# Transformative Agency in Workers' Account: Tensions in Professional Development

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### Abstract

*The concept of agency expresses one's will in actions that alter reality. In the work market's current social and cultural conditions, individuals are pushed to continuous change to transform their professional and personal lives. The interests and socio-material constraints help understand the personal and professional path shape. In this paper, we will focus on how a group of workers expressed transformative agency in their narrative accounts, how it evolves and the influence of the interests and socio-material constraints on the expression of agency. To pursue this objective, we interviewed twelve workers that moved from Italy to France. From the transcription and the analysis, we have identified four dimensions in their account to make sense of their career path: conflicts of motives to act; wandering actions in global cultural (dis)fluency; activation of resources toward an (in)definite interest; sensorial and material mobility.*

**Keywords:** *Dialogical self-theory; Italian; France; identity; resources; adaptation*

## Introduction

In the work market's current social and cultural conditions, individuals are pushed to continuous change to transform their professional lives. The concept of agency expresses one's will in actions that transform reality (Ahearn, 2001). This concept focuses attention on the individual and groups on the transformation of existence, with implications for the way of acting and of the forms of expression of identity: "Agency is manifested when people formulate intentions and carry out voluntary actions that go beyond accepted habits and the given conditions of the activity and the organisation in which they are part, and then transform them" (Engeström & Sannino, 2013, p. 4). In particular, transformative agency manifests itself in discourse and actions, oriented to envisioning new patterns or models for the current activity. Even though the educational and psychological literature discussed the subject of the agency widely, the transformative agency of migrants still needs further study, especially related to professional development. We consider that the issue of career directionality in a complex situation such as the current labour system deserves to be further analysed to understand the decision-making processes that lead to the chosen action among the many possible choices. The migration situation increases this level of complexity, adding the unknown and essential changes that are less likely to be managed as those known in one's reality.

This paper will focus on how a group of workers expressed their transformative agency in their narrative accounts, in particular related to the experience of migration. To pursue this objective, we interviewed twelve emigrated as part of a project to learn more about migration

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dynamics with new technologies. Through these interviews, we explored the expression of their transformative agency.

## Transformative Agency in Professional Development

Human agency is a multidisciplinary concept (Archer, 2000), highly valued in Western society, which exalts "self-made man". Culture emphasises autonomy, the ability to overcome and accept challenges, and the ability to be an entrepreneur in oneself. Generally speaking, the agency indicates the capacity of a person to act on his environment by transforming it, proposing ideas, choices, expressing their own "voice", self-determination, and free will. This concept focuses on the individual as the agent of the transformation of reality. At the same time, it is a development situated dimension between the individual and the environment.

The social sciences traced the roots of the concept of agency, suggesting people (and groups) act as agents over their environment in transformative ways. Agency means acting intentionally and is visible in purposive acts with consequences. In psychology, instead of focusing on social structures like sociology, the notion of agency emphasises local, micro and individual social action, constituting the active component of variable social activity. From a socio-cultural psychology perspective, individual action must be viewed socially, considering individuals as cultural agents (Bruner, 1990). The individual agency redefines social practices where culture functions as a transformation tool and production for new meanings. Gillespie (2010) defines agency as "the degree to which an agent can act independently of the immediate situation" (p. 32), emphasising the ability to go outside and beyond the immediate situation. In what follows, we will discuss this concept according to the activity-theoretical framework.

The activity-theoretical framework considered agency embedded in historically evolved object-oriented activity systems. CHAT strongly emphasises the transformative dimension of agency, which emerges in conflicting stimuli in local activity. CHAT considers transformative agency in examining disturbances and conflicts and developing the collective object-oriented activity. The transformative agency examines the dilemmas, conflicts and contradictions developed in and between activity systems. It aims to create and change existing ways of action and circumstances. Virkkunen (2006, p. 49) defines an individual's transformative agency as 'breaking away from a given frame of action and taking the initiatives to transform it'.

The concept of agency is well mobilised in the literature about migration (for example, Schlimbach et al., 2019). Scholars agree that examining how agency emerges, manifests, and transforms is mainly relevant. The paper focuses on the emergence of transformative agency in the personal account of the migrants. Specifically, we focus on the interest as a complex construct that gives directionality to the action in the following.

### Interests and socio-material constraints to shape professional identity path

Interest is a complex construct. It integrates cognition, motivation and effect (Hidi & Renninger, 2006), with a different type of manifestation, as momentary states of interest to longer-term interest pursuits. Today interest raises new attention as a robust basis for learning and career decisions (Erstad & Silseth, 2019). It fits a person-centred, life-wide spectrum and connects formal and informal education (Reber, Canning, & Harackiewicz, 2018). Indeed, it became a catalyst for meaningful learning processes (Ito et al., 2018). Therefore, we consider analysing the emigration professional and personal path as a complex and integrative

construct. Draijer, Bakker, Slot, & Akkerman (2020, p. 18) identify critical dimensions of interests:

a) Historicity as a meaningful activity for the person with different manifestations; b) Agency "to denote the extent to which a person is the agent of their interest, both in triggering and pursuing the interest";

c) Value, as the personal significance of the object of interest because of various possible reasons;

d) Frequency of engagement as a well-developed individual interest is more frequently engaged; e) intensity of the engagement;

f) Mastery as to gaining knowledge or expertise about the interest related contents and activities.

Akkerman and Bakker (2019) consider interests a life-wide process, with the person as a significant and moving unit of analysis, where multiple interests develop in various contexts.

As proposed, the analysis of interests includes:

- a potential multilinearity into pursuing different lines at the same time/context;
- equifinality, as the possibility of pursuing a particular interest and direction as a follow-up to and integration of various prior interests.
- Or a multi-finality process, as the possibility of pursuing one interest in different directions.

Considering the complexity of the emigration and adaptation process, we also adopt a socio-material perspective to understand the in-action shape of a personal and professional path. Indeed, following distributed cognition theory, while carrying out an activity as a process of adaptation to new situations, people project structures of intentionality onto the context, which thus becomes an integral part of human thought and action (Hollan et al., 2000). Materiality, in this case, must be understood as a connection to other physical and social entities, becoming a relevant perspective for the adaptive process during emigration and the pursuit of personal interests. A socio-material view also focuses on embodied interaction, which claims that any action constitutes a complex arrangement of multiple semiotic fields (e.g., gestures, the body, the language) that are deployed simultaneously and influence each other. Considering the classic perspectives of Lakoff & Johnson (1999), the body is the frame of reference in which all our experiences take place; on the other, it becomes, through the senses, the main link between the mind and the world. So, human activity can be understood through the contextualised experience of a body-environment system and not as the result of representations of the world disconnected from a context, opening to a multimodal analysis of social interaction. In the following, the study case is discussed.

The paper aims to analyse the expression of transformative agency in Italian migrants in France. Our research questions are: What types of expressions of the transformative agency are found in the narrative account of Italian migrants, and how do they evolve? What influence has interests and the socio-material constraints on the expression of agency, and how does it shape personal and professional paths?

## Intra-European migration Context: From Italy to France

After crossing the Mediterranean Sea, Italy and France are the leading destinations for immigrants (Zaccardelli & Cohen, 2021). Both developed methods for welcoming and distributing the migrants' crises around their territory as much as possible, hosting them in structures adapted or created for this purpose. But France and Italy are also linked to an inner side of the European movement (La Spina, 2021).

Emigration for employment is becoming a widespread experience, expanding the traditional path from South to North to South-South intra-European migration (such as Italian workers moving to the South of France). Intra-European migration sharply increased from 2.5% ten years ago (Eurostat, 2018), becoming a quiet side of the actual challenge of migration (Verwiebe et al., 2014). In 2017, of Union citizens of working age (20–64), 3.8% resided in member states other than citizenship. This phenomenon, in particular, touches upon Italians, Polish, and Romanian citizens (Fries-Tersch et al., 2018), mainly as a consequence of various European crises (e.g., pressures in the labour market, social mixing, cultural exchanges, and international relations; Lafleur & Stanek, 2017).

The phenomenon of migration from Italy to France has a consolidated past and is not something new. Today, perceptions of immigration and multiculturalism have profoundly changed in most European immigration societies over the past two decades. Different authors discuss an ignorance or even denial of memory of an immigrant past in Europe. The reference is to collective amnesia regarding the role of immigration in earlier times and a tendency to view mass immigration as something new.

The Italians constitute the first foreign nationality represented in France from the beginning of the 20th century to the 1960s. This immigration, first coming from the north of the Italian Peninsula and then from the South after 1945, was comprised mainly of a non-qualified labour force coming to work in various industry sectors, e.g., in building and public works and agriculture. As with other European countries, for about 20 years, France has seen a resumption of Italian migration. This new wave has been robust since the mid-2000s. Indeed, between 1990 and 2005, the official entry of Italians into France averaged around 3,000 individuals per year according to the Italian Minister of Economy. Today, France is the fourth destination of this wave of migration (behind Germany, the United Kingdom and Switzerland); it is, however, ahead of the United States. More than the economic crisis and the search for a job, the mobility of young graduates of the middle class responds to Italian structural immobility. In the following case study, the focus on the regional perspective of the PACA (Provence-Apes-Côte d'Azur) region, whit stress today many relationships in formal and informal education about migration (for one example, https://inspe.univ-amu.fr/fr/ciao-italia-musee-national-immigration-a-inspe).

## Research Method

To achieve the research aims, we conducted a qualitative multiple case study. According to Stake (2006), investigating experiences reflective of more than one person means understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

For the first benchmark of Italians residing in Marseille, we interviewed Italian migrants in that city. This step aimed to derive some initial insight regarding identity development within this particular group. The researchers contacted the participants through a general message

post in a large group on a topical Facebook called '*Italiani a Marsiglia*'. Twelve different profiles of members were selected for the interview. We selected them with attention to obtaining a good variability in sex, work, and social status (for details, see Table 1):

**Table 1.** Summary of the 12 interviews with Italian migrant workers in Marseille

| Age | 25–30(4) 30–40(4); 40–50(4) |
|---|---|
| Sex | F(6); M(6) |
| From | Southern Italy (8); Northern Italy (4) |
| Level of education | PhD (2); Master's (6); High School (4) |
| In Marseilles | More of 5 years (3); 1-5 years (6); Less of 1 year (3) |

The researcher conducted interviews in the Italian language in a university room. They were audio-recorded; the average length was 45 minutes. The interviewees talked freely about their personal and professional stories in light of the present moment: their current life in Marseille. The semi-structured interviews focused on the following set of themes: (1) education and professional background; (2) the experience of mobility abroad; and (3) the migrant's genuine sense of belonging. Following this approach, we used the narrative interview in our study since this qualitative method most faithfully illustrates how migrants' perceptions, personal motivations, turning points, values, and relationships come to the fore in their adaptive developing process. Indeed, narrative accounts are traditional tools enabling self-disclosure and identification of positions, thereby serving as spaces to recount and reconstruct meanings.

According to discursive constructionism, the narration is a way to understand how people tell and construct their own story (Potter & Hepburn, 2008). In producing self-narratives about their migration, individuals have an opportunity to examine how they relate to the world and how they strive for biographical consistency (Ecclestone et al., 2009). It also enables activation of a sense-making process that gives meaning to confused and uncourtly situations.

Whit the aim to determine the transformative agency, the interviews were analysed qualitatively (Grimell, 2018). The data were first approached to obtain 'an overview of the thematic range of the text, which is to be analysed' (Flick, 2014, p. 394). Based on thematic content analysis (Neuendorf, 2016), the researchers agreed to single out four dimensions to present the relevant results. First, two independent researchers read the narrative accounts' transcriptions to grasp the narratives' general sense. Then, a text segmentation was performed to complete meaning units that became the basis for our units of analysis. An in-depth analysis of interviews helps to display conflicts of motives based on interest in the narration's temporal and spatial axis, moving toward action. The knots of motives and interest conflicts were identified to focus on transformative action.

## Results

From our analysis, different dimensions emerged. The dimensions aim to answer the research question about a) types of expressions and evolution of the transformative agency; b) and about the influence of interests and the socio-material constraints on the agency, shaping personal and professional path. In the following sections, the four dimensions are discussed: conflicts of motives to act; wandering actions in global cultural (dis)fluency; activation of resources toward an (in)definite interest; sensorial and material mobility.

### Conflicts of motives to act

Different motives can move toward the decision to emigrate. Motives and interests can generate new action to change the status consolidate, as in these examples from the profile:

**Table 1.** Motives

| | Name | Age | Formation | Work | Years in Marseille | Status | The motive to move to Marseille |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Seb | 35 | Journalist | Marketing | 4 | Full | Precarious job in Italy versus a friend relationship that gives support in Marseille |
| 2 | Marty | 40 | Research | Marketing | 1 | Part-time | A friend relationship that gives support versus a difficult time in the UK about the job and personal life |
| 3 | Paolo | 26 | Economy | Bank | 2 | Full | The family relationship that gives support versus the lack of fixed-job plus the willingness of new experiences |
| 4 | Pina | 44 | Language | Italian Teacher | 3 | Part-time | A friend relationship that proposes a job versus the end of the contract in the UK |
| 5 | Antonio | 36 | ITC | Researcher | 1 | Full | A professional link versus the end of the contract in Italy |
| 6 | Alberto | 30 | Art | Art Pinter | 3 | Searching | A friend relationship that gives support versus the need to change from Paris |
| 7 | Anna | 27 | Graphic | Unemployed | 1 | Searching | A friend relationship that gives support versus the willingness to do new experiences |

### Conflicts in Elena account

As a focus, in the narrative of one account selected, Elena describes her other motives to emigrate and how she shaped her interests at the time. As a general overview, she is 40 years old, holds a PhD in science, comes from the southern part of Italy, is not married, and has no children. Elena has been in Marseille for less than two years. She justifies her decision to migrate to France by speaking of the intense feeling of 'wandering somewhere else' in personal and professional development. Her expressed motivation is similar to others: the absence in Italy of fair working conditions commensurate with one's educational qualifications. Each conflict of motives/interest are linked, becoming a resource through which the action is generated, as proposed in Table 2:

**Table 2.** Conflicts of motives on interests and related action

| Place | Conflicts of motives based on her interests | Action |
|---|---|---|
| In Italy | The expectation to work in a university position versus the lack of opportunities in the Italian context | To move abroad |
| In the UK | The expectation of finding a job as a professional versus the language issues | To improve English |
| | The willingness to fit in the system versus the lack of contextual opportunities | To enrol in a master's student in sustainable energy |
| | The interest in sustainable energy versus the loneliness of the daily lifestyle | To move abroad |
| In Marseille | The expectation of finding a job as a professional versus the language issues | To be volunteer |
| | The active searching job versus the lack of response in her field of expertise | To give up about her professionality |
| | The interest in an energy-related job Versus the opportunities in another job career | To find a job as a secretary in tourism society |
| | The disappointing professional life versus the enjoyment of the local lifestyle | To find personal well-being |
| | The enjoyment of the lifestyle versus the willingness to become a researcher | To move abroad again shortly |

The past is dominated by the experience of being a doctoral student and then her postdoctoral studies. Along her path, she faces new demands, mobilises her resources, develops skills, and gathers knowledge. Elana accepted a friend invitation to visit the UK and then a second invitation to visit Marseille *("I got the invitation of Pina who was already here, I don't know if I would have chosen her alone, so capable that it would not have been Marseille if it wasn't for Pina. Yes, Pina is a reference point for all that is bureaucracy")*. Ethnic homogeneity is particularly well-known in these processes of groups; mutual aid among people sharing similar migration experiences to adjusting to a foreign environment (Dahinden, 2005), especially as an already close friendship, as in our case. Similar characteristics and attitudes are based on network structure and belonging (Mendola & Busetta, 2021).

Here is an example of the tension that transforms her experience in Marseille: *'I was waiting for answers that did not arrive, I started looking for work ... in fact, they never answered me. I kept looking; I found nothing. I became a volunteer in an association. They do the things I would like to do for work. I became active in their projects".* The position as a volunteer shows the role of networks as a form of social capital that the individual can exploit as a resource. Each transitional stage (from no work to have work) is imbued with a tension between a condition acquired or accepted to move in a new direction, moving in time and space. She continues, *"I found something else in the meantime, in a travel agency for camping vacations. Expectations came a little later when I started looking. And then I hoped, I hoped. And I have never gotten any positive response. I don't feel like staying in Marseille for a long time. Yes, expectations are daily'.* The position analysis gives an example of the role of Elena's agentic action – how she constructs her goals and acts upon them (Somerville & Bernoth, 2001), i.e., in studying for a profession and subsequently through work.

These transitional passages represent well the evolution of her adaptation process. The past becomes a present resource, helping shape her new positioning and projecting into the future, embracing and embodying possibilities of action and self-affirmation.

### Wandering actions in global cultural (dis)fluency

In the narrative, workers express their "wandering" attitude in various attempts to represent their interests, like Mary's second extract (Extract 3).

Extract: Mary, 40 years old, language teacher, from Sardinia, Italy

> Sardinia is a rather particular region in that if we don't find work (as often happens), we continue to study. So, I started working in a context wholly disconnected from these studies because I started working for a telephone company. Then, I took an Italian course at the University of Siena and then the adventure began with this project as a part-time entrepreneur. I still had the desire to have an extended experience abroad. I had already stopped these two activities for two months, taking a break to Argentina. It was an experience that I liked very much. And therefore, this desire lingered. And one fine day, I simply resigned. In the UK, I worked in a company; after I left, I went to work in a cafeteria, but after a month, the opportunity arose to come here to Marseille. [in Sardinia] I had a house of my own, a permanent job, an everyday life; it wasn't an escape, it was just following a desire, a wish. Then, after the first job, I enrolled in the job centre. Now I am also a tourist guide. At the end of each academic year, I renew my teaching contract, and I tell myself that I will come back again, but I am not sure afterwards.

Mary continued to study only due to the lack of work. She shows the potential multilinearity of her interest (for example, when Mary tries to pursue a professional position as a language teacher while working in the call centre at the same time). Then, the working experiences are mediated by necessity and a real issue to sustain herself.

The wandering line can be alternated in different directions, like this example:

Extract: Paolo, 27 years old, a bank worker

> While I was attending my licence, I met several Erasmus friends who suggested, put the flea in my ear to leave. I chose France because many of my friends were French.

The interest in the license brings new contacts. The casualty of the nationality of the Friends gets him to follow this original path. In other cases, such as Marco, the wandering line is tempered by his willingness to stay in academic life (Extract 4):

Extract: Marco, 36 years old, computer researcher, from Milan, Italy

> I did some competitions. I also searched abroad. France, in particular, I had already, for a long time, seen it as a possible destination. I started studying French in 2014. Also, I did two competitions in Spain, so I already knew the environment, and in Seville in particular, I loved it, so I tried to return there.

Marco moves around Italy, France, and Spain to fit his research application; these endeavours enable him to arrive at a stable professional position. His wandering approach links interests and context.

### Activation of resources toward an (in)definite interest

The agentic transformation emerges as an expression of the individual effort and tension involved in interpreting a novel territory through constant internal and external resources. Here, an extract of one interview (Extract 1) shows the socio and material resources activated:

Extract: Mary, a woman of 40 years old, language teacher, from Sardinia, Italy

> I made a first stop in the northeast of England. It was not a city that ill-suited my rhythms and needs. I chose Newcastle at the time because there was a friend of mine who had extended me an invitation. She told me: 'if you come here, I can help you with living accommodations for the first few months and with all the bureaucracy....'. Once there, I found some English courses, and I was working. Marseille came at the suggestion of a new friend, who knew that an academic institute was looking for a language assistant. I applied for that position, though it was not in Marseille. But later, a similar job was offered in Marseille. I had only studied French in middle school. I managed by myself the rent, the bank accounts, etc.

She mobilised material and immaterial resources to adapt. It is possible to identify personal resources - like her linguistic resources from middle school and social resources, like Mary's friend in England and then in France that provide her support and help. As shown in the extract, the past and future experiences become the symbolic resources to transform and make the adaptation process possible.

Extract: Marco, 36 years old, computer researcher, from Milan, Italy

> The only disorientation I had was the bureaucracy. I studied French at the college, and I quickly re-active it. I found the city very nice. It is challenging to feel foreigners genuinely here. It is such a fantastic melange of cultures and ethnicities. Half the people in Marseille have an Italian surname, so there is a shared history.

After the linguistic and bureaucratic mastery, the adaptation is also conveyed by similarities with the culture of belonging, looking for points of contact, familiarity and significant history, reaching fluency in understanding the new territory and how to move within it—the past experiences of mobility help to support the globalisation-based acculturation.

### Sensorial and Material mobility

The mobility is also made of material resources that move with the person. In the interview, we have traced the reference to a material object that try to materialise the process of mobility. Indeed, in the accounts, there is always references to something that connects the two sides of the migration, in this case, from Italy to France. The object becomes an example of reification - from the Latin res (genitive rei), i.e. thing + facere, i.e. do, reification can be 'translated' as "to make become object", "to make a thing". Different profile evokes different object that they bring with them in the mobilities. Some examples here:

|   | Name | Age | Objects bring from Italy to Marseille |
|---|------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | Seb | 35 | Plant |
| 2 | Marty | 40 | Books |
| 3 | Paolo | 26 | FIAT 500 car bought and coming from Italy. |
| 4 | Mary | 44 | Books |
| 5 | Antonio | 36 | Coffee machine |
| 6 | Alberto | 30 | A few pictures |
| 7 | Anna | 27 | A suitcase |

As we can see from the examples, they all refer to an object charged with affectivity and meaning. The material value of the object is undoubtedly meagre. A plant, books, a car, a coffee machine, paintings and suitcases become symbols of a former elsewhere that becomes nowhere. Observing these objects in everyday life creates emotional connections and possible emotional activation of nostalgia, bonding and familiarity -also strikes loneliness (Cela, di Belgiojoso, 2021). We can also speculate that such objects also become somehow transactional, in the sense of facilitators and affective regulators in the change, an event in itself stressful. Objects are hardly ever repurchased in Italy after several years: the new plant or coffee machine will be repurchased in the new place of life, and the old one will have played its transactional role.

Mobility is also made up of geographical changes, with new microclimates to get used to, new types of clothing to wear, new landscapes to admire, flora and corresponding smell and tastes. Another dimension that we consider attractive and slightly evoked in the interviews is the sensory dimension. The sensory dimension is evoked in the narrative account, like in this extract of Mary (Extract 5):

Extract 5: Mary, 40 years old, language teacher, from Sardinia, Italy

> I was also tired because physically, it was strenuous to do two jobs, and I also desired to have extensive experience abroad. After the experience in the north, as soon as I left the Marseille metro, I remember very well, 'Welcome back to the Mediterranean

Sea', smells, lights... Then I talk a lot about my land; it seems that I have the mission of spreading Italian culture abroad but especially of Sardinia. I still have this thing about the territory. I move with everything that I am. Altogether, I don't feel uprooted because I think my roots are with me; it is paradoxical to believe they somehow move with me. I believe it is so. Then again, I have this sense of 'elsewhere'; I am already here and would like to be somewhere else. It's a part of my anxiety, anxiety from elsewhere. I have already started to look elsewhere; I think I go where there is work, so I go to places where Italian is studied.

Her future is connected with her past, using the metaphor of the roots that walk with her. She expresses her social identification with her territory, with deep affection as a psychological and cultural attachment (Mangum & Block, 2018) to where she grew up. Her cultural identity emerges abroad, and she finds a creative way to express it through interactions with and spreading the values, traditions, and information of her former context, supported and amplified by her cultural group (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). In the extract, we can see references to the physical fatigue that his daily choices made, with the desire to go elsewhere. In his description, the colour and flavour of the Mediterranean emerge as a new element that materialises the desire for a new departure. The metaphor of the roots manifests itself as a new conquest of identity that is acquired: the roots are with her, and, as a human plant, she can move into new territories and find the best material and sensory conditions for her development and flowering.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Human migration is a global phenomenon that challenges modern nations and has a wide range of implications for the economy, social structures and politics. Different modalities could be retraced around the decision of migration. Different traces are left about the decision to move: internet research, networking activities in social networks, personal relationships – for example, Wanner (2021) attempts to measure the extent to which internet activities can predict people's intentions to migrate and, consequently, future migration trends.

This paper focuses on moving and how this decision could be requested and negotiated about different opportunities. The accounts give some insights about the decision to move and how this decision is taken and changed in time. In general, the accounts show the variety of strategies in moving: in settling permanently; spending time in two or more different countries and others organise their migration trajectory around different stages, crossing different countries in circular, stepwise or serial migration patterns.

The concept of agency is particularly suitable to highlight and relate the desire for change and the act carried out to act on reality and have a concrete, social and material change. Migration becomes an action that concretises a need, a desire, a dissatisfaction of the present to find new languages, experiences and possibilities elsewhere. In particular, the transformative dimension highlights the need for change, whether desired or immediate. The decision to leave is negotiated at the individual and social level, limiting and modifying the imagined ideal path. The Italians interviewed summarise the complexity of choice, focusing on finding new and better job opportunities. This group brings with it a complex human dimension, even if less dramatic than other groups and migratory movements in the world today fleeing war, poverty and malaise. The decision to choose is linked to the interest to be pursued. This interest is either precise and decisive or vague and indefinite. Interest remains a magnet that

directs action. The various accounts show how this interest declines in time and space, personalised concerning the active internal or external resources. The three characteristics of interest - multilinearity, equifinality and multi-finality - can be found in the various accounts. Interest becomes a red line that is sometimes lost and found again in the evolution of decisions taken. Agency is activated to direct towards interests, despite the limits and resistances that hinder.

Specifically, from the analysis, we have identified four primary dimensions. The four dimensions analyse this decision-making process, which is conflictual, open to expertise of new cultural and social practices and languages, with resources to be activated in the context and about one's own sensoriality and affectivity.

About conflicts of motives to act, interests become an engine of action. They are defined and clear at the beginning of the migration process and shaped along the path. The Elena narrative account can retrace the tensions and the relative transformative action. The context and interests engage the emerging tensions toward new positions and transform the multi-voiced self in space and time (Gillespie, 2012). The transformative actions are originated by conflicts that bring some change in the conditions that can become more or less consolidated in time.

**Figure 1.** Conflict of motives to action
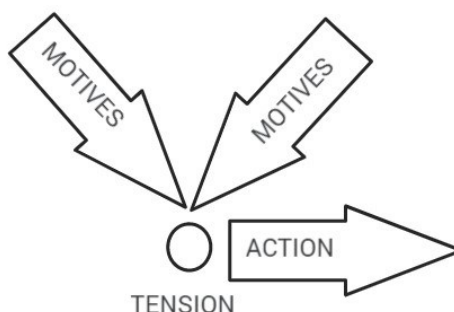


We stress the open possibility of the path about the wandering actions in global cultural (dis)fluency.

The activation of resources toward an (in)definite interest reveals the transformative adaptation that mobilises tangible and intangible personal resources. It shows the fluid orientation toward apprehending a new culture, the situating of body and interests within that space and time. The research, exploration, and adaptation in an unknown context led to metrics of multiple references, ways of doing and procedures to 'codify' and to interpret a new territory through constant interaction between its internal and external resources (people, personal knowledge of the languages, network etc.…).

The material and sensorial mobility show the concrete side of the active action. The temporal line helps visualise the activity here-and-now, influenced by the past, that serves as a resource.

Finally, the accounts show the rich personal and social dynamics in the challenging act of taking decisions and moving. The semiotic dynamics of meaning-making are active in the

adaptation process in a continuous intersection of the person with the environment. Indeed, during the migration, the person seeks to update their meanings to understand the new context and their lived experience, searching for an adaptation (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012). Here the 'possible' - of work and life opportunities – have to be shaped in a reconstructive and imaginative process.

In conclusion, this study shed light on the decision to move, linked with the interests and the agentic act to express personal and professional transformation. The new trend of Italian mobility has a specificity different from the past migration in France. Historical past analysis helps to understand the present trend in migration (Bertossi et al., 2021); in the same way, the personal past becomes a rich background to explain the personal decision. This research could help sensibilise and clarify the delicate decision-making process before mobility.

Applying the same approach in other contexts for a generalised set of findings in different intra-European dynamics will be interesting. The research could be enriched by taking an interdisciplinary perspective (economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc.) and considering reciprocal acculturation strategies and expectancies (Yakushko & Morgan-Consoli, 2014). Finally, we believe that combining two elements – the focus on transformative agency and the interests in a socio-material perspective – would allow for a good understanding of worker migrants' adaptive process.

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