among different SIEs. It will be interesting to see further studies explore how the significance of expending time and resources to adjust to the culture and institutions of either the host country or communities of internationals are detrimental to or supportive in achieving personal and professional goals. Overall, this article may inspire future expatriation research to study how TM practices at local, regional, and (trans-)national levels interact with career capital processes. The article in this regard also highlights the importance of not only considering TM factors and activities at the level of individual employers or a country. The present research is limited by the empirical context of a Scandinavian city. More research is relevant in diverse and under-represented contexts, including in the Global South.

Finally, the findings hold some implications for strategies of MTM and GTM aimed at attracting, developing and retaining globally mobile talents. The diversity in personal strategies and effects of using surrounding MTM institutions calls for differentiated GTM strategies of firms. Balancing firm's GTM and the institutional practices of MTM in a way that is sensitive to such differences may promote SIEs' long-term retention and development. The potential unanticipated consequences of participation in an MTM institution for integration and capital formation among some longer-term SIEs who experience some capital losses may easily translate into unanticipated losses for the firms and public actors involved in financing MTM institutions and whose competitiveness possibly subsides when talents undertake international relocation for work abroad. This suggests that there is a delicate balance to strike between assisting SIEs through, for example, institutional support of MTM (which replaces some of the organizational support granted to organizational assignees) and making

them dependent on a parallel set of specialized TM practices that potentially may disembedded SIEs from the local institutions and networks of the host society. The study illustrates the importance of taking the variable institutional environments into account in calibrating company GTM strategies and differentiating them in accordance with a diversity of SIEs who are affected differently by the same institutional practices. Future studies could devote attention to specifying which groups of SIEs are best retained by support from a particular mix of external local and international institutions or organizational support. Nevertheless, this study has contributed insights into an under-researched dimension of SIEs' strategies of engaging with surrounding institutions, involving complex interactive dynamics between career capital formation and institutional practices of MTM.

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