NOVIA
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Designing a New Service Concept for Reducing Culture Shock

- **Case expatriates in Albania**

Armela Totaj

Thesis for a Master of Business Administration (UAS) - degree

The Degree Programme of Leadership and Service Design

Turku , 2018

DEGREE THESIS

Author: Armela Totaj

Degree Programme and place: Leadership and Service Design, Turku

Supervisor: Elina Vartama

Designing a New Service Concept for Reducing Culture Shock

- Case expatriates in Albania

Date: May 2018 Number of pages: 106 Appendices: VI

Abstract

This study is a practical research about the transition process of expatriates in Albania, and how to design a service to lessen the phenomenon of culture shock. The main focus of this study are the practical issues and required arrangements that challenge expats when moving to Albania that overload them with emotional and phycological effects of culture shock. This service concept is about an e-business offering mainly a digital information service for expats in Albania, to improve expat`s journey through the transition process and to provide a better life experience when moving to Albania. The group of interest includes all sojourners in Albania. The research in this study is diverse by nature as it is performed without distinguishing on their nationality or sojourning reasons. The research in this study is conducted with qualitative and quantitative methods. The results of the research provide a clear understanding of expats unmet needs related to settling into the host country, their frustrating touchpoints related to substantial life arrangements during their journey. The research outcome is useful for evaluating the service proposition and at the same time to generate ideas for this service concept development and design. The service concept is developed with co-design methods. In the end, a final high-fidelity prototype is created and evaluated for assuring service success in case of service implementation. The implementation, however, is not part of this study.

Language: English **Key words:** Service design, co-design, service proposition, sojourner, expatriating, adjustment, culture shock, website design.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction 1
1.1 Background and Context 1
1.2 Motivation and Scope 1
1.3 Practical Relevance 2
1.4 Problem Statement and Objectives 3
1.5 Research Question 4
1.6 Study Framework and Visual Process Strategy 5
2 Research Strategy 7
2.1 Underlying Goals 7
2.2 Insights Gathering Methods 9
2.3 Analysis and Synthesis Methods 11
3 Literature Review 12
3.1 Expatriate and Expatriating 12
3.2 Theories Explaining Culture, Shock, and Culture Shock 14
3.2.1 Culture Definition 16
3.2.2 The Learning Theories 18
3.2.3 The Transition Process Theories 21
3.2.4 The Acculturation Theories 25
3.2.5 The U-curve and W-curve Theories 29
3.2.6 Important Factors and Facts 33
3.3 Albania as a Host Country 36
3.4 Conclusions 39
4 Empirical Research 41
4.1 Face-to-Face Interviews 42
4.2 Online Ethnography 44
4.3 Online Questionnaire 46
4.4 Service Precedents 50
4.5 Synthesis and Conclusions 51
5 Service Design Strategy 53
5.1 Underlying Goals 54
5.2 Service Design Methods 56
6 Personas and Experience Journey 58
6.1 Creating Personas 59
6.2 Mapping Events with Experience Journey 61

7 Prototyping 66
7.1 Defining Service Proposition 66
7.2 Integrating Service Proposition into Prototype Design 68
7.2.1 The Game Plan for Success 68
7.2.2 Service Key Touchpoints - Boxes versus Arrows 70
7.3 Low-Fidelity Prototyping 74
7.3.1 Flexible Modelling Using Card Sorting 75
7.3.2 Parallel Prototyping 76
7.3.3 A/B Testing combined with Desirability Testing 77
7.4 High-Fidelity Prototyping 81
7.4.1 Microsoft Excel for Effective Prototyping 81
7.4.2 Customer Journey 83
7.4.3 Analysis of the Expatriating Journey 87
7.4.4 Business Model Canvas 91
7.5 Conclusions 95
8 Discussion 96
References 100
List of Tables 104
List of Figures 104
Appendices
Appendix I - Affinity Diagramming
Appendix II - Online Questionnaire
Appendix III - Low-Fidelity Prototypes
Appendix IV - Tree Model of Website Anatomy
Appendix V - High-Fidelity Prototype
Appendix VI - Customer Journey

1 Introduction

The culture shock phenomenon is a companion of every sojourner on the way of starting a life in an unknown country. This study is about creating a digital service which helps them when moving to Albania. This service offers to these sojourners a helping hand by providing useful information about the country and practical solutions. In the end, by using this service, they benefit a reduced culture shock.

1.1 Background and Context

The general context of this study is about discovering the sojourners` challenges of starting a new life in a host country. Black and Gregersen (1999, 5) states in their study that each person has a mental map of the world which contains personal assumptions about other people and the world. However, this map might be misleading when used in uncharted territory. Thus, if a person moves to a territory where he is unfamiliar about its people`s behavior, customs and values, then it is necessary for him to understand what these people do, *how* and *why* they do certain things. The *how* and *why* depend on which country the person is moving to, depends on its culture; both are very distinct among different cultures. Therefore, everyone would need support and guidance when moving to such a country. The famous poet, philosopher and journalist Ralph Waldo Emerson (1836-1838) quotes that "*Not in his goals but in his transition man is great*" (Whicher, Spiller & Williams 1964, 158). Everyone who moves to a host country will go through a transition process while settling into unfamiliar surroundings, people, culture and more. The *how* and *why* of the person will get into conflict with *how* and *why* of the host culture and from this will emerge an inner conflict for the person as his values will become very succinct. The person is experiencing the so-called *Culture Shock*. (Wittenkamp 2014, 10-11.)

The term *expatriate*, or *expat* used as abbreviation, is a common term referring to an individual who leaves one's native country to live elsewhere. The term *expatriating* refers to the process itself. More information regarding these terms are described in sub-chapter 3.1.

1.2 Motivation and Scope

Few years ago, I had my own expatriating experience which took place over a time span of 2 years. My host country was Switzerland, a country which is in many aspects very different from my home country Albania. This was my first time living abroad for such a long time. I was not prepared for the culture shock I was about to suffer. At that time, I did not have the knowledge of the culture shock phenomenon as I presently do after reading enough about it. The Human Resources department of the hiring company did not provide the necessary support for making my transition process easy. Having to face emotional, practical, and social issues while struggling to keep a productive professional performance at work, was not easy at all. There were moments of thinking to give up and leave. With time I get to know the country, local people, their values and customs, and I could collect useful information about practical everyday life matters. As a consequence, everything was

starting to feel less heavy and I began to enjoy my life there. If I would have known this information earlier, it would have saved me a lot of trouble, sadness, stress, money, inconvenience and would have anticipated the enjoyable part of living in the host country.

After this experience, when returning to my home country Albania, I have been wondering how foreigners experience their sojourning in Albania. In comparison to Switzerland and other developed countries, Albania is somehow chaotic and unstructured. Thus, I was wondering how difficult might be for sojourners when moving to Albania.

The scope of the study is to gather information about sojourners, their transition process difficulties, and culture shock phenomenon. This study focuses in discovering the patterns of sojourners` life experience while starting a new life in Albania as a host country; deep understanding of the suffered culture shock and the sources which are causing it. Based on this information, a service is designed for supporting expatriates in Albania, giving them a helping hand in this process while dealing with everyday life issues.

My role in this study is that of the researcher, service proposition creator, and service prototype designer. This service is my personal initiative of a potential business idea. Thus, that makes me be also in the role of the commissioner.

1.3 Practical Relevance

In the modern world, globalization and free people movement have created a world with less barriers. The increasing volume of human mobility is the most noticeable phenomenon of the present era of globalization., more people are on the move than ever before.
The presence of host nationalities within a country is noticeable and diverse, from international tourists to war-displaced refugees.

In a corporate context, Black and Gregersen (1999, 1) write about the importance of expatriating workforce phenomenon by describing it as a competitive necessity and not a luxury in today`s global economy. Even though there is an urge for expatriating workforce from organizations of the present and the future, the transfer of expatriates into foreign assignments is one of the challenges that organizations face as they try to remain competitive in an increasing global economy (Sims & Schraeder 2004/2005, 98-99). This statement shows that expatriating is not only a business opportunity for the organizations but also a considerable challenge. Naeem, Nadeem, and Khan (2015, 250-251) recites how Webb and Wright (1996) explains that the expatriates who have no knowledge of host culture norms and patterns of behavior are likely to feel unhappy living in the host country. This will negatively impact their work performance or even impacting them in more extreme by quitting the job. Both cases directly affect the organization in a negative way by generating considerable costs for them.

Besides financial and performance costs caused to the organizations who make use of expatriating workforce, there are also well-being costs for the people who expatriate. *InterNations* organization, a well-known global organization dedicated to expatriates all over the world, defines the culture shock phenomenon in its website (www.internations.org 2017) as a nerve-wrecking, anxiety, nervousness and alienation phenomenon. It states that it is caused due to exposure to an alien environment and culture, therefore if expats could learn in advance about this mysterious country to them, they will be less shocked by obvious differences in social customs, religion, language or food. The cost for the

expatriates is the severe emotional and psychological distress which might lead to serious health issues and destructive misbalance in the personal life. Expatriating is affecting also the family of the expatriate. In addition, Naeem et al. (2015, 249) in their research show that also expats` spouses and children are affected by cross-cultural transfers and face many difficulties in the adjusting process.

The service designed in this study might be useful for people who sojourn in Albania, with the benefit of less risk for well-being damage, and failing to accomplish the sojourning purposes (e.g. carrier failure by week performance or leaving the host country on an international assignment). This service might be useful to companies, foreign missions, universities, and other entities which operate with foreigners moving to Albania. These entities might benefit from reduced risk of receiving a weak performance from the sojourner and reduced risk of quitting, both causing considerable costs to them. For instance, regarding the universities that have international programs, the foreign students are the paying customers. Thus, these entities will lose future revenues if these students do not continue their studies. Furthermore, this service might be useful to expats` families who are expatriating with him, with the benefit of less risk of culture shock. This service might be useful also to those expats` families who are not expatriating with him, with the benefit of less risk of family distress which can lead towards a relation unhappiness, and even worse towards a definitive separation.

Uncertainty coming from the unknown is something to consider for solution, because "*at the most basic level, culture shock is embedded within uncertainty*" (Naeem et al. 2015, 249). The power of having necessary information for the unknown host country makes the environment less alien which will decrease expat uncertainty, which will lead in decreased culture shock and will make the host country more welcoming and the expat journey more pleasant. This service might make Albania less of an alien environment which might improve the life experience of expats in Albania and should change their perception of Albania into a less challenging host country.

1.4 Problem Statement and Objectives

When any individual leaves his environment, his routine will be changed which brings him out of the life balance he is used to. Going to an unfamiliar environment challenges him and he has to have a new routine. All this process takes him from a balanced emotional and psychological state to an uncertain emotional and psychological state. This explains how an expat experiences his transition from home country to host country, and why he experiences the so-called phenomenon of "the culture shock". This psychological and emotional uncertainty gets more severe when the host country is unknown to the expat, and when it is very different to his home country. This highlights the benefit of using certain ways/means which might reduce the uncertainty intrinsic in the new environment. There are several factors which impacts on the level of uncertainty, and as a consequence, the exposure to the culture shock phenomenon.

Albania is still categorized as a developing country and has still many areas and sectors striving to get efficient. For a foreigner who just arrived in Albania and who is planning to live there, the surrounding might be somehow too chaotic. This is true especially for people who are coming from developed countries where everything is well-structured. This happens due to missing the "survival instinct" when placed in a country they do not know much about and which is not so well-structured. Besides the culture shock, they might be

lost in a host country where things work differently. Informal ways of information are not reachable to them in the very beginning of their living in Albania. So, they might be missing “a helping hand” to begin with.

This study is about a practical research which aims to understand the process of the culture shock and the occurring challenges that sojourners experience when moving to a host country. This study evolves in a more specific context by having a focus on the sojourners in Albania. While developing the practical research, to understand the real challenges of an expat in Albania during the transition process coming from the lack of information about the host country and understanding their need for information, becomes the main the objective. The target was about contacting expats for learning their transition process of starting a new life in Albania and to gather information about the challenges that they are dealing with. Based in these findings, the next objective in this study is the design of a service around this need.

1.5 Research Question

The overall objective of this thesis project is to develop a new service concept for reducing sojourners` culture shock. This service concept is about designing a service which should be an efficient and complete survival guide to expats moving to Albania for a better life experience. Therefore, the main research question that stands at the core of this thesis is the following:

What digital service can be designed to help expats coming to the host country Albania, that can ease the transition process and lessen the culture shock?

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to understand the expat transition process and its severe phenomenon of culture shock. It is also important to investigate which practical issues and required arrangements during the transition period are causing stress and frustration to expats when moving to Albania. In the end, using the gained knowledge and gathered insights for designing a service which gives them access to useful information about Albania and provide an adequate database for practical solutions, for making their sojourning less complicated and less stressful. Therefore, in order to respond to the main research question, it is necessary to provide answers for three research sub-questions, as follows:

1. ***What is culture shock and the most common challenges of the transition phase for expats?***

2. ***How is the transition process of expats in Albania and which are the challenges?***

3. ***How should the website be designed in order to provide the best possible customer journey?***

1.6 Study Framework and Visual Process Strategy

The framework shown in Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the topics where this study focuses the most. The study main focus is about the quality and efficiency of expats` life in Albania. Research work and design work of this study are evolved around the concepts, phenomena, theories, and domains shown in the study framework, such as host country, culture shock, learning theories, website design, and so on.

Figure 1. A visualized framework of the study.

The service design process, underlying goals, methods, techniques, and tools which are applied in this study, are visualized in Figure 2. The service design process in this study is not complete with all its stages as the *Implementation* has been left out. The service design process starts with in depth research, continues with service proposition, and concludes with design. During this study, methodological triangulation was used in several phases of the service design process with the purpose of getting accurate final results. The objective was the use of multiple methods for gathering research data in the early stages of service design, and evaluative data in the later stages of service design.

Phase of Research

The research process starts with defining core underlying goals and research methods**.** The research process in this study includes *primary* and *secondary* research. *Qualitative* and *quantitative* research methods are adopted to undertake this project. The applied research methods are literature review, survey research conducted by face-to-face interviews and online questionnaires, and online ethnography. These methods are used in a certain sequence and their research extent differs according to different research purposes, such as inspirational research, exploratory and generative research, and evaluative research. The backbone of the research strategy for this study is the technique of methodological

triangulation. Different research methods are adapted at different research stages, but they aim towards the same objective by answering the same research question. The main objective of using the right methods at the right time, was about accomplishing two important goals for me as a researcher: avoiding to be with an empty mind or a limited thinking, and to increase empathy towards the customer. The research phase is further described in chapter 2.

Phase of Service Proposition

This process phase is about defining service proposition objectives, measuring and evaluating the initial service concept, and conceptualizing the business model behind the service. The objective is the further development of initial service concept based on obtained knowledge and information from research work. The service proposition phase is further described in sub-chapter 7.1

Phase of Design

The design process starts with defining core underlying goals and design methods. The design process consists on building a service final prototype and defining the business behind the service; the service final prototype testing and implementation is not included in the design phase. The process starts with creating *personas* and *mapping events* with experience journey. Afterwards, several methods for developing, testing, and evaluating the service prototypes are applied. In the end, *business model canvas* method and *customer journey* method for defining and analyzing the business behind the service, are applied. The backbone of the design strategy for this study is the technique of methodological triangulation, the same as stated above for the research phase. The design phase is further described in chapter 5.

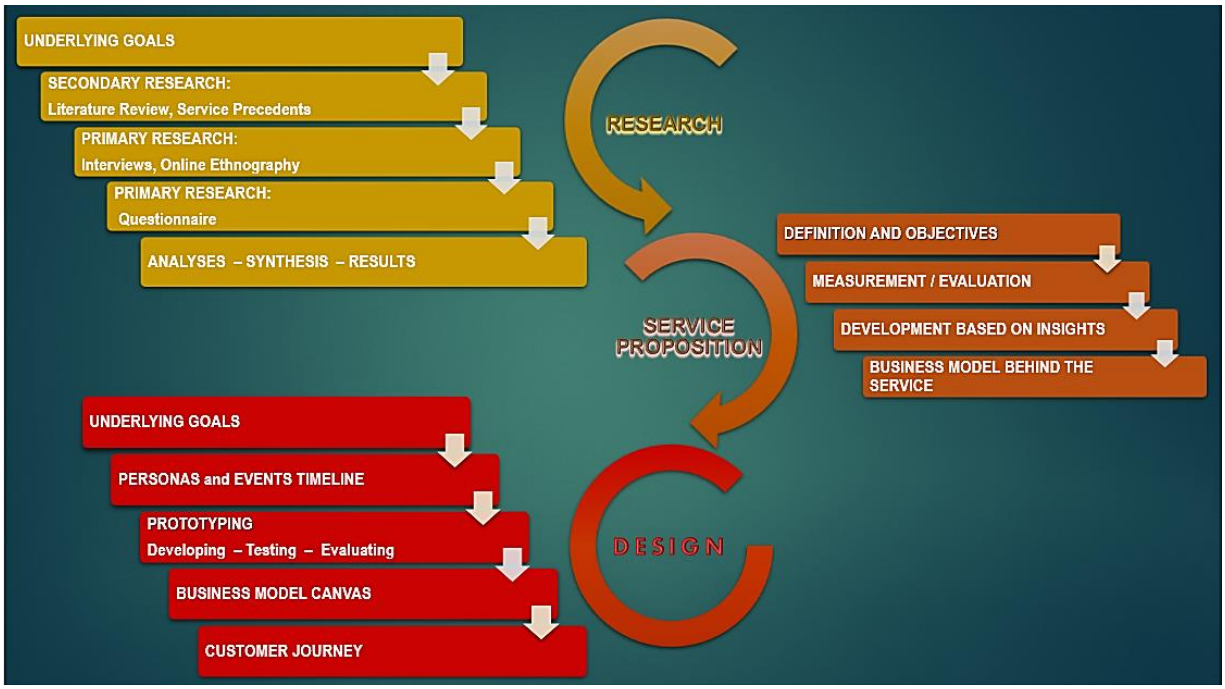


Figure 2. The service design process of the study.

2 Research Strategy

In the research phase of the study, the main scope is to gain in-depth knowledge about expatriating process, related concepts and variables through *literature review*, and then to gather information about expatriating experience and challenges in Albania as a host country through *fieldwork research*.

Service design is a user-centered discipline. Thus, knowing the user is the stepping stone of a successful service design. In-depth insights about the user is at the core of this research work. The users of the service designed in this study are all the sojourners in Albania. The research process (refer to Figure 3) starts as research about the user for knowing him in its general term: *The Expat*. This stage of research is covered by the literature review. Afterwards, the research process continues as research with the user. This stage of research is covered by empirical research. Secondary research about service precedents is conducted additionally for investigating about and learning from other existing services.

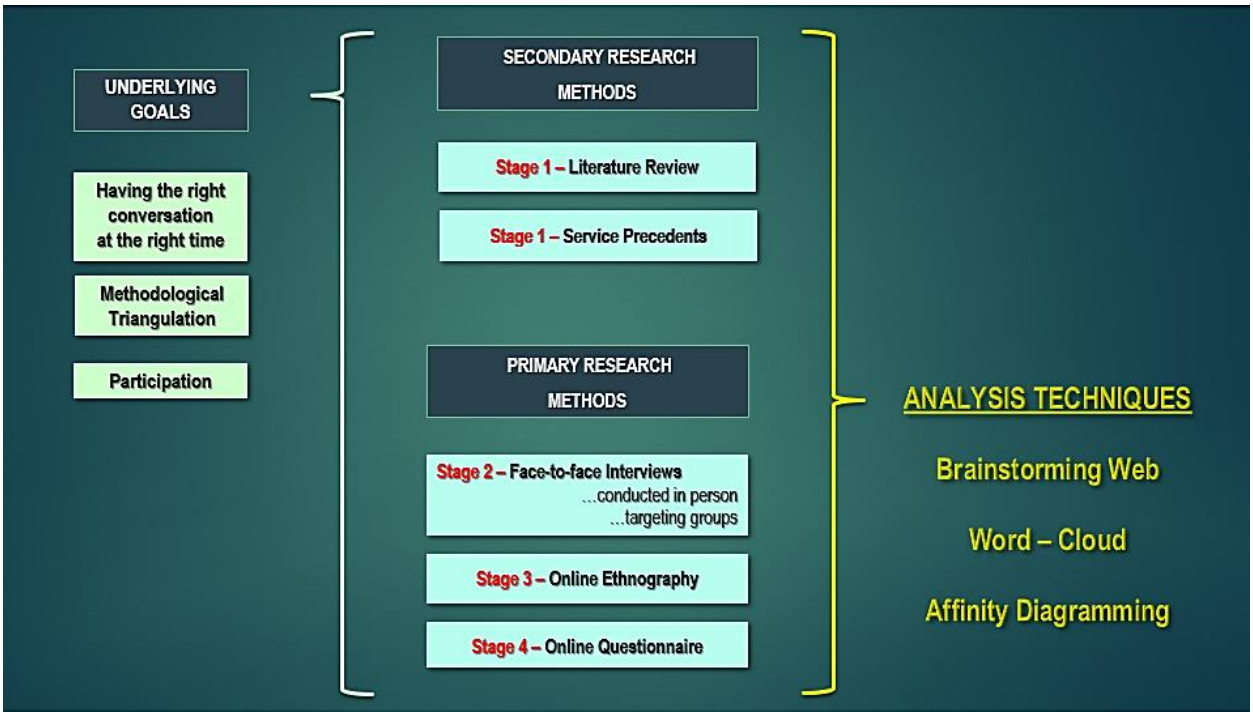


Figure 3. The research process and methods.

2.1 Underlying Goals

The research strategy of this study has three important underlying goals: having the right conversation at the right time, methodological triangulation, and participation. These goals are described in the following paragraphs.

Having the right conversation at the right time

A designer must choose among many methods and techniques, and matching the proper method or technique to reach the design goals is the key to a successful service design project. This means that it is important to use the correct method and technique in the right situation, at the right time, and at the right sequence, always focused on the problems which need to be solved. (Martin & Hanington 2012, 7.)

During this study, this approach was leading the whole research work, especially when deciding the sequence of the used methods. For instance, a questionnaire is conducted after gathering insights from the literature review, interviews, and online ethnography. In addition, each research method had its own research purpose, and the research work extent was adjusted accordingly. For instance, interviews for inspirational purposes is less in-depth research work than the one conducted by questionnaires for generative purposes. Research methods has also been adapted with the occurring situations. For instance, when conducting interviews with expats during expats` events held in Tirana, they were adapted into conversations with small groups of participants.

Methodological Triangulation

In 1978, Norman K. Denzin found in his study that there are four different varieties of triangulation: theoretical triangulation, data triangulation, investigator triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Within methodological triangulation there are two forms. One of them is *with-in-method*, where in the research are used several varieties of the same method for gathering data. The other form is named *between-method*, where in the research multiple methods for gathering data are used. (Denzin 1970/2017, part XII.)

Martin and Hanington (2012, 188) define *methodological triangulation* as the technique which brings evidence from several different angles about a research question by using multiple research methods. The purpose of using this technique is about the synergy benefits of using several methods instead of one, for generating more convincing and reliable results. A researcher must be aware that people have a pattern to make a difference between *what they say* and *what they do*. For that reason, the self-reported methods such as surveys, may not give a complete reflection of true thoughts, feelings, perceptions, or behaviors. With self-reported methods, many things might also be left unsaid for many reasons: shyness, carelessness, forgetfulness, etc. To fix this gap of this method, the best is to conduct a complementary unobtrusive method, such as observation or similar. In this research work, besides survey, online ethnography has been conducted.

Participation

Polaine, Lovlie and Reason (2013, 57) define participation as "*an excellent strategy for developing empathy*" which "*can provide researchers with a unique, firsthand understanding of the way users feel and behave*".

The participative approach in this study was accomplished through my enrollment in two main expat communities in Albania: InterNations Tirana community and Expats in Albania community. The service description of these communities' websites is introduced below.

- InterNations – Worldwide expat community with its presence also in Albania (Tirana community)

  > "The largest global expat network 2.5 million members. Present with communities in 390 cities worldwide. As the largest international community for people who live and work abroad, InterNations offers global networking opportunities, local events, and expat-relevant information. At around 3,500 monthly events and activities, expats get to meet fellow internationals in their city, while forums and destination guides provide valuable tips and information". (www.Internations.org)

- Expats in Albania – Local expats community public group in Facebook

  > "Expats in Albania is a public group in Facebook, with currently 2,019 members. Its goal is to bring together expats and locals in Albania through various activities, with the aim of helping integration, networking, and friendship". (www.facebook.com/groups/expatsinalbania)

2.2 Insights Gathering Methods

Obtaining clear answers for the research sub-questions, is crucial to create a solid base for this study in developing the service concept. In order to get the right answers, is necessary to get them from the right customers. The fieldwork research strategy for collecting these customers' insights is reaching out gathering of customers of interest, for an efficient research work. For that reason, this part of research applies in places where several expat events take place in Tirana. For collecting answers for the research sub-questions, methods such as literature review, survey, and online ethnography are used. Channels for collecting customers` insights, are face-to face, email, Facebook, and websites related to the expat community in Albania. For organizing collected answers are used techniques such as affinity diagram, word cloud, and brainstorming web.

In this study both primary and secondary research is conducted. Each of them includes methods which were applied in a certain sequence during the whole research process for accomplishing certain research purposes. These methods are described in the following paragraphs.

Secondary research

The secondary research of this study includes a literature review and service precedents research. The literature review consisted at deep theory research about concepts, definitions and models related to the first research sub-question. Research about service precedents consisted at extracting information for inspirational purposes in the service design. The aim of this desk research was to collect information about existing services which have similar service concepts, websites offering expats a service of support for their life in a host country. As Martin and Hanington (2012, 154) suggest, this secondary research is an excellent method to identify what precedents exist. This research was useful to learn what has already been done and what hasn`t, and where there may yet be opportunity gaps. The gathered information from this research was necessary to provide some direction to this study and a certain frame for its design project.

Primary research

The primary research of this study is about empirical research using survey research and online ethnography methods. The aim of this research was the in-depth knowledge about expats in Albania, their life experience during transit time in this host country. The focus of this research was about their practical arrangements of everyday life, issues and challenges. The empathic approach of this research had in focus their feelings and emotions during the process, understanding how their experience was while trying to settle in this host country.

Martin and Hanington (2012, 102, 172) state that: "*questionnaires are a method of collecting self-reported information from people about their characteristics, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, behaviors, or attitudes*" and "*interviews are a fundamental research method for direct contact with participants, to collect firsthand personal accounts of experience, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions*". As already mentioned, the start of the design process was about knowing the user, in-depth understanding of the expats` thoughts, feelings, perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes during the transition process of moving to the host country Albania. Interviews were the first primary research method conducted in this study for collecting information related to the topic, in the context of inspirational research. Beside the inspirational purpose, another purpose of using interviews as a research method was to prepare the groundwork for generating ideas and developing the service concept. Anonymity is maintained throughout the research, however information about nationalities, gender and age, status, and reason for expatriating are revealed.

- Face-to face interviews

Face-to-face interviews is one of the survey methods used in this study. The interviews conducted in this study had the following patterns: unstructured / directed storytelling, conducted in person, and targeting groups of two or three participants.

Martin and Hanington (2012, 102) suggest that being conversational through unstructured interviews makes participants feel more comfortable. In addition, conducting the interview with a group of participants is more efficient than with an individual participant. The advantage of group interviews is about the interaction between participants which generates insights in bigger amount and more elaborated then interviews with one participant. Similar statement can be found in the study of Polaine et al. (2013, 52) saying that in a group the participants promote and support each other during the process, while the individual participant might be shy, forgetful and setting boundaries when he is expressing himself during the interview. Another advantage of group interviews is the efficient use of time because the frequency of the process for interview introducing and addressing the guiding questions is less when interviewing groups than in the case of one-to-one interviews.

- Online questionnaires

The online questionnaire is the other survey method used in this study. While conducting interviews at the early stage of the primary research, questionnaires were conducted at a later stage. At this part of the research, the gathered knowledge from literature review and

interviews have created a good understanding of the problem area. Thus, questionnaires were designed based on the outcome from this preliminary research.

- Online ethnography

As already mentioned, my approach as the researcher in this study was the participative approach. After becoming a member of expat communities in Albania, the following step was to collect insights from the research conducted over discussions posts in a digital media, the Expats in Albania Facebook page. The online ethnography research in this study was conducted during the exploratory phase of the design process and the aim was to gather baseline information for the problem area by reading the expats` posts in this digital media. This method was suitable for the research purpose in this phase of design, guiding design inspiration. It the end, the outcome from this research have provided a stepping stone for generating ideas about the service design of this study.

2.3 Analysis and Synthesis Methods

The gathered information through the research in this study has been quite wide. The applied analysis and synthesis methods are personas, mapping events with experience journey, affinity diagram, word cloud, and brainstorming-web.

Word cloud

In this study, word cloud was used to give a synthesis of insights collected from research conducted through the online ethnography method over the discussions posts in Expats in Albania Facebook page. Word cloud was considered an adequate synthesis method for better understanding of these deep, rich qualitative, text-based data (Martin & Hanington 2012, 60). The tool used for this method is the online word cloud generator named *WordItOut*.

Affinity diagramming

Affinity diagramming was used in this study as an inductive technique to first document and then cluster information gathered from online ethnography research in order to reach general topics related to the expat challenges. This technique was necessary to support the online ethnography research, by documenting the frequency of used words representing expats` issues and topics which were used to generate the *word cloud*.

Brainstorming web (Brainstorm Graphic Organizer)

To analyze the information gathered from all research work in this study the brainstorm web method was used. The purpose for using this method is the synthesis of the new knowledge related to expatriating and culture shock, gained from the research work.

Brainstorming web offers a well-organized visual structuring of gained know-how while deep diving in the problem area (Martin & Hanington 2012, 22).

3 Literature Review

In order to understand the people for whom the service is designed, in-depth literature review was considered a crucial starting point of the whole process. The users are at the core of the service design as the service is designed around them.

The purpose of this research work was to get in-depth knowledge of the theoretical background; the expats and the phenomenon of culture shock. To accomplish this purpose literature review was used by reading books, articles and studies which tell and explain expats` emotions, behaviors, attitudes, and challenges of starting a life in a host country. Articles, journals and research papers have been found as online sources from several resources, such as www.businessballs.com, www.scholarworks.gvsu.edu, www.emeraldinsight.com, www.papers.ssrn.com, and more. Most of the e-books were found in online libraries, such as www.turkuamk.finna.fi, www.bookbone.com, www.ebooks-it.org, and more as book previews in www.books.google.fi and www.amazon.com.

3.1 Expatriate and Expatriating

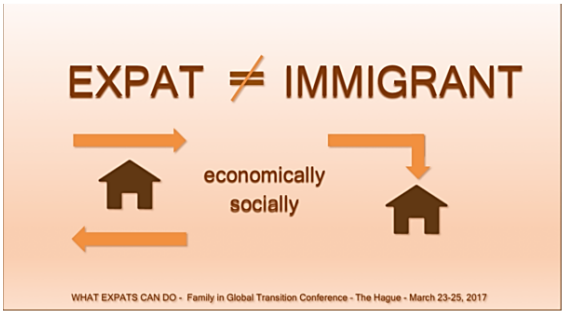
This sub-chapter is about a deep understanding of the terms expatriate and expatriating and the defining of the frame of these terms.

Expatriate Definition

People who have left the country where they were born in are named differently depending on the different contexts related to them: expat, immigrant, refugee, global citizen, world nomad, international student, and sojourner. The term “expat” is short for “expatriate” and is a term originated in the 18th century used for individuals who were either banished from others or left their own country by themselves. (Parks 2015.)

The use of this term has evolved since then. Cieri, Dowling and Taylor (1991) have reported (according to Naeem et al. 2015, 249) that expatriates` definition differs from other people travelling abroad such as tourists or migrants, in the time span and reason of travel, and Furham (1988) gives (according to Naeem et al. 2015, 249) a time frame of six months to five years of being abroad ending with intended travel back home. Nowadays, an expatriate is commonly known as the employee moving to live abroad due to company assignment on a work project (job position), for a defined time period which might be from six months to five years (Lexicon - Financial Times 2016). Meanwhile, according to InterNations.org, a global organization with the mission of connecting expats and locals worldwide, this term is referred in a wider spectrum than the above-mentioned definitions, by describing it as a term “*generally used to refer to people who temporarily or permanently live in a different country than the one they were born in or whose nationality they have*”. (www.InterNations.org)

However, the major arguments are about differences between people named expats and people named immigrants. In Figure 4, is an example of distinguishing these terms, which was given during the Family in Global Transition conference in Hague, held in March 2017.



Immigrants are considered a social entity and it is understandable: their goal is to settle down, they have a significant financial impact on society (positive as an economical resource, negative for the cost of integration), they tend to integrate their families in the host country. There are governments' programs to deal with their integration so that they can give their contribution to society.

Expats are generally not considered as a social entity or, if they are, it is a kind of temporary consideration, strictly related to the nature of their assignment (military members, diplomats, executives, etc.). Outside of this role, they practically don't have a social identity, their families are considered only as "accessories". It is understandable: expats don't bring social issues or problems with them, their financial impact on society is limited or controlled. Their integration in society is not an issue: they will not stay for long. In some countries expats communities are also "physically" confined inside specific areas to keep them separated by locals.

Figure 4. Expat concept versus Immigrant concept, Family in Global Transition Conference in Hague, March 2017. (www.whatexpatscando.com)

There are so many reasons why people leave their home country for another country, most probably moving to a country unknown to them. They do travel for different purposes, expectations, targets and timing of stay. They are of different age, have different status (diplomat, employee, student, etc.) and they travel alone or accompanied by a partner or family. Every move is different, depending on one's life stage or circumstance. Crossing borders for a grown-up employee to follow a job opportunity, carries many different contexts, responsibilities, and obstacles than a relocation of a youngster following studies abroad. A move due to more vital needs, the unemployed seeking for job opportunities or the one escaping from a hostile environment seeking for a safer life, brings again another context of relocation and other influence factors in the adjustment process in the new home.

The theoretical background is highlighting an important outcome. Even though the nowadays studies and articles about culture shock are referred only to expats in their foreign assignments, the culture shock issue belongs not only to them. This is true because no matter the reason for leaving the home country, the new life in the host country will bring the individual in a particularly challenging transition process resulting in unavoidable suffering of culture shock.

Expatriate Failure and its costs

Like any other assignment where there is a presence of failure or success, expatriating can end in failure.

Richard Mills is the Chairman of Chalré Associates – a successful executive search & management consulting organization operating in emerging countries throughout the Asia Pacific region. After spending more than 20 years in recruiting, Mills defines the

expatriate failure "*…as a posting that either ends prematurely or is considered ineffective by senior management*" (Mills 2013, 169). He explains that the expats have to handle simultaneously the new job position overload, most probably with long working hours, and the new culture overwhelming differences with his own culture, and the consequences can be quite serious "*The combination of emotional despondency and physical exhaustion from elevated stress levels and overwork is a common problem for new expatriates otherwise known as burnout. Unless alleviated, the result can be dramatically reduced effectiveness or work interrupting illness for them*". (Mills 2013, 171.)

Failure costs is not impacting only the expat, but also other people and entities related to him. Costs of a lost investment from the company in an international assignment has to be considered because "*expatriate assignments can be costly endeavors for organizations due to special compensation packages, housing and relocation costs, predeparture training, and so forth*" (Lexicon - Financial Times 2017). Also, Black and Gregersen (1999, 1) wrote about how costly an expat is to a company: "*. . .international assignments don't come cheap. On average, expatriates cost two to three times what they would in an equivalent position back home. A fully loaded expatriate package including benefits and cost-of-living adjustments costs. . . probably the single largest expenditure most companies make on any one individual except for the CEO*".

Beside the company who was the initiator of sending the employ for an international assignment, the family members of the expat are also suffering from the expatriating. Failure to maintain a sound balance during the expatriating period, may cause cost not only caused in financial terms to them but also emotional and personal aspects. Marriage breakdown is a common result among married expatriates, and this happens mainly because it is not only the assignee suffering the culture shock in the new country; the trailing spouse suffers greater culture shock. (Mills 2013, 169.)

3.2 Theories Explaining Culture, Shock, and Culture Shock

The broad literature on migration includes many large-scale cross-national studies concerned with mental health. Most of the initial studies where on student sojourners. The initial researches are dated after 1950, and they accounted the association between migration and psychological problems. Many studies about migration have concluded that when individuals start to live in a new culture, many negative aspects will emerge and they can become so stressful to the individual as to necessitate medical treatment. After 1980, sojourning has started to be treated in a new perspective, as a learning experience instead of a medical issue. For the individual, preparation, orientation, and empowering with the necessary skills to deal with the new culture, are those needed action to be taken in order to have a successful sojourning. (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham 2001/2005, 36.)

This new perspective viewed sojourning as a dynamic experience, where social skills and culture learning are the main drivers. With time, studies about "culture shock" phenomenon have shifted from medicine to education and social psychology, and the concepts of "adaptation" and "acculturation" have become the culprit of this phenomenon. Recently, studies have less focus on student sojourns and more on international assignment sojourners, the expats.

The several models and theories explained in the coming paragraph, give a deeper understanding by starting with the concept of culture, then how shock is caused by changes in a general context, and it the end focusing in more specific shock: *the culture shock*. In Figure 5 the literature review is shown on a framework.

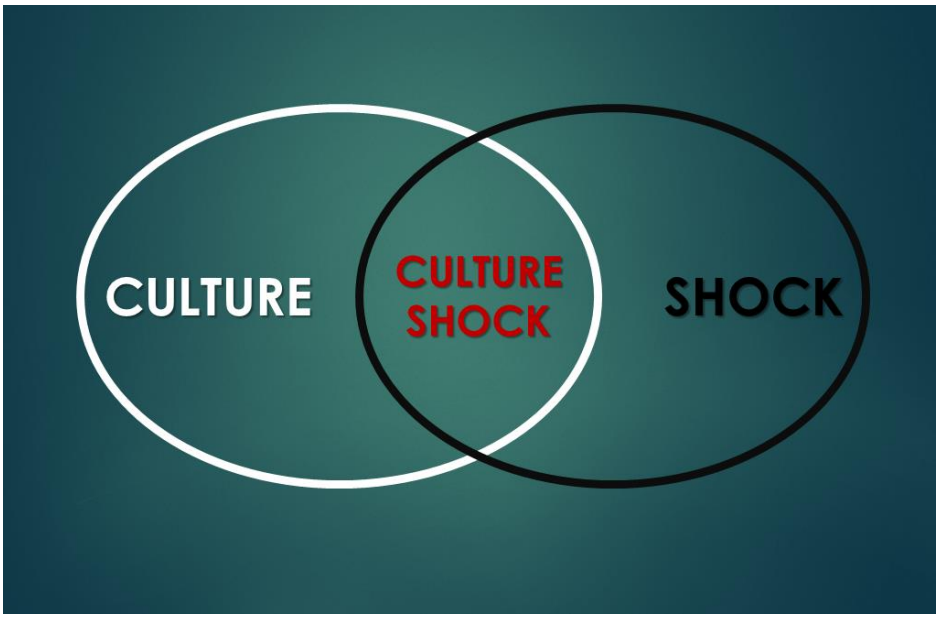


Figure 5. Literature review framework.

Culture shock is a concept constructed in recent decades, but the phenomenon itself, the certain symptoms emerging when crossing cultural boundaries, has been noticed and noted already in the classical Greek literature. The first public use of the term "culture shock" was in 1951 by the anthropologist Cora DuBois naming a phenomenon noticed among the anthropologists while they were exploring new cultures, as a disorienting experience. (La Brack w.y., 1.) Although, the term 'culture shock' was officially coined by the anthropologist Kalervo Oberg in 1960, who explained the symptoms and the process of adapting to a new and different culture. Oberg, born to immigrant Finnish parents in British Columbia, was in the 1950s living in Rio. There he was responsible for newly arrived American technicians and their families explaining them the Brazilian culture and society. Many of them had not previously lived abroad, and he noticed a common syndrome, a sequence of behavior and attitude: initial exhilaration and excitement with the foreign assignment, quickly turning to depression, disillusionment, harsh criticism of Brazilian ways, and concern with health problems, usually followed by recovery and adaptation to the new conditions of life. These observations were the start of Oberg's most widely known paper about the Culture Shock phenomenon. At first, he gave an informal talk about his findings to an American wives' club in Rio de Janeiro. This talk, which remains the definitive statement on culture shock, was reproduced and distributed to American personnel in embassies and technical aid missions in many parts of the world. Only much later, in 1960, did it appear in the Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series, where the date, 1954, is that of the original talk, and not of publication. Oberg wrote his article based on his own observation of expatriate Americans. Living in a new culture can produce a number of reactions, including confusion, anxiety, frustration, exhilaration, isolation, inappropriate social behavior and even depression. The experience of a new culture can be viewed as an unpleasant or unwelcome surprise or shock, which comes about when a person's expectations do not coincide with the reality. (Oberg 1960/2006, 142-146.)

Naeem et al. (2015, 249) recites how Taft (1977) believes that there are six different aspects of culture shock: *strain*, felt due to the efforts to adapt in a foreign culture; *sense of loss and deprivation*, related to friends, status and professions; rejection, by the people of the new culture or rejecting them; *confusion*, in identity, values and roles; *anxiety*, leading up to even disgust about various foreign practices; *feeling helpless*, when not being able to cope with the new atmosphere.

These concepts about culture shock has also been endorsed in 1986 by Furnham and Bochner (according to Bochner 2003) in their book *Culture Shock: Psychological Reactions to Unfamiliar Environments.*

Internations.org, in their article "What is culture shock?" posted in Expat Magazine, define culture shock as an emotional roller-coaster which all the expatriates do experience, without any distinguish in their individual characteristics, reasons of expatriating, or the existence of previous expatriating experiences. Furthermore, they define the most common elements which fuel the culture shock phenomenon and face expats with a struggling transition process, such as deeper cultural differences in mindset, customs and interpersonal interaction.

3.2.1 Culture Definition

Culture can be defined as a mental programming that is designed from two different paths: what we inherit from our leading generations and what we absorb from the people around us (Hofstede 1980/1984, 21-23.)

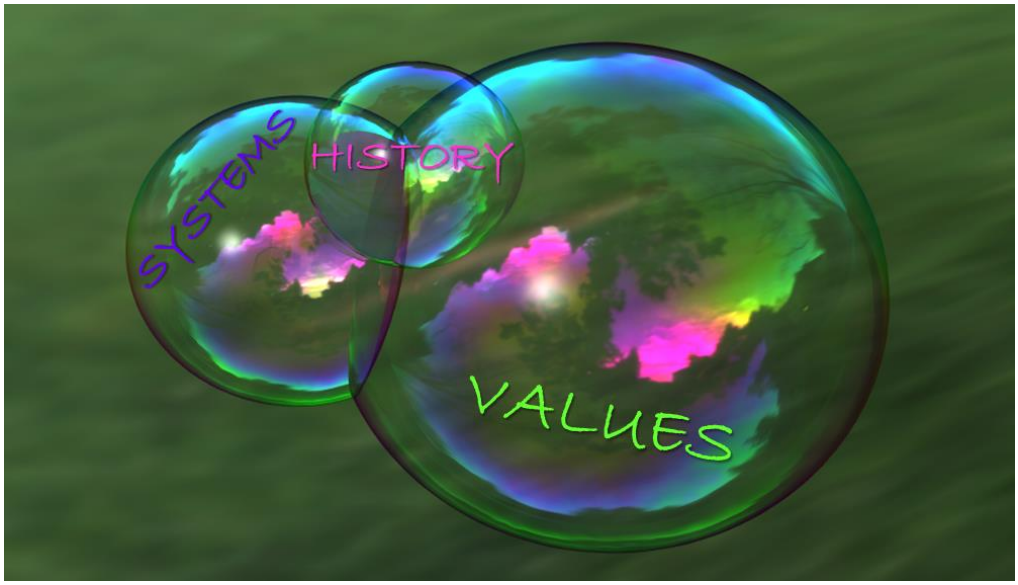


Figure 6. Model of factors influencing culture in a society.

Factors influencing culture in a society are: values, history, and systems (refer to Figure 6). The foundation of culture is the factor **Values**, which are strong opinions that the majority of the population share about core social concepts such as power, gender roles, risk, autonomy etc. The second ingredient is **History**. A country's history has strong impact on people by determining how its people do things today. Based on history precedents, people

shape their behaviors and approaches to a certain situation in the present. So, knowing about the host`s nation history helps to better understand its culture. Final ingredient is **Systems**, which represent the way a society organizes its commons. In any society there are arrangements within its structure about the main aspects of society. This includes regulation about violation (how is law and order organized), education, religions, environment protection, politics, etc. All three factors interact with each other and collectively they contribute to the dominating culture of a country. Values and history also shape subcultures, but the systems generally are decided by the dominant cultural group. (Wittenkamp 2014, 12-13.)

Edward T. Hall`s Iceberg Model of Culture (1976)

This model was developed by anthropologist Edward T. Hall in 1976 in his book *Beyond Culture*. According to the iceberg model of understanding culture, *Culture* is similar to an iceberg: you can observe about 10% of it, but to comprehend the rest, you have to go deeper (90% of iceberg mass is underneath the surface). (Hall 1976/1989.)

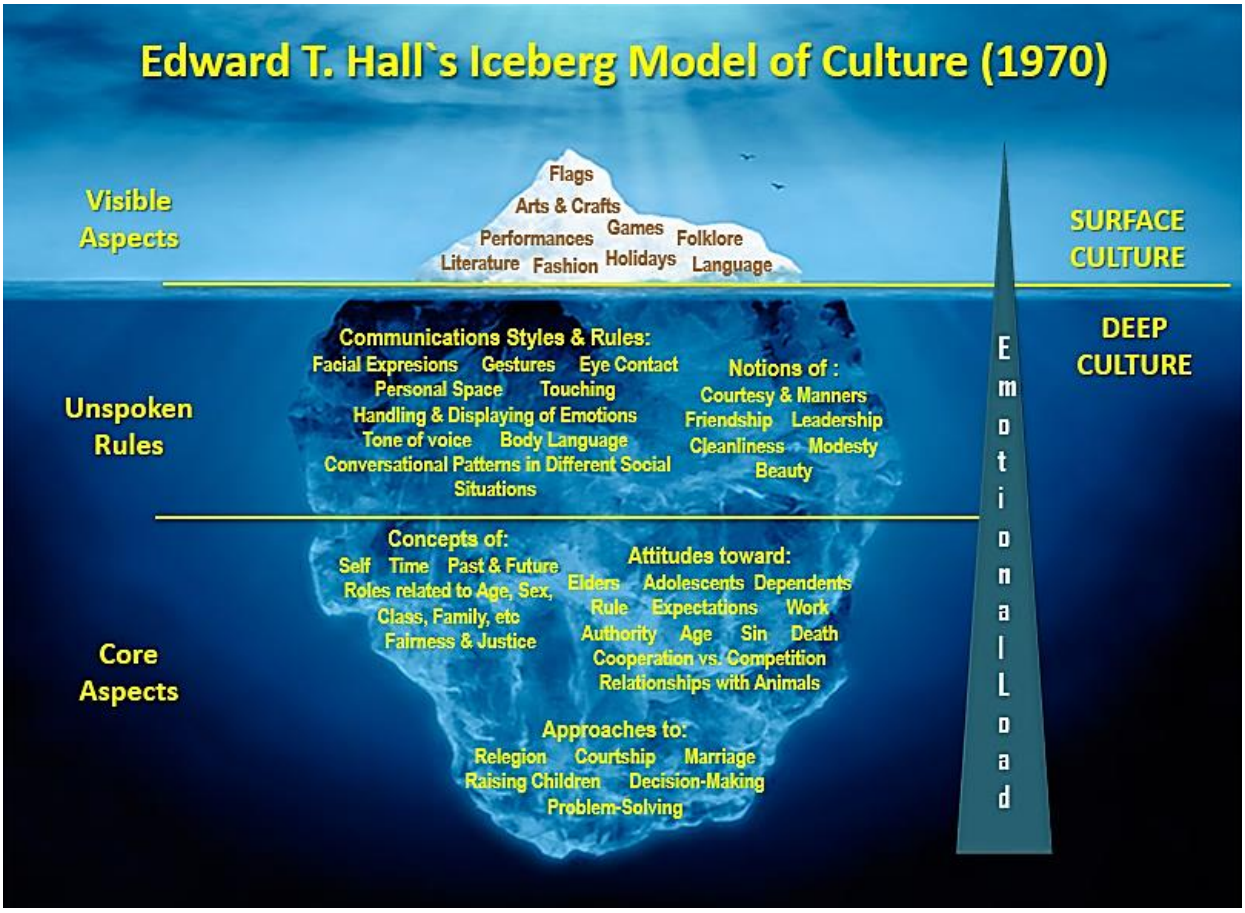


Figure 7. The Cultural Iceberg, a model developed by anthropologist Edward T. Hall in the 1976s.

The Top 10% is the part that is immediately noticeable to us when we first interact with a new culture. This is the part of culture we can easily observe and perceive, such as language, art, cuisine, and so on (refer to Figure 7). Even this part of culture is important to identify the culture itself, still these visible elements of culture are changeable or transformable; for instance, recipes, games and music can change over time. This means

that people are slightly attached with this part of their culture. Therefore, have a relatively low emotional load so they can also be changed and altered without jeopardizing the existence of a culture or people's perception about their identity.

Hall's model shows that 90% of culture, which is similar to that part hidden underwater of an iceberg, represents the most important and most solid aspect of the culture which can be divided into two categories. The first category is about things which are near the surface, but still hidden, named “the unspoken rules” of a society. Unspoken rules represent culture elements, such as body language, comfortable distance with other people, what is defined as beautiful, appropriate manners, and so on. An outsider needs time and have to make efforts to understand these culture aspects because they are not as visible as the aspects belonging to the top 10%. As they carry a considerable emotional load, and if these values are changed then people will begin to feel like their cultural identity is being threatened. Going even deeper we get to the second category named “the core” of the iceberg, because they represent the real values of a certain culture. At the core of culture, there are concepts related to gender roles, class, status, age, lifecycle and family, society pace, and so on. Understanding this part of culture is not an easy and fast process; we must have lived in that culture for a long time and become deeply aware of its values and knowledgeable in its history. These culture aspects carry the heaviest emotional load of all, thus people will resist changing these values.

3.2.2 The Learning Theories

According to learning theories, ‘shock’ is understood as the psychological crisis used as a “surviving stimulus” for learning the culture-specific skills that are required to perform in the new social interactions. Argyle’s Culture Learning Theory (1969), Abraham Maslow`s Conscious Competence Theory - the 4 Stages of Learning (1940), and Albert Bandura’ Social Learning Theory (1977) are the learning theories supporting this study, as described in the following paragraphs.

Argyle’s Culture Learning Theory (1969)

The culture learning approach has its origin in social and experimental psychology and has been strongly influenced by Argyle’s work in 1969 on social skills and interpersonal behaviors. The approach is based on the assumption that cross-cultural problems arise because outsiders face difficulties in everyday exposure to the new society. Adaptation, therefore, needs time and is a continuous learning process of the new culture aspects. (Ward et al. 2001/2005, 37.)

According to Culture learning theory, ‘**shock’** is understood as the psychological crisis used as a “surviving stimulus” for learning the culture-specific skills that are required to perform in the new social interactions. The adaption of the outsider can be easy to handle or very difficult, which will define how severe the “shock” might be to him. There are several variables which impact this process such as the know-how about the host culture, length of residence in the host culture, language or communication competence, quantity and quality of contact with host nationals, friendship networks, previous experience abroad, cultural distance, cultural identity, acculturation modes, temporary versus permanent residence in a new country, and cross-cultural training / assistance.

Abraham Maslow`s Conscious Competence Theory - the 4 Stages of Learning (1940)

The conscious competence theory is another name for the Four Stages of Learning, a theory posited by 1940's psychologist Abraham Maslow. According to Abraham Maslow there are four stages of learning that everyone must go through. The Four Stages of Learning model suggests that individuals are initially unaware of how little they know, or unconscious of their incompetence. After recognizing their incompetence, they consciously acquire a skill and use it. With time, the skill is utilized without being conscious, it becomes natural, and at this point the individual has acquired unconscious competence. The Four Stages of Learning describe how a person learns, progressing in each stage. The four stages are described as follows:

1. Unconscious Incompetence - The unknown unknowns
2. Conscious Incompetence - The known unknowns
3. Conscious Competence - The known knowns
4. Unconscious Competence - The unknown knowns

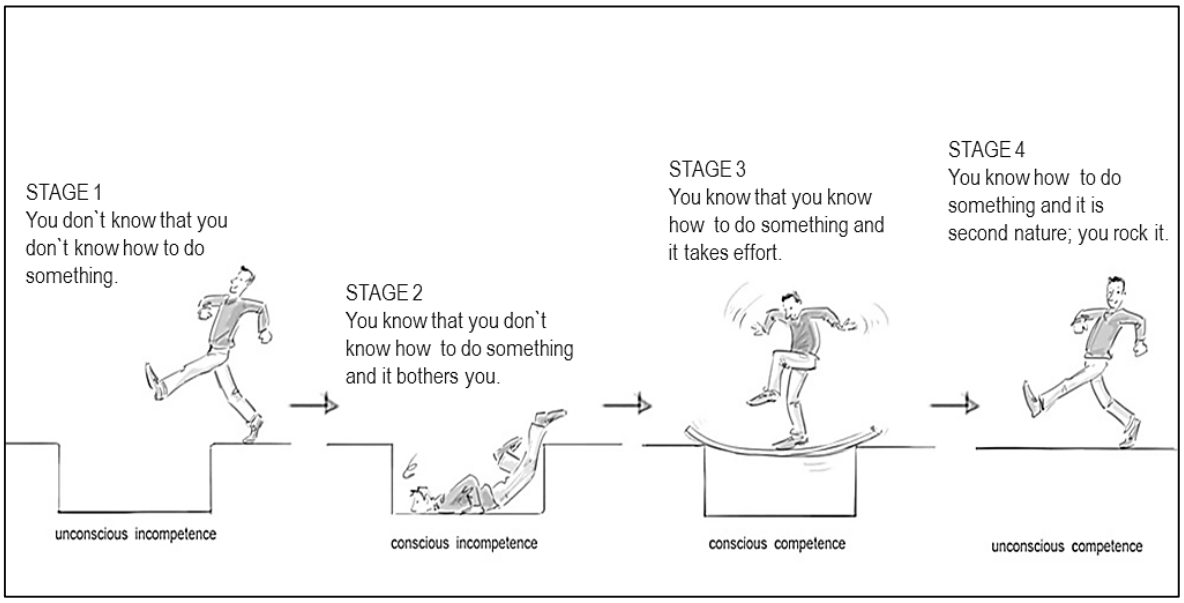


Figure 8. Maslow`s theory of Four Stages of Learning Process. (Wesselien de Groot – Bright Alley, adapted) (www.businessballs.com)

Maslow has reported (according to Wittenkamp 2014, 17-18.) that in stage_1 you didn't know you needed to learn something, in stage_2 you have realized that you need to learn something and then you learn it in stage 3 so it becomes the known knowns, and in phase 4 you have become so good at it that you don't even think about it, you just do things as they are like a second nature to you. Stage 2, conscious incompetence, is the most difficult stage, where learning begins, and where the most judgments against self are formed. This is the stage which creates psychological discomfort or crises to the people and that most people give up. These stages are illustrated in Figure 8.

Albert Bandura' Social Learning Theory (1977)

Social Learning Theory - SLT is presented by Albert Bandura in 1977. SLT declares that in addition to individuals learning based on the consequences of their actions, individuals can also learn and behave based on their observations of other people's behavior and associated consequences and by imitating the modeled behavior. Bandura has found (according to Black & Mendenhall 1990, 232-236) that people are capable of anticipatory control-of choosing how they will respond in various future situations. As described by Bandura, SLT goes through 3 stages: attention, retention, reproduction, and the main drive for the whole process are incentives on the motivational process (refer to Figure 9).

Attention – before someone or something can be observed and modeled, the subject must notice them.

Retention – the observer files in his memory the modeled behavior as a cognitive map which will help him to imitate it when needed.

Reproduction – when individuals try to imitate the modeled behavior with their actions, they confront their actions with the behavior model they retained in relation to this situation.

Incentives and the motivational processes – these are internal (coming from the individual himself) or external (coming from the surroundings) factors which impacts the whole process.

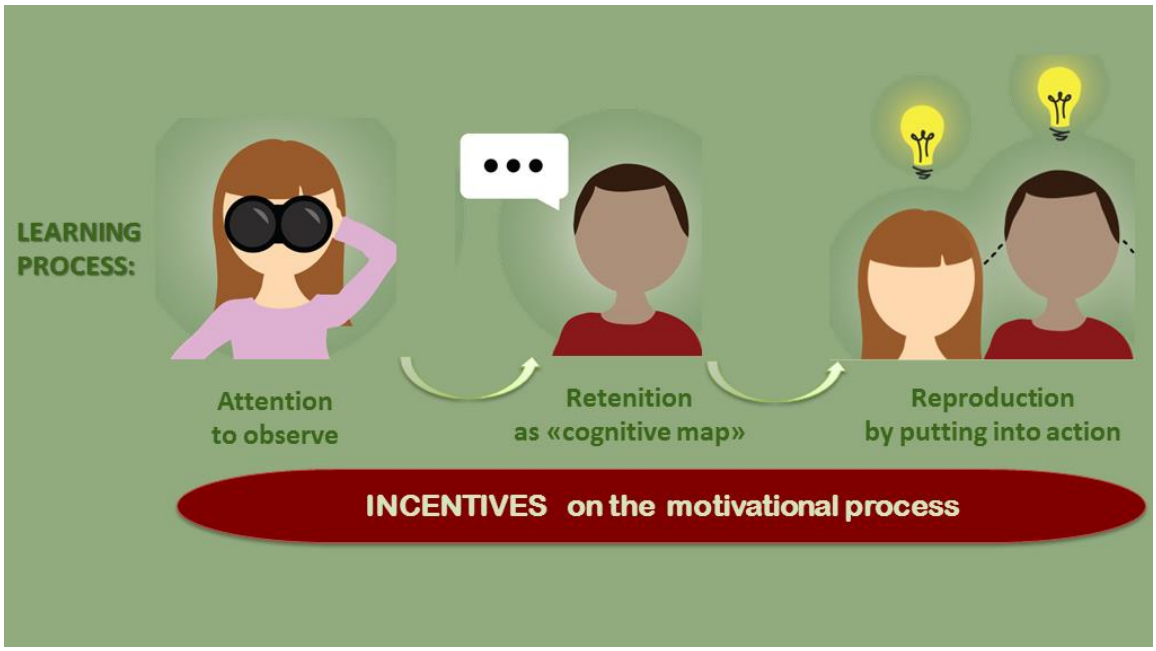


Figure 9. Bandura`s Social Learning Theory – SLT, 1977.

Black and Mendenhall (1990, 232-236) recites how Bandura`s social learning theory provides important outcomes in the context of cross-cultural adjustment which places an individual in a situation in which many past behaviors and associated consequences are no longer appropriate and new sources of modeled behavior are different from the past. Because individuals adjusting to new cultures can be thought of as being involved in a learning process, social learning theory provides a theoretical framework within which cross-cultural adjustment can be examined.

3.2.3 The Transition Process Theories

The transition process theories are the other theories in this study which continue to bring knowledge for going deeper into the understanding of shock and culture shock. John Fisher`s Process of Personal Transition Model (1999) and William Bridges` Managing Transitions Model (1991) are the transition process theories supporting this study, as described in the following paragraphs.

John Fisher`s Process of Personal Transition Model (1999)

Even positive transitions that we have welcomed with excitement and optimism can also be stressful and will put people in a roller-coaster of emotions. Fisher's (1999) model of personal change - The Personal Transition Curve - is a model which gives a thorough analysis of how individuals deal with personal change. Figure 10 shows a revised model by John Fisher of his original transition model which is dated to 2000; originally, he presented this model in 1999 at the Tenth International Personal Construct Congress, Berlin.

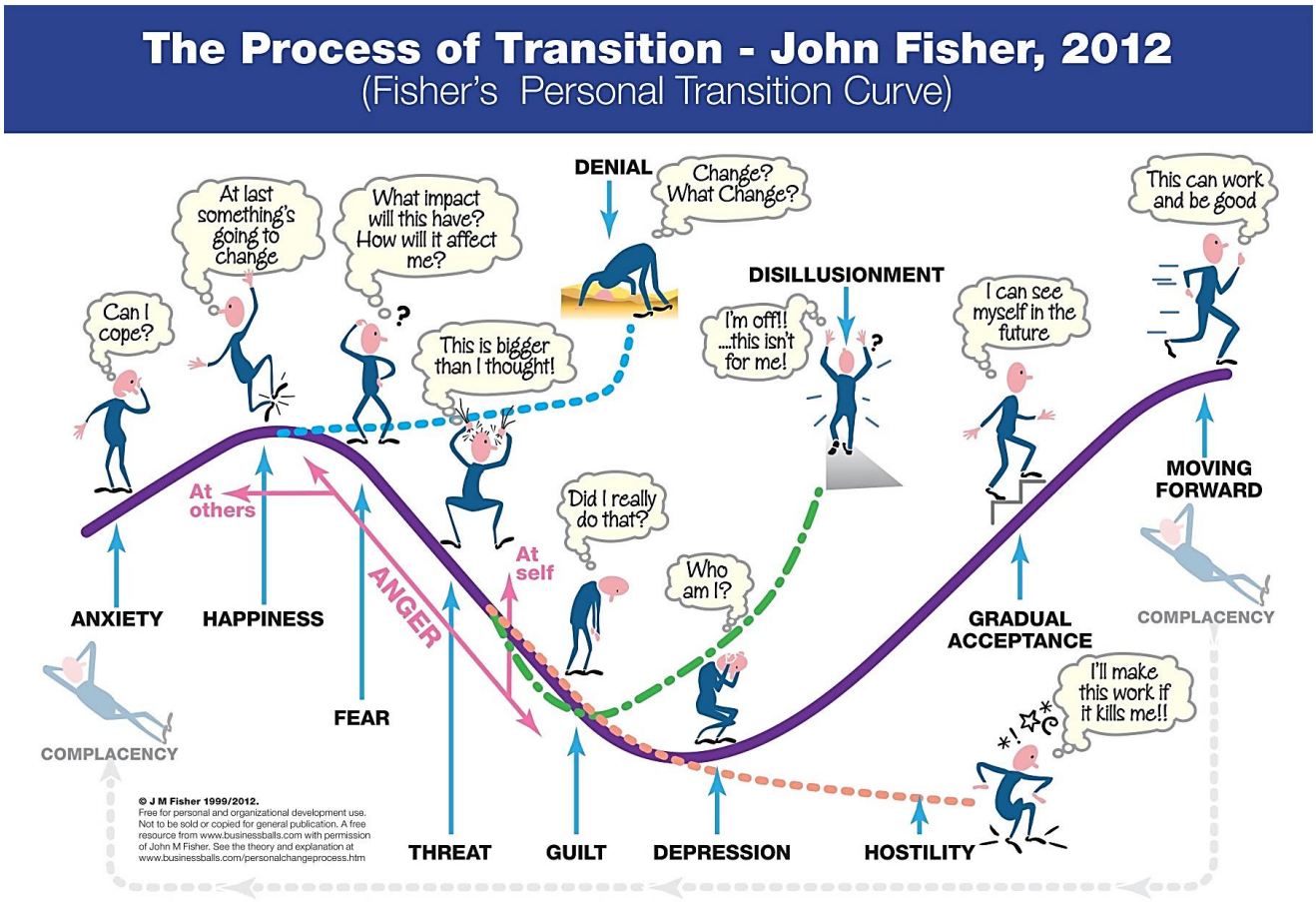


Figure 10. John Fisher's personal transition curve theory, the revised version in 2012. (www.businessballs.com)

John Fisher's personal transition curve shows the path of a person while coping with a major transition, and fragmenting in distinct stages and analyzing into details each of them (refer to Figure 10), as follows:

Anxiety - J. Fisher defines anxiety state as “the awareness that events lie outside one's range of understanding or control” and is caused because “individuals are unable to adequately picture the future”. Crucial element which impacts the person`s anxiety level is the beforehand information about the coming new; this shall allow them to anticipate preparation and build adequate expectations. Lack of information will make them feel unsure how to adequately construe acting in the new situations or surroundings. The depth of anxiety at start of the transition process will dictate how the person progress through the rest of the curve.

Happiness - J. Fisher defines state of happiness as “the awareness that one’s viewpoint is recognized and shared by others”. Fisher`s explains that “Whether the past is perceived positively or negatively, there is still a feeling of anticipation and possibly excitement at the possibility of improvement”. In this phase the expectations are built, and most of the time people expect the best and anticipate a bright future. This is a great mechanism to overcome anxiety, by giving oneself reasons to be optimistic about his future. Nevertheless, the downside of this mechanism is about building unrealistic expectations, by creating illusions about the coming future and setting high expectations about oneself. Fisher`s claims that “*If we can start interventions at this stage we can minimize the impact of the rest of the curve and virtually flatten the curve. By involving, informing, getting 'buy in' at this time we can help people move through the process*”.

Fear - J. Fisher defines state of fear as “the awareness of an imminent incidental change in one's core behavioral system”. At this state, people realize that they need to act in different manners which cause them slight changes in their normal interaction, which will change self-perception.

Threat - J. Fisher defines state of threat as “the awareness of an imminent comprehensive change in one's core behavioral structures”. Unlike fear state, in the threat state people do perceive a major change impacting significantly on their core identity or sense of self. People realize that this change demands a fundamental impact on: who they are, how they see themselves and what is key in their personality as individuals. This identity crises of suddenly discovering “you're not who you thought you were!” brings people into a **shock.** Their old core systems are no longer efficient. Fisher further explains that “in this phase, people are unsure as to how they will be able to act/react in what is, potentially, a totally new and alien environment - one where the 'old rules' no longer apply and there are no 'new' ones established yet.” According to Frances (1999) “Fear and Threat are the two key emotions that will cause us to resist change”.

Guilt - J. Fisher defines guilt as “an awareness of a dislodgement of our self from our core self-perception”. In this stage people start to make a detailed inventory of themselves by exploring their self-perception, identifying what their core beliefs are. Recognition of the inappropriateness of their previous actions, thoughts, and believes can cause guilt. Starting being self-critical with creates the feeling of disappointing ourselves, and feel ashamed of their old-self. This makes people begin to re-define their sense of self. The recognition of this dislodgement leads to the next stage.

Depression - J. Fisher defines depression as “the awareness that our past actions, behaviors and beliefs are incompatible with our core construct of our identity”. At this state, people`s perception of themselves at the present is not matching the perception of themselves in the past. Fisher explains that “this phase is characterized by a general lack of motivation and

confusion. Individuals are uncertain as to what the future holds and how they can fit into the future 'world”".

Gradual acceptance - At this state, people start to see 'a light at the end of the tunnel!'. This stage is characterized from the presence of some little victories, such as: better understanding of the new environment, thoughts and actions validation of one selves, increase of self-confidence. People start feeling like they finally are better managing the change and they start performing the right actions and behavior.

Moving forward - In this stage people gain more control over their life, increase self-confidence, making most of things right, feeling being on the right path, and getting their sense of self back. They feel confident to go on experimenting within the new environment more actively and effectively while embracing their new-self.

Disillusionment - J. Fisher defines disillusionment as “the awareness that your values, beliefs and goals are incompatible with those of the organization”. At this state people feel unmotivated, unfocused and increasingly dissatisfied, and probably surrender by leaving the new system / environment for good.

Hostility - J. Fisher defines hostility as “The continued effort to validate social predictions that have already proved to be a failure”. Individuals continue to operate on ways that have repeatedly failed to achieve a successful outcome at the new environment / situation; the new environment / situation are ignored at best and actively undermined at worst.

Denial - J. Fisher explains that “this stage is defined by a lack of acceptance of any change and denies that there will be any impact on the individual. People keep acting as if the change has not happened, using old practices and processes and ignoring evidence or information contrary to their belief systems.”

Anger - This is a consistent feeling all the way through the transition curve, mostly present in the very first stages when starting to recognize the wider implications of change. Its intensity depends on inner characteristics of the individual which define how much they feel to have the overall process under their control. Related to this consistent feeling, what changes is its focus; in the beginning the individual feels anger toward the surrounding, such as people, events, and situations, and with time this anger moves toward the individual himself, as he blames himself for not coping well and failing to manage the change. When the anger moves inward, the individual drives himself into the stages of “Guilt” and “Depression”.

Complacency - J. Fisher suggests in his model a final and initial stage called complacency which closes the transition process in a circle. This is the state where people feel into our 'comfort zone' which might be how they were before a change occurs or how they finally fall to be after a change. This state represents the balance state in between chaotic states caused by life changes.

Note: The above description of theory is found online in www.businessballs.com as an article; technical content of this article is written by John Fisher and published with his permission.

William Bridges` Managing Transitions Model (1991)

The change consultant William Bridges, has created The Transition Model, published on 1991 in his book titled "Managing Transitions", which explains that when people go through the road of change they experience three stages of transition: ending, losing, and letting go; the neutral zone; the new beginning. Bridges, W. and Bridges, S. (1991/2009, 3-8) say that each individual has a different pace of going through these stages, depending on their inner characteristics. Those stages are described as follows:

Stage 1 - Ending, Losing, and Letting Go
When people first meet the change, they immediately enter into this stage. However, this change is, people will have to let go something that they are comfortable with, that's why they are most likely resisting to the change. In order to start embracing the "new things" coming with the change, people have to accept that the "old things" in their life are ending. Some people are even likely to encounter resistance throughout the entire change process. At this stage, people may experience a big load of negative emotions, such as fear, denial, anger, sadness, disorientation, frustration, uncertainty, and a sense of loss.

Stage 2 - The Neutral Zone
People are in the corridor of moving from the old life to the new one. They are still attached to some extent to the old life and in the meantime adapting themselves in the new life. They for sure are quite overloaded in this stage as there are many new things to assimilate and adapt. Many negative emotions might emerge at this stage, such as confusion, low morale, uncertainty, anxiety, and skepticism regarding the change itself – whether it is a good thing to them or not.

Stage 3 - The New Beginning
This is the stage where people have crossed that corridor between the old and the new, and they have finally accepted the change. They get proactive by acquiring the necessary skills to cope successfully with the new environment and do things right. Some positive emotions will finally emerge in this stage, such as self-accomplishment, motivation, willingness to integrate, and satisfaction.

In Figure 11, adopted from Bridges, W. in 2009, actions for each trait during the transition are suggested to make the path of change less frustrating.

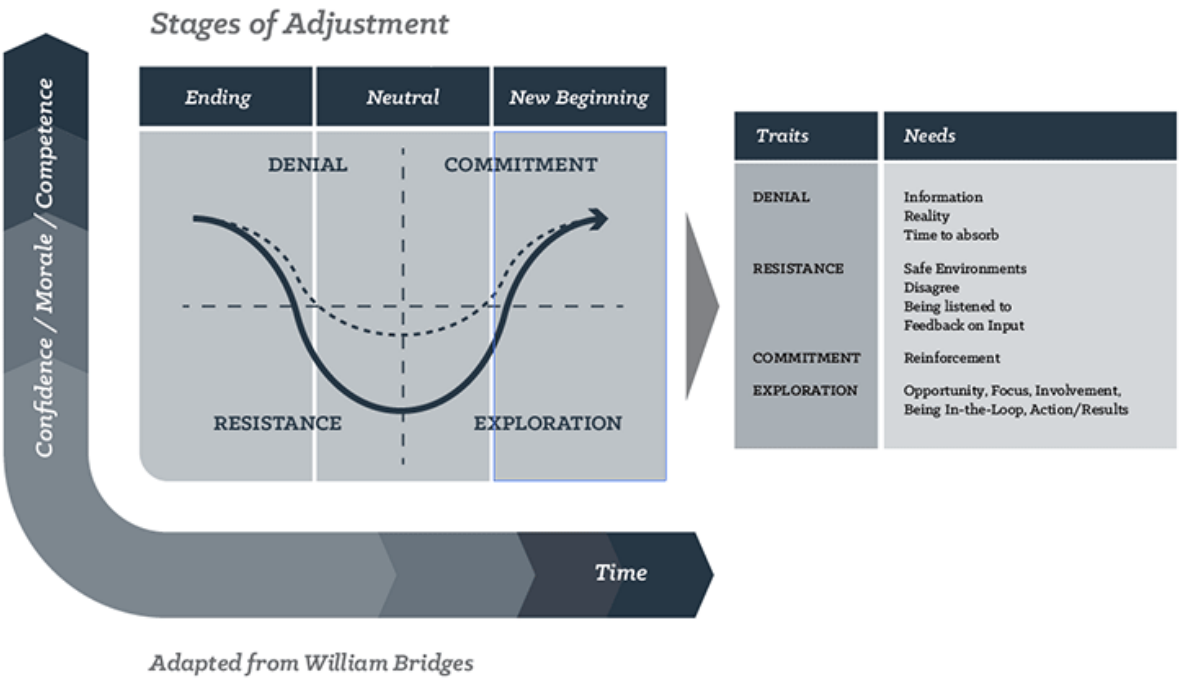


Figure 11. William Bridges` Managing Transitions Model, 2009. (Bridges 2009)

3.2.4 The Acculturation Theories

The acculturation theories explain that incomplete acculturation is the cause of many of the difficulties that foreigners face in emotional and psychological aspects, such as stress, inner problems of the individual, and family problems; this status is called *culture shock*. J. W. Powell`s Acculturation Concept (1883) and J. W. Berry`s Acculturation Model (1980), and J. Ward`s Acculturation Process (2001) are the acculturation theories supporting this study, as described in the following paragraphs.

J. W. Powell`s Acculturation Concept (1883)

The concept of acculturation was first introduced in 1883 by John Wesley Powell in a report for the US Bureau of Ethnology. He based this concept on his studies conducted in Numa tribe, which is one of the Indian tribes that occupied areas of California, Arizona, Utah, Oregon, and Nevada (illustrated in Figure 12). Powell later defined the term as the psychological changes that occur within a person due to cultural exchange that occurs as a result of extended contact between different cultures. Powell observed that, while they exchange cultural elements, each retains its own unique culture. (Fowler, Euler & Fowler 1969.)

Figure 12. John Wesley Powell and Southern Paiute Indians. Photograph by J. K. Hillers, 1873, from Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Collection. (Fowler, Euler & Fowler 1969.)

Through the acculturation process a person adopts certain values and practices of a culture that is not originally their own, to a greater or lesser extent. Mostly, the end result is that the original culture of the person or group remains but is changed by this process. When the process is at its most extreme, assimilation occurs wherein the original culture is wholly abandoned and the new culture adopted in its place. Other outcomes can occur as well, depending on the extent of the change. These possible outcomes include separation, integration, and marginalization.

Later, in the early twentieth century, acculturation became the focus of American sociologists who used ethnography to study the lives of immigrants and the extent to which they integrated into US society.

J. W. Berry`s Acculturation Model (1980)

In 1980, John W. Berry, a specialist in cross-cultural and acculturation / intercultural psychology, has defined (according to Ward et al. 2001/2005, 31-33.) acculturation as a "*phenomenon which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups*" and "*assimilation (adopts the receiving culture and discards the heritage culture), separation (rejects the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture), integration (adopts the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture), and*

marginalization (rejects both the heritage and receiving cultures)". Berry`s acculturation model is shown in Figure 13.

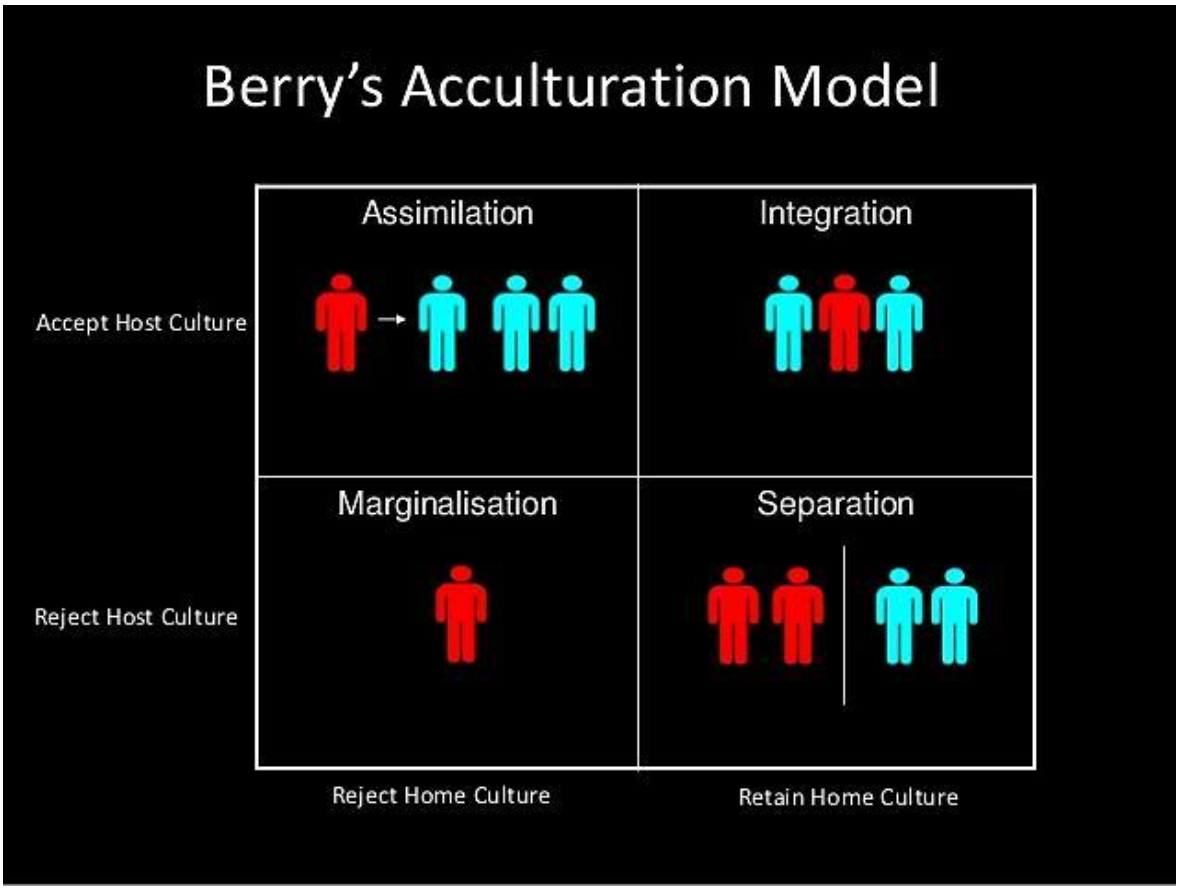


Figure 13. John W. Berry`s Acculturation Model, 1980. (www.nchsbands.info)

J. Ward`s Acculturation Process (2001)

In 2001, the English psychologist and philosopher James Ward and his colleagues S. Bochner and A. Furnham created an adapted model of the acculturation process, where the intercultural adaptation is divided into psychological adaption, and sociocultural adaptation. In Figure 14 this adapted acculturation model which shows the relation between the stress and coping framework which is represented by psychological adaption and the culture learning framework which is represented by sociocultural adaptation is shown. (Ward et al. 2001/2005, 42-46.)

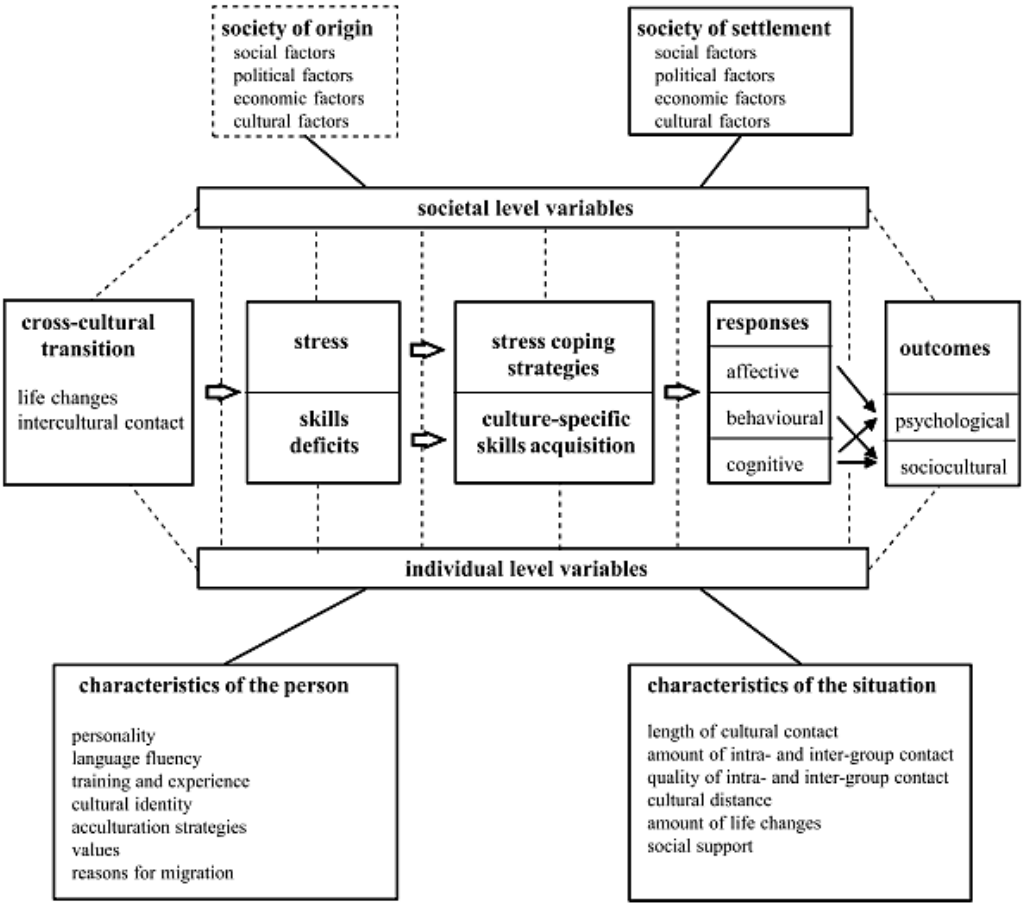


Figure 14. The acculturation process adapted from Ward, 1996. (Ward et al. 2001/2005, 44)

Whether people choose to or not, they will go through four stages of acculturation: elation, resistance, transformation, and integration. (Tsang-Feign 1993/2013, 10-12.)

1st stage - Elation (pathological euphoria)
Usually during the first several weeks in a new culture everything is fresh and new. A newcomer feels excited and elated. He gets in a state of euphoria. (Tsang-Feign 1993/2013, 10-12.)

2nd stage - Resistance
After several weeks, when the expat has to settle down to everyday life, the differences that thrilled him so far start to turn into annoyances. Frequent comparisons between home and the host country make everything back home seem so much better, causing homesickness. Some people refuse to adapt to the new culture, associating only with their own nationalities people (family and communities) and remaining aloof from the local population. (Tsang-Feign 1993/2013, 10-12.) This phenomenon at Berry`s Acculturation Model, is named Separation. Many expatriates remain in this stage until the day they move back home.

3rd stage - Transformation
After about nine months, the expat feels more familiar with the environment and begin to see the good side of the new culture. He gradually adopts the new ways of living. Often, this can go to the extreme by rejecting one's own culture. (Tsang-Feign 1993/2013, 10-12.) This phenomenon at Berry`s Acculturation Model, is named Assimilation. In particular the

people who see themselves staying permanently at the host country (for instance immigrants) may try to take on a totally new cultural identity. They refuse to speak their native language or associate with their own countrymen. They tend to view their own culture with a negative attitude and disdain its customs and traditions as backward or crude. Even expatriates, after months of adjustment they start to appreciate and embrace life overseas, no longer wanting to return to the *average, boring* lifestyle back home. They may put down people back home whom they see as naïve or narrow-minded. Many get stuck in this stage. They either stay in this particular expatriate society or move to another foreign country.

4th stage - Integration
According to Barry's Acculturation Model, the stage of Integration happens when the expat simultaneously retains home culture while accepting the host culture.

Many people remain stuck in the second or third stages, Resistance or Transformation, cutting themselves off from either their new world (Separation) or the one they came from (Assimilation) or both cultures (Marginalization). These *adjustments* are unbalanced, and lead to eventual frustration and unhappiness. Many of the difficulties and psychological complaints of foreigners in a new land, including stress and family problems, can be directly linked to incomplete acculturation, and this status is called *Culture Shock.* (Tsang-Feign 1993/2013, 10-12.)

3.2.5 The U-curve and W-curve Theories

The Sverre Lysgaard`s U-curve Theory (1955) and U-curve model adaption and alternations from other studies in the following decades bring rich input in this study about the culture shock phenomenon. The original model of U-curve theory, its adapted models, and the W-curve models are described in the following paragraphs.

Sverre Lysgaard`s U-curve Theory (1955)

The U-curve model for adjustment was first introduced by the Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lysgaard in 1955 in his book *A Study of Intercultural Contact: Norwegian Fulbright Grantees Visiting the United States* (Black & Mendenhall 1990/1991, 227-228). He based his empirical work on UCT (U-Curve Theory) by studying 198 Norwegian students who had been Fulbright scholars in the U.S. By grouping these students by the length of their stay in the host country, he stated an important pattern based on the findings: those students who had stayed in the U.S. six-eighteen months reported lower adjustment than those who had stayed less than six months or more than eighteen months. Furthermore, Lysgaard has described (according to Berardo & La Brack 2007, 6) the adjustment path as follows: "*Adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve: adjustment is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a 'crisis' in which one feels less well adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally, one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign community*". This model is shown in Figure 15.

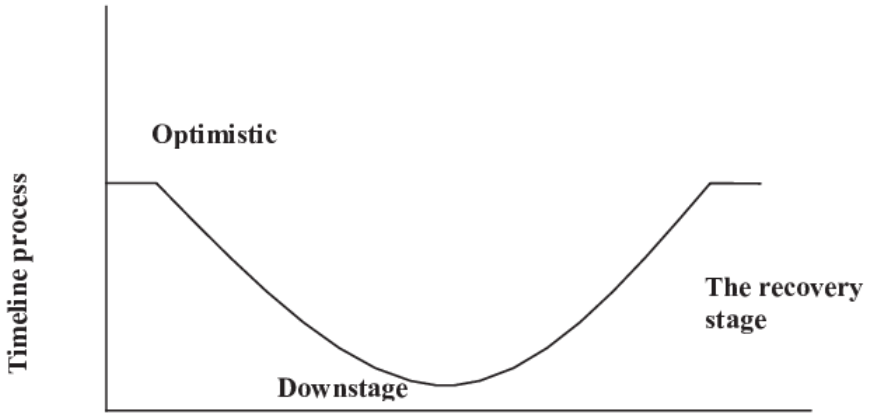


Figure 15. Lysgaard U-Curve model diagram, 1955. (Black & Mendenhall 1990/1991)

Other studies in the following decades have developed Lysgaard`s UCT (Oberg 1960; Chang 1973; Black & Mendenhall 1990/1991; Usunier 1998) and most of their descriptions of UCT include discussions of four stages (refer to Figure 16) based on the degree of adjustment of the expat in the host country: (1) Honeymoon, (2) Culture Shock, (3) Adjustment, (4) Mastery.

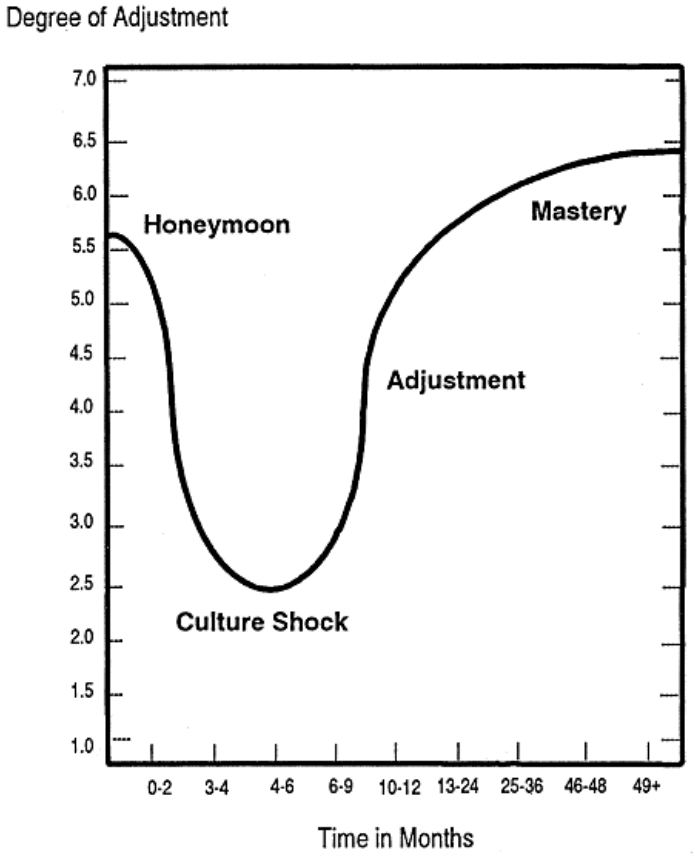


Figure 16. The U-Curve of Cross-Cultural Adjustment. (Black & Mendenhall 1990/1991)

In the initial Stage (*honeymoon stage*), individuals are fascinated by the new culture and are excited about all the new and interesting *sights and sounds*. This initial cultural infatuation is followed by a period of disillusionment and frustration (*disillusionment* or *culture shock stage*) as the individual must seriously cope with living in the new culture on a day-to-day basis. The third stage (*adjustment stage*) is characterized by gradual adaptation to the new culture and learning how to behave appropriately according to the

cultural norms of the host country. The fourth stage (*mastery stage*) is characterized by small incremental increases in the individual's ability to function effectively in the new culture.

The degree of adjustment is measured not by conformity to the host country culture but in terms of variables such as comfort or satisfaction with the new environment, attitudes, degree of contact with host nationals, or difficulties with aspects of the new environment Black and Mendenhall (1990/1991, 231) recites different studies which define adjustment in very different ways, such as a psychological mood (Golden1973; Klineberg & Hull 1979), favorableness of opinion about host nationals (Becker 1968; Chang 1973; Davis 1963; Greenblat 1971; Sewell & Davidsen1961), satisfaction (Deutsch & Won 1963; Klineberg & Hull 1979; Lysgaard 1955; Torbiorn 1982), attitudes (Heath1970; Morris 1960), degree of contact with host nationals (Hull 1978), comfort with the new environment (Ruben & Kealey 1979), and difficulties with various aspects of the new environment (Surdam & Collins 1984). Initially, difficulties of adjustment may be overridden by a cultural infatuation caused by the novelty of the environment. Culture shock sets in when coping with the new environment on a daily basis becomes necessary. The adjustment stage is marked by an increasing degree of satisfaction with being able to cope with the cultural norms of the host country. Increasing satisfaction may have nothing to do with following host country behaviors, is not about conformity, but rather, having a better knowledge of how to function effectively within the host country.

The U-curve Alternations

According to most U-curve models, the adaptation process goes through four stages as shown in Figure 17.

1. Honeymoon stage
2. Crisis stage (Culture Shock)
3. Recovery stage
4. Mastery stage

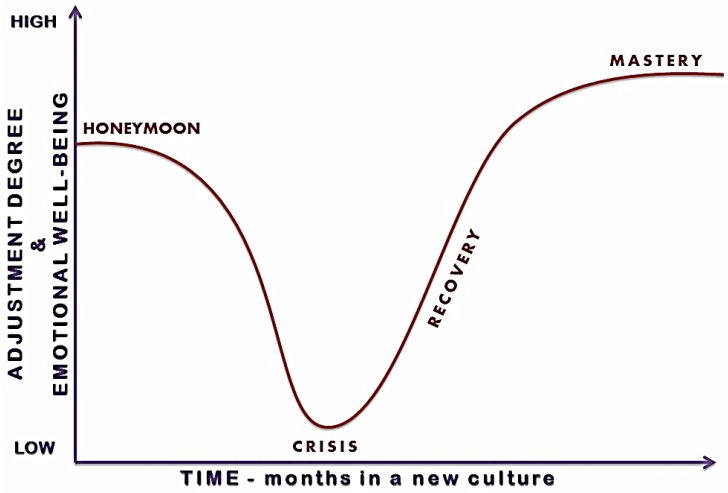


Figure 17. The U-Curve model of 4 stages.

Some other models add an initial stage named Preparation stage or Leaving stage, thus the adaptation process goes through five stages as shown in Figure 18.

1. Preparation / Leaving stage
2. Honeymoon stage
3. Crisis stage (Culture Shock)
4. Recovery stage
5. Mastery stage

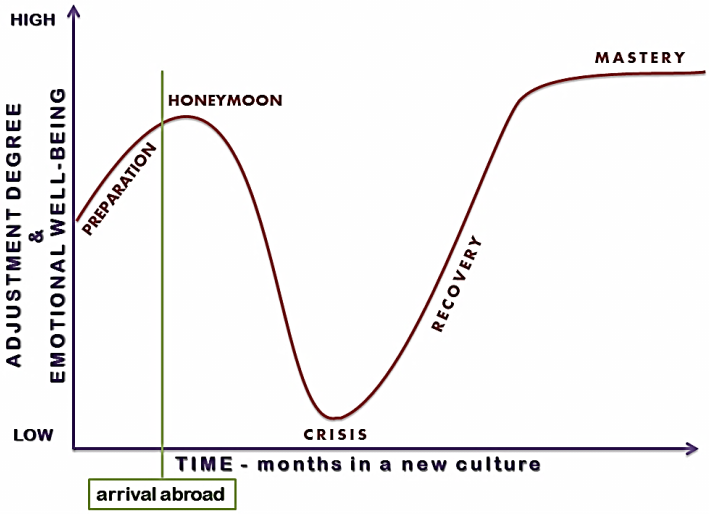


Figure 18. The U-Curve model of 5 stages.

Evolving a more detailed model, there are theories that suggest a very short period of *Recovery* in-between *Honeymoon and Crisis*. This is explained to happen as the Recovery stage is about to begin but the following *Crisis* stage will postpone it to a later stage. This is shown in Figure 19.

1. Preparation / Leaving stage
   →Recovery stage (short-term)
2. Honeymoon stage
3. Crisis stage (Culture Shock)
4. Recovery stage
5. Mastery stage

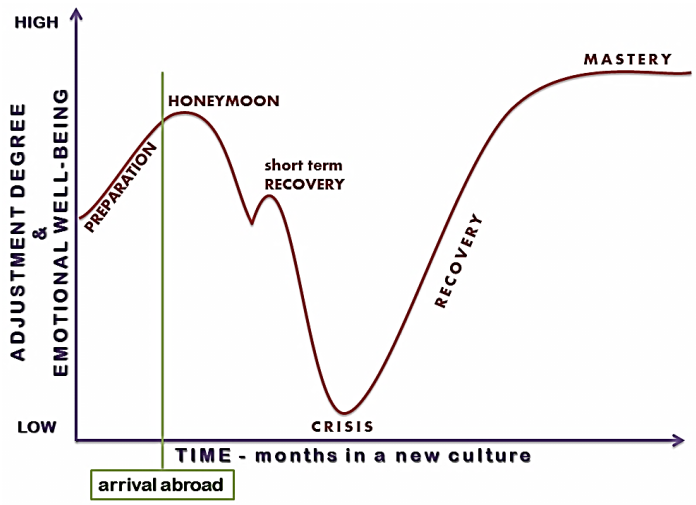


Figure 19. The U-Curve model of 5 stages including a short-term recovery.

Jeanne E., Gullahorn and John T. Gullahorn`s W-curve Theory (1963)

While one has been staying abroad, many changes have happened in different perspectives. The home country itself has changed, for instance its political situation, technology, or popular culture and trends. Also, the close circle of people around the expat, friends and family, are maybe not the same any more. After spending a long time abroad, in a different environment from the home country, also the expat had his personal transformation, even though family and friends expect to reunite with the same person. When repatriating, the expat most likely has to go through an adaption process similar to the one he experienced when he moved to the host country. The U-curve of the adjustment in the host country is followed by another U-curve of adjustment; this time is about adjustment in the home

country. This way, the cycle of entry and re-entry has a diagram in a W shape; the second U-curve represents the re-entry shock and readjustment, as shown in Figure 20.

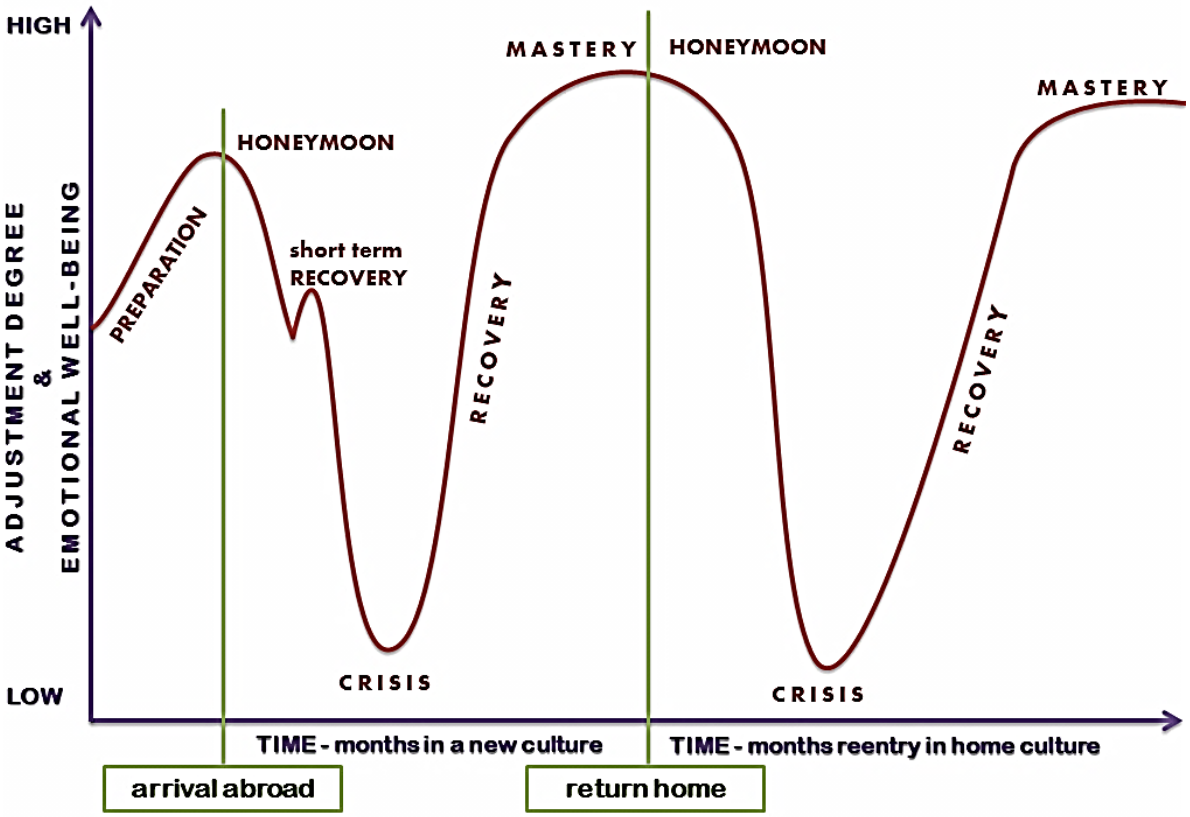


Figure 20. The W-Curve model of Repatriation.

In 1963, Jeanne E. Gullahorn and John T. Gullahorn has been (according to La Brack w.y., 1) the ones who expanded the U-curve into the W-curve, and published this model in their study titled An Extension of the U-Curve Hypothesis. In their model, they connect together the initial culture shock when the sojourner is entering in the host country and another experience of culture shock when he is reentering in the home country. This model suggests that right after returning home the expat will go through the same stages as when he entered in the host country: Honeymoon, Crisis, Recovery, and in the end Mastery. This readjustment might be even more difficult than the adjustment in the host country, and this due to being unprepared as the expat does not expect to suffer a culture shock in his home country. This re-entry shock is named Reverse Culture Shock.

3.2.6 Important Factors and Facts

The theories mentioned in the above sub-chapters provide the main knowledge about culture, shock, and culture shock. Moreover, these theories provide some other important outcomes about understanding better what impacts culture shock phenomenon, such as inner and outer key factors, the expat knowledge and awareness, and the individual differences.

Key Factors Influencing the Journey

As explained in the above paragraphs, all expats go differently through stages during their adjustment process abroad, some more quickly and more smoothly than others, but still experiencing all phases at one point of time. Some adjust faster and some not, and this depends on many internal (oneself) and external factors. For instance, having positive friends and doing activities can strengthen the expat`s self-efficacy and may accelerate the process. Past experience of relocation helps the expat in the coming relocation, being as a certain guidance to him, but still doesn`t avoid the transition process happening again.

According to different studies from different research of sojourners transition process (Church 1982; Mendenhall & Oddou 1985; Stening1979) there are some Individual variables that might affect adjustment, such as:

1. *Willingness to communicate*
2. *Willingness to establish relationships*
3. *Tolerance for ambiguity*
4. *Degree of ethnocentricity*
5. *Willingness to substitute reinforces*

Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) suggested that *Willingness to establish relationships* was an important and positive factor of adjustment. SLT provides a theoretical explanation of why this personal characteristic would be related to adjustment and how it might affect the pattern of adjustment. It seems reasonable to suppose that those who are more willing to establish relationships with host country nationals (HCNs) would as a consequence have more salient and available models of appropriate behavior in the new culture. Because repeated availability of models has a positive impact on the attention process, and because attention has a positive impact on retention and reproduction, this would explain theoretically the positive relationship between willingness to establish relationships and cross-cultural adjustment. Because the shift from culture shock to adjustment is a function of the individual's ability to learn and reproduce new behaviors (thereby reducing the anxiety associated with not knowing how to behave appropriately) willingness to establish relationships with HCNs would also be expected to shorten the time it takes to reach the adjustment stage. Thus, the U-curve pattern of adjustment for an individual with a high willingness to establish relationships will HCNs would be more "compacted" than a pattern of adjustment for an individual with a low willingness to establish relationships with HCNs. However, the willingness to establish relationships is not always enough to establish relationships, because knowing the where and how to reach other people plays and important role as well.

A high degree of *Ethnocentricity* has been consistently found to have a negative effect on cross-cultural experiences. Ethnocentricity is essentially the belief that one's own culture is superior to others. SLT (Social Learning Theory) again provides a theoretical explanation. Ethnocentric individuals would also be relatively unmotivated to attend to, retain, or reproduce new behaviors considered appropriate in the host culture but which were different (and therefore inferior) to those of the individual's home culture. This lack of learning and reproducing new and appropriate behaviors would likely lead to a more severe culture shock and a slower advancement to the adjustment stage.

An even more important individual difference from a SLT perspective is *Self-efficacy*. Self-efficacy is the degree to which individuals believe they can successfully execute expected behaviors. This belief leads individuals to persist at imitating new behaviors

longer as well as to being more willing to try to imitate new behaviors. Consequently, individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy will be more willing to learn new behaviors in the host country than individuals with lower levels of self-efficacy. Also, individuals with high levels of self-efficacy would likely be more willing to experiment and try to imitate new behaviors. The more likely these individuals would be to exhibit appropriate new behaviors and receive positive reinforcement. Even if the new behaviors attempted were not reproduced exactly right, individuals with high levels of self-efficacy would be likely to persist at learning those behaviors longer than individuals with low self-efficacy. The longer they persist at imitating the new behaviors, the more corrective feedback they receive, and the greater the chance for taking corrective actions that result in eventually exhibiting appropriate behavior. The lower the initial level of self-efficacy, the greater the chance that the individual will (1) not persist at trying to reproduce the new behaviors, (2) experience a more severe culture shock, or (3) give-up and return home during the culture shock stage.

Through life we learn from our experiences, and are those previous experiences which enable us manage the similar current situations better. Expatriating previous experiences play the same role when the expat moves to another host country. These previous expatriating experiences get more useful if the host countries` background is similar and even more if the expat has been before in the same host country. Anne-Marie Masgoret found in her study in 2002 a strong correlation between the background experiences with the host community, especially about its language and culture, and the degree of sociocultural adaptation. Those previous cross-cultural experiences abroad do facilitate the sociocultural adaptation, because expats can apply the generic skills learned in the new cultural situations. (Masgoret & Ward 2006, 70.)

Studies reveal another key factor which can make the transition process less severe, the social support, as they show an increased psychological well-being on people when it is provided to them. Social support is the assistance that people receive from others and it can be in various ways. The main types of social support are *emotional support* (by providing love, care, motivation, therapy), *instrumental support* (by providing tangible help such as childcare, money) and *informational support* (by providing information). Thus, when social support is provided to the sojourner, the risk for depression and psychological distress is expected to be lower. (Seeman 2008, 1-4.)

Importance of Being Aware – Awareness is Half of the Cure

The principle “awareness is half the cure” stands for having a better control of your action if you already know their results, thus it is easier to avoid undesirable outcomes. If the expat is aware of the negative outcomes of his old behaviors, then he is less likely to exhibit those behaviors. He is more likely paying more attention and observe more carefully for finding out the correct new behaviors for substituting the old ones. Being aware of the expatriating process will help the expat discover in advance, prevent and avoid the challenges and negative outcomes in his expat life. Being aware in advance will shorten the stage of unknown-the-unknown (refer to sub-chapter 3.2.2).

Another notion which supports the above arguments is: “Anticipatory Adjustment as a Moderating Variable”. The essence of this notion is that the expat through vicarious learning (preparation before landing in the host country) can make anticipatory adjustments to the new culture before they ever experience it. For example, if an expat made few anticipatory adjustments, a short-lasting and low amplitude U-curve pattern of

adjustment might be more likely to emerge. For instance, this might lead to less initial euphoria because of more realistic expectations and anticipatory behavioral adaptations. Thus, anticipatory adjustments may reduce significantly the initial euphoria or honeymoon stage altogether (or even eliminate this stage), which would result in an upward-sloping, almost linear pattern of adjustment. (Black & Mendenhall 1990/1991, 241-242.)

Increased awareness also supports a better integration. Deep and fast acknowledgement of the new culture will enable the expatriate to better integrate the two cultures, old and new cultures, and dare to be who he really is: a special individual who is truly cross-cultured. And this is the healthier way to live abroad.

Same – Same but Different [(1)]

The U-curve model suggests a linear movement through all the transition process stage, but it is important to understand that everyone moves through them at his own pace and in a random order. The timeframe of going through these series of phases takes two or, if the cultural differences are big, more than five years. Acculturation is the most suffering stage where the expat experiences the culture shock, and it can last from six to nine months, or for some expats, even one year and a half. Each stage lasts for a different time period, and it is possible that the expat gets stuck in one particular stage and need help to move on from there. Not every expat necessarily goes through all the stages, sometimes he may return back to a previous stage and might even experience them in several life aspects (private life, partnership, parenting, job, health etc.).

According to the acculturation process theory of Ward et al. (2001/2005, 72), within the same host society, expats experience a different transition process depending on their society of origin, personal characteristics and characteristics of the situation. Also, SLT determines which individual variables might impact adjustment, as well as the relative strength of impact certain individual variables would have on adjustment. For instance, the individual differences would cause the amplitude of the stages to be different and would also cause these stages to occur at different points in time.

---

1. “Same-same but different” is used a lot in Thailand, especially in an attempt to sell something but can mean just about anything depending on what the user is trying to achieve. (http://www.urbandictionary.com)

3.3 Albania as a Host Country

Albania was a closed-border and isolated country for many years during the communist system. Since 1992 when the system changed, the borders opened for the residents to go abroad and for the foreigners to enter the country. However, due to the transition period and political instability, it took several years till foreign investors started to show interest and willingness to invest in Albania. Previously, all the resources and industry belonged to the communist government. The new government strategy was to change this model by looking for shareholders in the private sector. Even if it is a very small country, Albania is

rich in natural resources such as gas, petroleum, hydro power, mining, cement, just to mention a few. Its pleasant Mediterranean climate, the beautiful nature, the very long coast shared among two different seas, and the geographical location promotes a high potential for tourism, port/harbors service and cross-Europe infrastructure to be used for several purposes.

Albania`s potentials of growth and opportunities are mentioned in The World Bank country overview as follows:

> "After Albania emerged from 50 years of communist rule, the transition from a centrally planned to a market-oriented economy, together with abundant international aid and other strategic assistance, helped Albania to make progress. The country's economic transformation continues to build on its huge potential and opportunities". (World Bank Group 2016, 1)

Currently, there are many foreign investors who are operating in Albania and beside managers and specialist job positions, there are many foreigners in other job positions employed by foreigners and local businesses.

During several years there has been an increase of multinational companies operating in Albania by opening their own subsidiaries or by partnership with local companies. There are also important private and public international projects which brings expatriates to Albania for their expertise, like for example the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) international gas project. Besides, as explained by Tan and Mahoney (2006, 468): "*firms with greater prior local experience are likely to have developed some local capabilities. Hence these firms are likely to rely less on host country nationals and may utilize more expatriates*", there is presence of interest from local companies for demanding expatriates to come and work in Albania. There are also foreign universities located in Albania which are hosting foreign students beside the local students. Among the jobs and studies, other foreigners choose to live in Albania for personal reasons (for instance, getting married with a local). To sum up, the foreigners' community in Albania has noticeably evolved in the last few years and there is a high potential of growing fast in the near future.

In developed countries, the institutional structure, the procedures flow and protocols are well established, consistent and efficient. The needed information about the country rules and ways to operate are reliable, accessible, and easily understandable. These countries are used to have foreigners' communities. Thus, they have already created and implemented in their overall structure, procedures and facilitators for a smooth start and integration of these communities into their host country. Most research about expatriating concludes that failure rates are high, from 20% to 50%, and depending on the host country characteristics; emerging countries contain higher risk of expatriating failure than so called advanced nations Mills (2013, 166). So, the expatriating experience and its tendency of failure is different in each host country and there are two parameters involved in making the main difference. The first is about which countries-group the host country belong, in the developed countries-group or emerging & developing countries-group. The second is about the gap between the expat`s home country and expat`s host country. If the expat`s home country belongs to the developed countries-group expatriating him to a host country which belongs to the emerging & developing countries-group, will expose him to a high risk of expatriating failure. If the expat`s home country and host country belong to the same country-group, then this risk will be less due to more similarities between the countries.

Albania still belongs to the emerging and developing countries group, as stated from the latest special reports of Regional Economic Issues from the International Monetary Fund

(International Monetary Fund 2015, 7). Albania still has a unique environment due to isolation from other countries during the post-communist history. This means that it exists a considerable gap in the Albania resemblance with other countries. All these facts define Albania as a host country where expatriating has a considerable risk of failure. Although this is not good news for expats assigned to move to Albania, the good news is that if expats survive the culture shock then they might define Albania as an exotic country worthy to experience, as illustrated in Figures 21 and 22.

Figure 21. Ksamil Beach in Saranda, Albania.

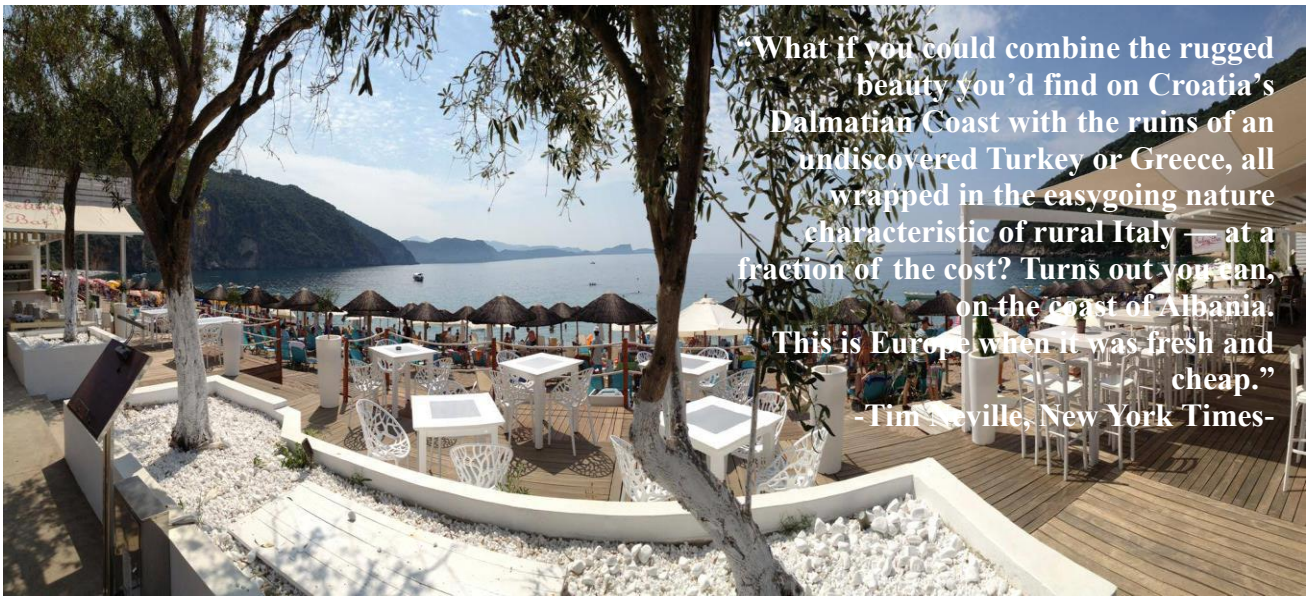


Figure 22. Resort in Drimades - Dhermi, Albania.

3.4 Conclusions

The cross-cultural adjustment research literature has largely been conducted from a theoretical perspective. When a theoretical framework is imposed, the U-Curve adjustment theory has been the one most commonly used. Nowadays, the U-curve and the W-curve models are commonly used to explain the expat transition process and the phenomenon of Culture Shock and Reverse Culture Shock from psychologists, therapists, life coaches, international websites and magazines. Eventually, several alternations of the U-curve or the W-curve can be emerged depending on many inner factors (the personal characteristic of the expat) and outer factors (i.e. the characteristics of the host country).

At a certain point in life, major transitions happen to everyone by their choice or not. This transition occurs due to changes, such as change of one`s status (marriage/divorce, becoming a parent, retiring) or transferring one`s life to a new location with different surrounding (moving to a new city or a new country), and any change may generate conflict between the person`s existing values and beliefs and anticipated altered. People usually are not comfortable with changes and they resist and oppose. The real problem emerging from a change is the person`s transition involved with change. While change is something external that happens to people, no matter if they welcome it or not, transition, on the other hand, is internal: it's what happens in people's minds as they go through change. Change can happen very quickly, while transition usually occurs more slowly. (Bridges 2006.) Life transitions are events that impact one`s self by transforming to adjust to the new. This adjustment requires a breakup with the old self, leaving the current version of oneself to be replaced by a new one. Breaking up with oneself is hard, yet necessary in order to cope with the new status or surrounding. In life transitions, people break up with who they were so far before the transitions happened, thus they go through an identity crisis during this transition process.

Acculturation is a term that describes the process of cultural and psychological change that results following a meeting of cultures, which for expats involves moving to a new country. The decision to move to another country involves several simultaneous changes. Soon after physically moving to the new home, the expat realizes that the heart also needs to follow in this transition. This is the start of the acculturation process which refers to the process of intercultural adaptation. Acculturation is the transition into learning and internalizing new behaviors, values, customs, and language. In this process, the expat needs to adjust and develop new roots.

When change is interpreted as a threat, experiencing acculturative stress is likely. The stress occurring during the acculturation process, or the acculturative stress, is what is known as the culture shock. Culture shock, or acculturative stress, refers to the psychological, somatic, and social difficulties that may accompany acculturation processes, often manifested in anxiety, depression and other forms of mental and physical maladaptation. Contributing factors include food, homesickness, social isolation, language barriers, customs, weather, transportation, services available and the treatment of foreigners. Expat mental and physical health is under continuous stressors as many external factors that affect them are new and unfamiliar and the coping skills that helped in their home country may not work in the new country. The expat will experience a sudden loss of control that results from the culture shock and this will make him feel helpless.

The next stage of acculturation is the assimilation of the host country`s ideas, traditions, and beliefs into expats own previously developed belief system. To do this, the expat might let go some of own ways of thinking, culture background and beliefs. Once the expat is

willing to accept the change, he can start to adapt to the new culture and begin to feel comfortable with his newly found identity. When the expat has successfully integrated, he feels equal to others and finds his place in the host country society. This is the moment when the expat will start to develop new roots. Assimilation and integration are important phases for most expats, but the process differs in severity and duration for different people. Eventual integration into the culture is difficult when you do not know the language, are not familiar with the culture, or do not have a strong local social network.

Going through cross- cultural adjustment, the expat discovers that past behaviors and associated consequences are no longer appropriate in the host country. The more different the host culture is with the home culture, than the more different specific behaviors he will face in the host country. The more these cultures difference the higher the risk that the expat might behave in an inappropriate way. It takes time for the expat to realize that negative feedback / outcome of his inappropriate behavior, and to correct himself by adjusting his behavior. It takes time for these negative consequences to become sufficient for the expat to realize, recognize and accept them and feel the need to act differently. The expat initially goes through a honeymoon stage because there is a short time after arrival in the host country where expats fail to recognize these negative outcomes and feedbacks. After this short time, the number of negative outcomes and feedback will increase and their repetition will make the expat recognize a difference between his behaviors, considered inappropriate, and expected behaviors, considered appropriate in the host country. The expat in this time realizes that he is exhibiting inappropriate behaviors but he yet does not know how to correct them. The observation of these negative events and his inability to adjust his behavior right away is causing him pressure, stress, negative emotions. He is experiencing a culture shock. Facilitators such as availability of models in relation to specific situations may decrease the ratio of negative consequences and accelerate learning of new appropriate behaviors. Thus, these facilitating conditions which give access to host culture behavior models will make the expat experience less at a culture shock. It takes time for the expat to be enough exposed in repeated availability of modeled behaviors in order to become familiar with these models, and to increase attention and retention. As a consequence, the expat will obtain the ability to reproduce the appropriate behaviors which will decrease the negative outcomes / feedbacks and eventually will make the expat feel and be more adjusted in the host culture. All this needed time is the adjustment stage of the transition process.

The degree of adjustment is measured in terms of variables such as comfort or satisfaction with the new environment, attitudes, degree of contact with host nationals, or difficulties with aspects to the new environment. The adjustment stage length of time is not strongly associated with the degree of adjustment to the culture. When the need for learning and adaptation is decreased, it means that the expat has entered the mastery stage. (Black & Mendhall 1990, 231.)

Research on cross-cultural adjustment has been focused more towards factors that influence cross-cultural adjustment, rather than towards theoretically explaining the adjustment process and why certain factors would be expected to influence adjustment. The "U-Curve Theory" of adjustment (UCT) has been one of the most consistently used model to explain the adjustment process and its influencing factors.

The U-curve framework initiated by Lysgaard (1955) has been widely used to describe the cross-cultural adjustment process of expatriate employees or sojourners within a host culture. The U-curve represents both the events timeline and the experience journey of an expatriate during adjustment to a host country`s culture, as it describes the emotional

adjustment process of cross-cultural sojourns over time. It shows a journey which starts with a honeymoon stage, followed by culture shock and a process of improvement or adjustment to the host culture, culminating in a mastery stage. The “U” shape shows the expat`s emotional well-being which begins with a positive state, then drops to a negative state, and returns again to a positive state.

The U curve framework is a description of a process rather than a theory. The U curve model alone does not explain what might cause transition from one phase to the next. The several theories explored during the literature review in this study, complete the U-curve framework for a thorough understanding of the expat transition process. For instance, Black and Mendenhall (1990/1991, 245) say that adjusting to a new culture is similar to a learning process thus SLT helps explain the U curve. SLT explains that an individual's learning and behavior is based on their observations and repeated imitation of other people's modeled behavior. When the expat arrives at the host country, he starts to observe in its people`s behaviors. His attention to observe, retention in the memory, and ability to reproduce these behaviors depends on motivation and conditions. The right incentives will give motivation. Facilitators which enable him to observe by giving him access to host country behaviors will create the right conditions for him.

From the SLT perspective, when the expat arrives in the host country (the honeymoon stage) he tends to pay attention to those elements which are similar to his home culture, and he notice only those differences which are very visible. The similarity or dissimilarity between the home culture and the host culture is a crucial factor in the acculturation process (Masgoret & Ward 2006, 62-67). Intensity of dissimilarity will increase the frequency of new / unknown situations for the expat which will lead to increased probability for him to perform inappropriate behaviors (unknown the unknown). These inappropriate behaviors will happen increasingly as the time goes by in the host country and produce more and more negative consequences such as blame, shame and failure, and make him suffer the culture shock. The greater the dissimilarity of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors between the two cultures, the more difficult it will be for the expat to exhibit appropriate behaviors; even with the correct attention / observation and retention, the reproduction might fail. This in turn would contribute to a lower motivation to be in this new culture. This will cause greater culture shock, lasting longer and being more severe. This is how the expat is leaving the honeymoon stage and entering the crisis stage. As the expat encounters more positive outcomes and fewer negative outcomes, the pressure of negative feelings will decrease and satisfaction will increase. The acculturation process is in progress and the expat has entered the adjustment stage. When the adjustment is complete or additional needed adjustment is not significant or necessary, the expat has entered the mastery stage. In this stage, the expat knows-the-knows, has embraced his new self, the new behaviors have become old and feel as a second nature, and the acculturation process is considered completed.

4 Empirical Research

This part of the study is about conducting fieldwork research aiming to know the service customers and their needs. In order to design a good service for the customers, first it is necessary to know well who the customer is. It is important to detect the right customers, including also potential future customers, and to make sure that no customer segment is

left unrecognized. In the coming sub-chapters, the research process of the study conducted is described to well detect and well define the customers ‘segments of this service proposition.

4.1 Face-to-Face Interviews

Face-to-face interviews was the first method of the primary research which was conducted in this research process. The purpose of using this method, its characteristics and its sequence in the process, was about accomplishing inspirational research. The objective of these interviews was listening about expats` life experiences while moving to Albania. Interviews were conducted as unstructured interviews similar to a directed storytelling, by using guiding questions during the conversation. The target of interviews was small groups compounded of two or three participants. The interviews where documented by writing notes.

Defining the Service Users

In the end, no matter of sojourning context variations, no one is immune to the adjustment and stress that come with moving abroad. It really doesn’t matter if you arrived in the host country as a student or as an employee, all alone or with family, because the transition process will have almost the same challenges. There are several common challenges that everyone has to deal with, such as overcoming the culture shock, struggling to integrate in the new environment, finding logistics and social solutions, finding ways to communicate and deal with different languages, learning about different cultures and kinds of people, and adapting with different values and norms.

Based on the insights of the literature review, it is noticeable a common ground in the fact that all sojourners, no matter of the relocation reasons, face the challenges of finding their identity in a place that is different from where they grew up. This common challenge is mostly about learning a new language and creating a support system away from home. Thus, the term *expat* which seems to belong more to those who are sojourning in a corporate context, actually can be addressed to all the people moving to a host country. They all will experience the expatriating journey, more or less the same. In that perspective, this study brings a definition for its service customers as follows.

The customers of this service are those people who have left their home country, either by choice or necessity, in order to temporarily or permanently experience life in another country and culture, and who strive to proactively take the steps to make the very most of this exciting, memorable, and inevitably challenging life change.

Defining Customers` Segments

The interviews were made possible by participating at customers` gathering, events of expat community in Tirana organized by InternaNations organization. Expats attend these events to get to know new people, other expats and also locals, to meet people they already know from this network, and above all have a good time. In order to follow a participative approach, as one of the underlying goals of this study research work, I became a member

of this expat community site, as shown in Figure 23. Being a member, I was able to attend the events organized for the expats in Tirana. For the research work that means conducting the interviews at the right time in the right place. I had a previous experience of being part of this network in Switzerland (InterNations community in Zug-Switzerland) during my own expat life. Thus, I was familiar with the people that might attend these events (usually a mix of expats and locals) and about the event context itself. This past experience helped me being well prepared about what to expect from these events. The benefit was of having the correct approach and being efficient during the research process.

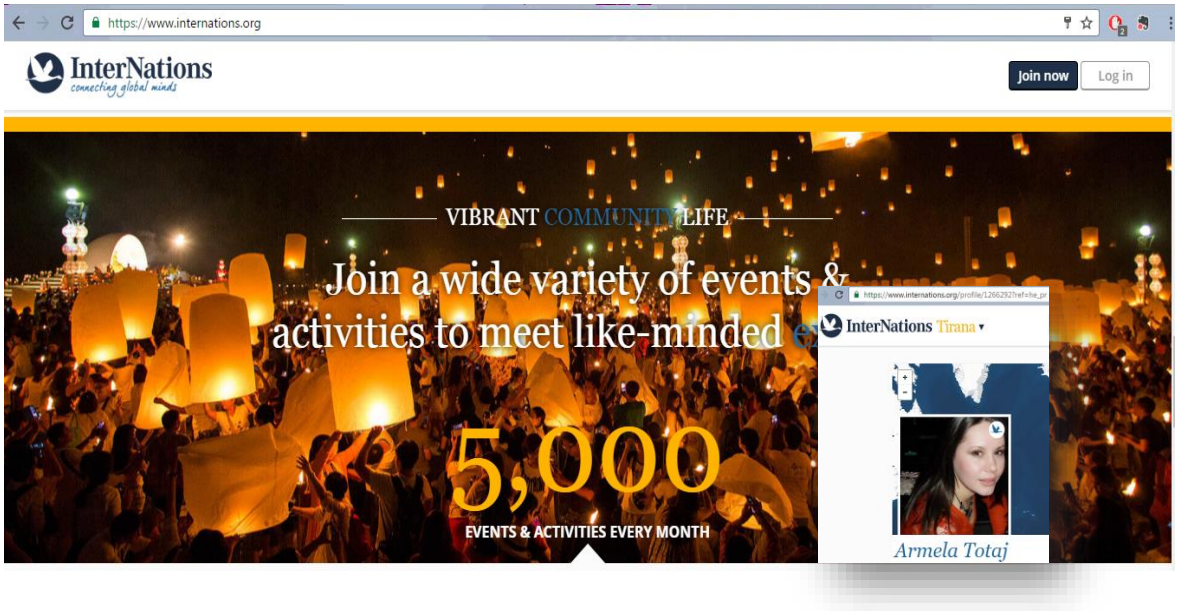


Figure 23. Becoming a member of InterNations expat community in Tirana – Albania, January 2017. (www.internations.org)

The research through interviews was performed during two events. The first event was held on 20 December 2016 with 63 attending members from 17 countries, and the second event on 19 January 2017 with 86 attendees from 25 countries. The attendees were not only foreigners but also locals.

The aim during the interviews was to create a relaxed atmosphere and make it feel as a casual conversation, not as an interrogation. This approach was necessary to make the interviewees comfortable. These conversations started first by introducing myself and my study, and the purpose of my conversation with them. Talking about my own experience as an expat, being the first to share personal information with them, was intended to make them feel confident to share their own personal stories and feelings. Then, there were questions addressed to them about who they are, where they come from, the purpose of coming to Albania, time span of living in Albania, and other questions aiming to know more about their experience of moving to Albania. The interview responses were registered by keeping notes possibly at the end of the interviews (taking time between each interviewed group) for not interfering / interrupting the conversations.

In overall, the flow of the interviews was as a conversation; not only by making questions but also sharing my own stories and replying to their questions as well. The discussions turned out to be very interesting, entertaining and empathic. These interviews gave important inspirational information to this study, by directly hearing from the expats about

their challenges, perceptions and feelings which accompanied them in this particular life change: moving to Albania. A vast diversity of nationalities participated in this research. Expatriates belonged to diverse countries like Indonesia, Macedonia, South Africa, Mexico, France and Turkey, to name just a few.

In addition, the interviews with the local people attending these events gave an important insight. Most of them were repatriates, Albanian people who had lived for a long time abroad and returned to live in their home country, and who were facing challenges to re-integrate. According to statistics, Albania is a country with high emigration, and the last decade the number of returnees has increased (INSTAT 2017, 3). Based on the knowledge extracted from the literature review, relocation to the home country might be as the shocking as relocation to a host country, and sometimes even more. The returnees suffer the same transition process after arrival in their home country, and they suffer the same culture shock which in this case is called reverse culture shock. Thus, these Albanian returnees are considered a potential customer segment for this service.

Other insights emerged during these interviews were useful to the service design process. Interviewing expats who have for a long time been in Albania (more than 2 years) was not as resourceful as interviewing new comers. This because of two reasons, first their memories of their transition process were foggy (they had forgotten the challenges and the emotional impact), and second the country is changing rapidly thus the surrounding at the time of their transition process in the past is different from the surrounding in the present. Especially, the host country systems and services are not the same. Thus, in order to gather information which is reliable and up to date, was better to focus on those customers who have been in Albania for less than 2 years, and this approach was applied with the test-users during the design stage of the service, as described in sub-chapter 7.3. Furthermore, some of the interviewed expats who had moved to Albania as hired employee had a lot of support from the hiring company. Thus, this segment of customers is not the right one to provide complete information about expats` challenges in Albania. The customer segment which had to go through all the challenges and a complete transition process in Albania is the right segment for providing sound results in the service design process; expats who had no initial support and had to start their life in Albania by themselves.

4.2 Online Ethnography

An additional method of primary research performed in this study was the online ethnography conducted over the Facebook page *Expats in Albania*. The online ethnography research was very helpful to gain a deep understanding of actual issues that expats are struggling with. In order to follow a participative approach, as one of the underlying goals of this study research work, I became a member of this expat community site, as shown in Figure 24.

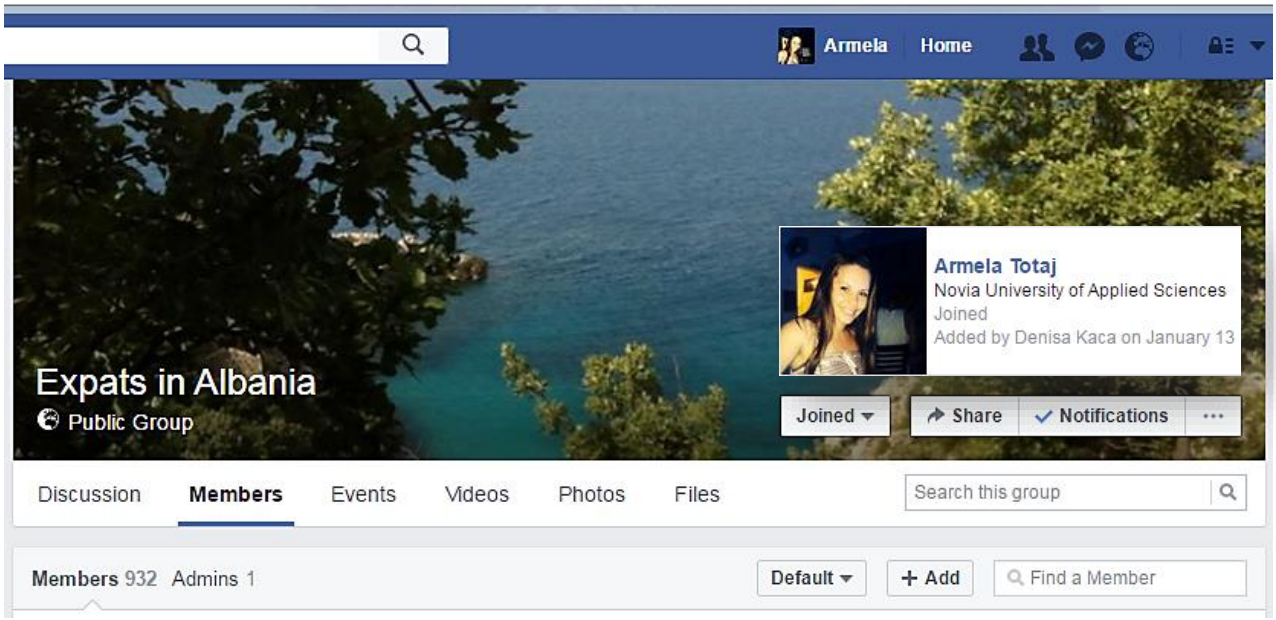


Figure 24. Becoming a member of "Expats in Albania", an expat public group in Facebook, January 2017. (www. facebook.com)

This research consisted at a careful and empathic reading of all the posts written from expat-members in the *Discussion* section of this Facebook page. The research was performed over discussions posted through a time span of 10 months, from February till November, 2017. These posts were mainly questions that an expat-member was addressing to other members (expats and locals) regarding different matters and needed information related to their host-country, Albania. While reading those posts, for each relevant post a key word was defined which represented the disclosed issue or need. These key words were registered in an excel spreadsheet and beside each of them a number to accumulate their frequency of appearance in the posts was recorded. At the end of the research, the obtained results were a wide number of registered key words with different frequencies. The database of these key words was too large for creating a clear word cloud, thus it was necessary to narrow them down. To achieve that, similar key words were arranged within a word group and a general key word was created to represent the group. This way, the gathered results were narrowed into the word-cloud database which was used to create the word-cloud. This final affinity diagramming results are shown in Appendix I. WordItOut (www.worditout.com) was the tool used for creating the word-cloud, which is a very helpful tool for generating word-clouds from data included in a spreadsheet. Through this tool, by using the spreadsheet data obtained from the research, it was generated a visual analysis of this database, as shown in Figure 25.

Figure 25. Word Cloud of insights gathered from online ethnography conducted in "Expats in Albania" Facebook public group. (generated from www.worditout.com)

This word-cloud represents an attractive arrangement of the key words gathered from the research, by displaying randomly positioned words where the most important words are bigger than the others. The size of a word shows how important it is e.g. how often it has appeared in the posts form expats — its frequency. As shown in the word cloud in Figure 25, most posts were related to networking (i.e. asking for expat gatherings and events). Housing was the other most common topic. Also asking for information about how to find a job, a cleaning-lady, a good health insurance, and several shops, were very frequent posts. Besides, many post were related to expats with children and there was a wide variety of asked information related to children`s health, education, leisure and networking.

4.3 Online Questionnaire

Online questionnaire was the final method of primary research which was conducted in this study research process. The purpose of using this method, its characteristics and sequence in the process, were about accomplishing exploratory and generative research. A special focus was given to the questionnaire design because its aim was to provide more structured and detailed data. The used tool for questionnaire design was the online tool named KwikSurveys and the distribution channel was Facebook. In order to reach the target group directly, the expats in Albania, the participative approach was used by being a member of Tirana expat community in Facebook, named *Expats in Albania* (refer to sub-chapter 2.1).

The goal of this questionnaire was to learn from expats themselves how challenging the process of adjustment when living in Albania is, to find out about expatriates' reactions about culture shock and the adaptation process.

The target group was every expat in Albania no matter for the reason of their arrival.

The objective of the questionnaire was to measure the transition process for expats in Albania, regarding how difficult this process can be, and to understand the main issues.

The design of this questionnaire was based on outcomes from previous research in this study, such as literature review, interviews, and online ethnography. The main purpose while designing the questionnaire was to cover all the aspects of the problem in order to get useful information for making a complete analysis about the service proposition, discovering if its existence will be needed. Another target followed while designing the questionnaire was about addressing it to every expat in Albania, with no distinguish of their sojourning reasons. The focus was on their personal experiences, their challenges and feelings, regardless their sojourner status in Albania (i.e. student, employee, entrepreneur, expat-spouse, etc.). The questions are often showing a pessimistic approach regarding the host country and the expat experience, and this characteristic of the questionnaire was also noticed and commented from some respondents. The reason for designing the questionnaire in such a quotation was about satisfying its goal with reference to the study aim: discovering and measuring the negative aspects of expatriating in Albania and the lack of supporting services. The questionnaire was designed to discover if there is a meaningful prolongation of adaption process, a severe transition process, a considerable experienced culture shock, a real lack of supporting services, and a gap which is needed to be filled with the ALinAL service proposition. The questions were designed to be easy to understand for everyone and the anonymity of the questionnaire was also an important element. The design aimed to have only crucial questions in order to avoid a very long questionnaire (with many questions), which could have made respondents lazy to finalize it. Furthermore, the creation of introductory texts about the questionnaire itself had a special focus in the questionnaire design. One of these introductory texts was included in the very beginning of the questionnaire, before the questions were displayed, and it describes the scope of the questionnaire. The other introductory text was included in the email text sent to each expat member of *Expats in Albania* Facebook page. These texts are shown in Appendix II. Both these introductory texts were thought to be critical elements for motivating the target group to provide their feedback. The used incentive was about making them feel that their input might help improving things for them but also for other expats. They were motivated to feel part of a future progress because by sharing their experience they might help improve the experience of future expats.

Method of distribution is described as follows. The questionnaire was sent online individually to all active expatriate members that were registered on “Expats in Albania” Facebook group. Local nationals were not included in the sample. The questionnaire was sent to 582 members individually, in their Facebook inbox and the introductory text was personally addressed to each of them. The purpose was to create a personal contact which might be more successful in gathering a satisfying number of responses. Of the 582 members that received the message 59 responded. The questionnaire was launched on 5 November 2017 and stayed open till 7 May 2018. This questionnaire details are shown in Appendix II.

Results of questionnaire responses are described as follows. The respondents were expats who were coming mainly from countries of Europe (44%) and North America (44%). The other respondents were from Asia (5%), Australia (3%) and Africa (3%). Most of them agree (51%) and strongly agree (41%) that Albania is very different from their home country in many aspects. Considering that almost half of the respondents are coming from European countries and still admitting to find Albania very different from their home country, emphasizes the fact that Albania has a high cultural distance with other countries which makes the transition process more difficult.

The main purpose of expatriating to Albania is work (75%), and others have expatriated for joining the spouse (8%), for having a life abroad (5%), and other reasons (12%). Half of the respondents (49%) were followed by their spouse/partner and 22% of these spouse/partner have had problems adjusting in Albania. From the respondents, 85% were relocated without children (or had no children). Most of those expats had already had a previous expat experience in another country (75%). According to the results of the questionnaire, 49% has been living in Albania for more than 2 years which means that most likely they have already been through all the transition stages, and 24% between 3 months and 1 year are the expats who are currently going through the most difficult stages of transition process. This respondent variety has provided rich data for this survey.

The majority of the expats (73%) did not receive any cross-cultural training before departure. 85% of the expats tried to gather information by themselves before arrival in order to adjust their expectations but most of them claim that the process was frustrating and took time (30%) and most of the sources seemed unreliable (34%). For most of the expats who had some expectations about Albania, the reality was better than expected (56%). This in a way shows lack of information about Albania that expats can provide before departure. Most of them received a starting support from which 56% was from the hiring company, 34% from other expats already living in Albania, 29% from locals, and 15% had no connections to support them. These responses emphasize the lack of services and especially digital services about providing supportive and useful information to expats.

The initial feelings of the expats when just arrived in Albania were about feeling excitement, adventurous and energized, but also anxious, lost, homesick, lonely, helpless, and disappointed. Most of respondents declare to have experienced such negative feelings, and only 5% of the responses declare to have felt nothing unusual while settling in the host country, Albania. Most 64% of the respondent confess about experiencing unhappiness (in different frequencies) at the extent of feeling the urge to leave Albania, and only 27% of the respondents confess they never felt this way. For 56% (39% + 17%) of the respondents, being an expat in Albania is not a very tough experience. However, 45% (7% + 19% + 19%) do not share the same opinion. Almost all the respondent expats would recommend the expatriate life in Albania to other people (only 8% did not recommend), but 36% will recommend with the condition of them having initial support. While 54% believe that expatriating challenges did not have a negative impact on their performance (i.e. performance related to work, studies, family), the other 46% (14% + 32%) do not share the same opinion. All the above responses show the presence of transition process challenges and their negative impact on expat performance among a considerable share of expatriates in Albania.

Regarding the behavioral models of Albanian culture, the expats` responses show that these models are easy to observe but quite difficult to understand and relatively difficult to perform. These responses show certain difficulties in the learning process and acculturation of expats living in Albania. Furthermore, almost all the respondents declare that to them it is important (very important to 51%, important to 34% and moderately important to 14%) knowing more about the host country, its culture, values and systems. The lack of information sources or their unreliability about knowing better the host country is a considerable barrier in the process of adaption and acculturation of the expats in Albania.

From the results of the questionnaire can be stated that most of the expats (91%) do feel helpless or powerless while trying to cope with the host culture. Based on results from the questionnaire, the most common problems faced by expatriates include:

- Informal way of having things done is often the only way
- Lack of information and sources
- Complicated bureaucratic regulations and systems
- Lack of facilities
- Lack of services
- Difficult to arrange the most basic things
- Too chaotic

Only 3% of respondents stated that there are no existing problems at all with their new country of residence.

According to the responses of the questionnaire 34% of the expats could feel settled in Albania after 3 months after arrival, 27% after 6 months, 14% after 1 year, and 10% declare that they will never feel settled. This shows the diversity of the transition process of the respondents. The length of each stage is different for each of them. Based on the responses, few expats could accomplish their adaption within the first 6 months after arrival, as for most of the expats this process has lasted longer. Furthermore, the expats declare to have experienced several negative emotional states while going through the stages till reaching the adaption, such as isolation (e.g. staying home most of the time), fatigue, anxiety, irritability, reduction in job performance, anger, sleeping problems, and constant homesickness. Only 20% of the respondents declared that they experienced nothing negative.

Feeling confused about getting something done but not knowing where or how, results to have happened to all the responding expats (e.g. solving a dental problem, having the car fixed, travelling to other cities in Albania, finding a babysitter for your child, being member of a hiking club, buying certain products, etc.). This has happened at different frequency to different expats, for most of them happened occasionally (44%), frequently (24%) and very frequently (17%). None of the respondents declare about never have felt that way. In addition, sorting out the administrative formalities (e.g. permits, taxes, insurances, utility payments, banks, and health) resulted to be not easy at all for 46% of the respondents. Besides, fewer respondents (27%) declared the same difficulty about finding out entertainment/recreation facilities and opportunities.

Furthermore, when they needed to get something done, most of the expats were addressing people they already knew (20% asked other expats directly, 58% asked local friends directly, and 8% asked their colleagues or other random people directly). Only 12% use internet sources to find the needed information (Google, Facebook). This outcome emphasizes the lack of digital services for providing supportive information to expats in Albania. Based on other outcomes from the respondents (by asking what digital services expats use for providing information or networking in their host country) there are very limited options: mainly Facebook expat groups, a few InterNations expat forums, and very few Couchsurfing members. Thus, addressing directly and/or indirectly (via internet) other people seems to be the only way of getting the needed information for the expats in Albania. This gathered insight emphasizes again the lack of existing digital information service or other networking service. Furthermore, most of the expats (70%) find these information sources sufficient and useful occasionally (63%) and/or rarely (7%).

As a conclusion, only 10% of the respondents disagree with the following statement: “The existence of a digital service as a reliable source of all general information about Albania (culture and values, behavior models, systems, economy, politics, and more) and all

facilitating information about “the where and the how to get something done” (how to involve children in after school activities, where to find a physiotherapist, where to find a plumber, how to hire a cleaning lady, etc.) would have made my settling in Albania faster, easier and more pleasant. This result shows that a high percentage of the respondents do not oppose the potential of this service proposition to support the expatriating transition process in Albania. 72% (36% + 36%) of the responses clearly support the existing need for such a service, and 19% stay undecided about the value that this service can bring to them.

All the questionnaire responses described above can be found in the online questionnaire results shown in Appendix II.

4.4 Service Precedents

Simultaneously to the primary research with the customers, some desk research about service precedents was conducted. The aim of this desk research was to collect information about existing services which have a similar service concept, websites offering expats a service of support for their life in a host country. Many countries have been welcoming expats for a long time now, and they have gained experience and settled structures for improving the hosting process. Searching for services that are offered to expats in these countries and get to know what kind of services exists, had mainly served as inspirational research in this study.

Martin and Hanington (2012, 154) suggest secondary research to be an excellent method to identify what precedents exist. In this study, this research has been useful to learn what has already been done and what hasn`t, and where there may yet be opportunity gaps. The gathered information from this research was necessary in this study for providing good direction to the service design process.

In addition, research was conducted about the service precedent which are currently offering support to expats in Albania. The gathered information was helpful to understand the gaps in the users` territory. The gathered data from this research was a useful component for groundwork to generate ideas about the service proposition development and its design.

Service precedents from other host countries

During this research many service precedents were found, and some of the most relevant to this study are services such as *Just Landed* (www.justlanded.com), *Expat.com* (www.expat.com), *Expat Info Desk* (www.expatinfodesk.com), *Transition Concierge International* (www.transitionconciergeintl.com), *Show Around* (www.showaround.com), *At Home Abroad* (www.athomeabroad.nl), *Expatriate Connection* (www.expatriateconnection.com), *Cross Culture* (www.crossculture.com), *International Citizens* (www.internationalcitizens.com), *Expat Finland* (www.expat-finland.com), and *Expat-to-Expat* (www.expat-to-expat.com).

Some of those service precedents were offering an information database about the host country. Some other services were offering consulting, training and coaching services for

expatriates. Some of them provided the networking service through forums, blogs, or by organizing expats gathering events. Very few of them had a combination of the country information service and consulting services, and in those cases the offered country information was not very wide. The websites which offer the country information service were likely to have a sterile content. This characteristic was not present in the websites which offer consulting, training and coaching services; these websites had a presence of a direct voice for the customer which was decreasing their distance with these services. The consulting service websites` content was also more empathetic and was providing information about topics related to expatriation, such as culture shock, expatriate narratives, and more. A networking service was present in most of the service precedents. However, the networking service for expats was not about exclusive connection with host country locals. These services were about the expats creating connections with both locals and expats, and most of the time these services were about networking mostly with other expats living in the same host country.

Unmet need / missing gaps in Albania

When it comes to services supporting expatriates in Albania or providing thorough information about Albania, there is a meaningful existing gap. According to the desk research performed in this study, only a few websites were found that offer good service to the foreign community but they are only focused on creating a social network, the *InterNations* organization (Tirana community) and *Expats in Albania* Facebook page. For instance, the focus of *InterNations* service is only in creating a social network. This website does not offer information for practical arrangements about life in Albania. They have a forum were expats discuss their issues and share information with each other. Regarding *Expats in Albania* Facebook page, its service proposition is the same as *InterNations* organization.

4.5 Synthesis and Conclusions

Expat adjustment is about stress management within inner (individual) level and also outer (situational) level. Variables impacting the process are many and some of them have a strong influence, such as cultural distance, personality factors, and situational factors such as social support. Based on the provided information from the research process, in Albania there is a considerable number of expats who experience the transition process stages, suffer negative emotional impact of such transition, and show a potential need for supportive services.

In the research process it was very beneficial to have a certain sequence. The interviews and the online ethnography have provided inspirational information and the literature review has provided a deep understanding of the problem area with wide knowledge regarding the topic in a general context. The sequence of designing the questionnaire after concluding the interviews, literature review, and online ethnography was necessary to know what questions to include. This research strategy has accomplished one of the main research underlying goals: having the right conversation at the right time.

In order to create a visual analysis of gathered insights regarding the expat challenges during transition process in the host country, a brainstorming web was created as shown in Figure 26. This brainstorming web represents the outcome from all the research methods: literature review, interviews, online ethnography, and questionnaire. This brainstorming web belongs to the expat in general and is applicable also to the expat in Albania. At the center of the web the question "*Which are the challenges for an expat in a host country?"* is placed. The web has been developed further with relevant facts discovered while conducting the literature review and fieldwork research. The created brainstorming web has been the milestone for the upcoming stage of this study: the service design.

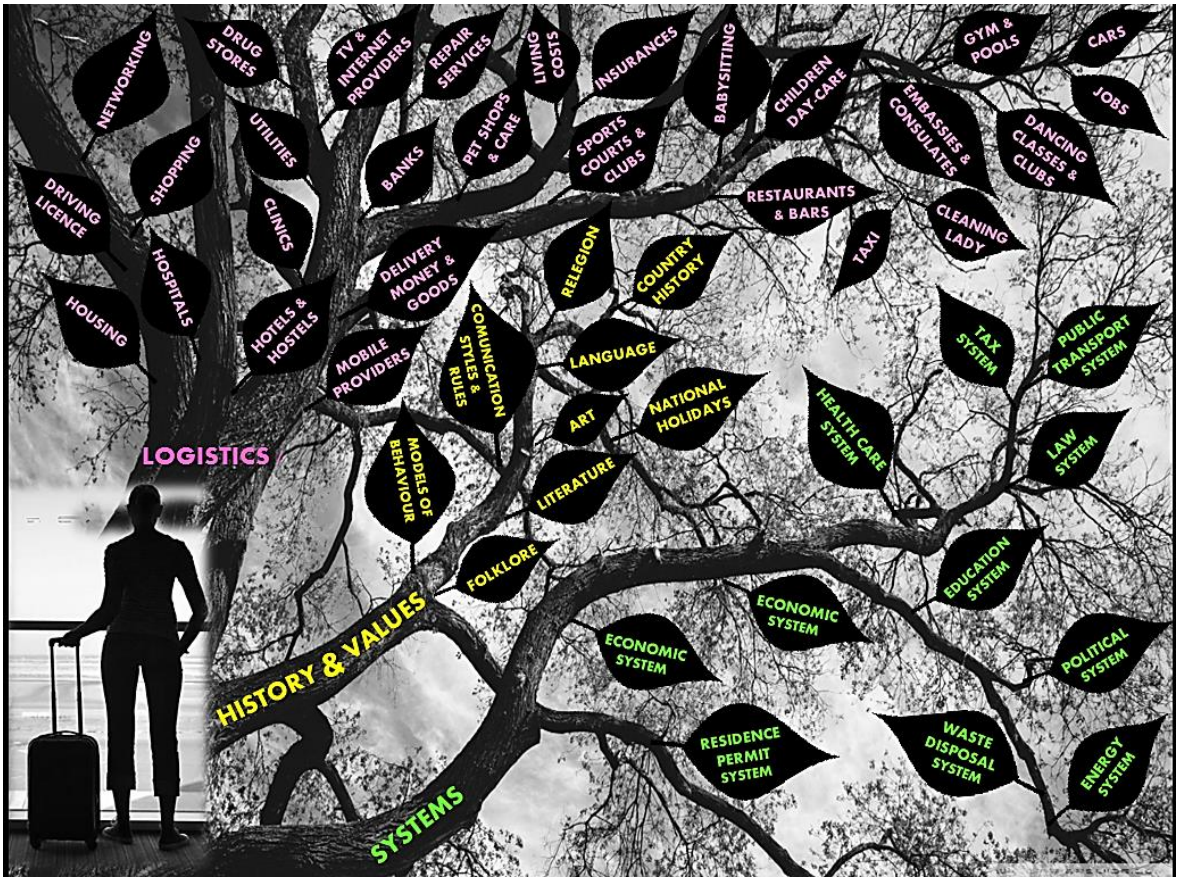


Figure 26. The expat brainstorming web.

Besides the brainstorming web, for the analysis and the synthesis of results from fieldwork research, the word cloud method with affinity diagramming technique has been very useful to this study. While conducting the online ethnography, the posts from expats in Albania were a good source of large text-based data but the analyses of it was quite challenging. Affinity diagraming technique was helpful at first with the synthesis of the collected data. However, further analysis and synthesis was necessary, and the word cloud resulted to be a helpful method. The affinity diagram outcome visualized with the word cloud was treated as the voice of the customers showing the right direction of designing this service, and making them partners in the design process (Martin & Hanington 2012, 12).

The conclusion emerged from the desk research for service precedents was that existing services in Albania do not meet the most necessary, basic, and practical needs which a foreigner must sort out even before landing in Albania. Starting a life in an unknown country has its own share of stress. The real need of expatriates is about services which could make this less stressful by finding all they need to know, in the most simple and

understandable way, well arranged and easy to find, and having all in one place. At the moment, this service does not exist for the destination Albania.

5 Service Design Strategy

The scope of the design phase in this study is to conduct generative and evaluative design research by co-designing with users. The objective is to integrate the gained knowledge and gathered insights from previous research work, the literature review and fieldwork research. through the literature review, into the service design process.

The design process starts with creating personas and then continues with prototyping. The prototyping design starts with creating *low-fidelity prototypes* and continues with creating *high-fidelity prototype*. A combination of *flexible modelling* method with *card sorting* method has been used to generate ideas about the design of the first low-fidelity prototype. A second low-fidelity prototype has been created in order to apply the *parallel prototyping* method. A combination of *A/B testing* method with *desirability testing* method has been used to perform the evaluation of the low-fidelity prototypes and to provide substantial information for continuing the design process with a high-fidelity prototype creation. Microsoft Excel as an effective tool for high-fidelity prototype creation has been used in this service design process. The content about the country information database integrated in the high-fidelity prototype is not fully completed due to the large amount of work. Anyhow, enough content has been included in this prototype to properly represent the service proposition and to have ready a final version for future testing and evaluation. Other service design methods, such as *customer journey* and *business model canvas*, have been applied to conclude the design process. These two methods have been applied for giving the opportunity of the business model of the designed service in case of future implementation.

The strategy of using the above-mentioned methods is about combining them all as complementary methods and techniques for the best design results. These methods and techniques, and their implementing process is visualized in Figure 27.

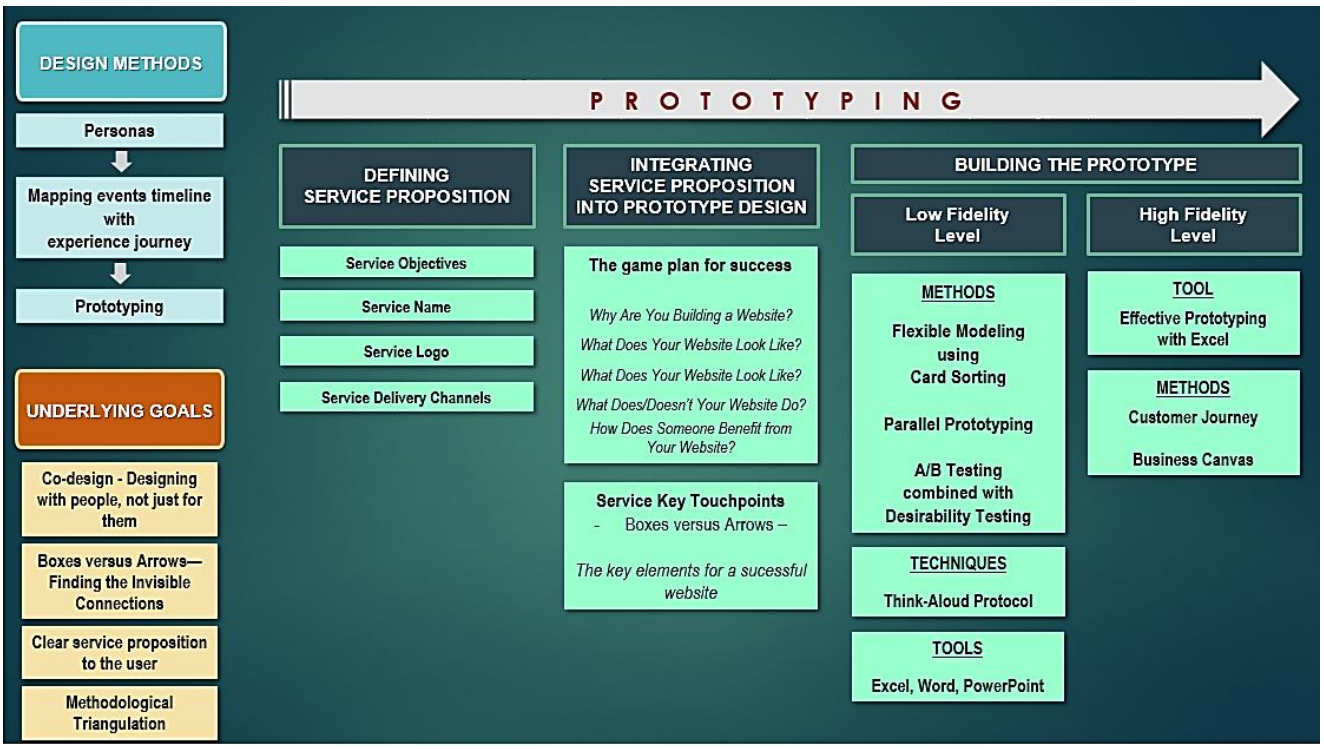


Figure 27. A visualization of the design process and methods of the study.

5.1 Underlying Goals

The design strategy of this study has four important underlying goals: co-design, boxes versus arrows, a clear service proposition, and using methodological triangulation technique. These goals are described in the following paragraphs.

Co-design - Designing with people, not just for them

Polaine et al. (2013, 41) states that "*Service design is about designing with people and not just for them, and it is here that it differs from classic user-centered design and much of marketing*".

The *co-design* is the approach used through all the design process of this service. The design of the service started developing already during the research process, step by step with the gained knowledge regarding the topic in focus. The chosen service design methods are *co-creative* methods which considerably involve the customers in the service design process. The aim is to let the customer decide about the content and the structure of the service. This was thought to be necessary for tailoring a service which will be responding to customers' needs in the most efficient and beneficial way.

Boxes versus Arrows—Finding the Invisible Connections

The process of designing a service is mainly about identifying its core touchpoints. Next on its focus is the design of each individual touchpoint and of their sequence through the service flow with the target of giving the best possible experience to the customers when using the service. The most challenging when designing service touchpoints is to focus on the intangible ones; to put design efforts on tangible touchpoint is much easier. Polaine et al. (2013, 86) say that the reason for getting a poorly designed service is mainly about not giving enough attention to those invisible elements which are critical to the experience of a service, such as time, context, and connections. An analogy which helps to understand these invisible service elements is about the organizational charts and process diagrams, where arrows and lines represent time, context, and connections (Polaine et al. 2013, 86). In services, these arrows represent the transitions from one touchpoint to the next, and they generate their own users` experiences which have a meaningful impact on the overall users' satisfaction level. Thus, when designing a service, it is crucial to focus on the invisible touchpoints, the connections of visible touchpoints in terms of time and space.

While designing the website of the service, the main focus was on identifying the "arrows" of the service to consider them while creating the structure of the website. The service proposition of this study is not only about collecting country information on one digital platform, it is also about the convenience of finding and using this information. The information represents *the boxes* while the structure of organizing this information represents *the arrows*. Finding the invisible connections is an important part of this service design process for assuring the service to have the proper convenience needed for the customer.

Clear service proposition to the user

Argumentations by Polaine et al. (2013, 112) give a particular importance to the website homepage design. They say that its description/statement must cover three important questions:

1. Do people understand what the new service is or does?
2. Do people see the value of it in their life?
3. Do people understand how to use it?

The homepage of the website is the *face* of a digital service, which has the power over the customer about drawing his attention and make him being aware of the service, and about him willing to join the service. It is the first introduction of the service proposition with the customer, thus it represents a key touchpoint. For that reason, a clear service proposition was in special focus during the design of the website.

Methodological triangulation

As mentioned in sub-chapter 2.1, besides the research process, the technique of methodological triangulation has been applied also during the service design process. The methodological triangulation technique underlies in the planning of service design methods, especially during the creation of the prototypes.

5.2 Service Design Methods

The applied service design methods in this study consist in creating representing personas for the service customer`s segments, mapping the service customers` events by stating their experiences, and building service prototypes for generating the best service design for its customers.

Personas

The empirical research insights collected from interviews, questionnaires, and online ethnography, fueled this study with descriptions of several potential users. The synthesis of these descriptions by looking for similarities across users was the next step. The aim was to identify a few users as personas who would better represent most of the potential users of this service. Identifying the most potential representing profiles of customers and accordingly creating fake personas for each profile with as much details as possible to resemble them as real humans, was crucial for the service design of this study.

Mapping events timeline with experience journey

Polaine et al. (2013, 105) define the experience journey map as a tool to be used for telling a story with depth and richness insights of human experience, as it contains both qualitative and quantitative information. By integrating the element of time, it is performed the mapping events timeline with experience journey, which is a great tool to visualize a story and that is the quickest and most effective way to tell the story (Polaine et al. 2013, 105).

In this study, this method provides a dynamic visualization of the transit process by showing its evolvement in terms of sequences more than in terms of time. The time aspect while mapping the events is more developed by answering questions such as w*hat happened first, what is coming next,* and *what were the priorities.* The experience aspect while mapping the events is about discovering *which were the challenges* and *what were the emerged emotions* during their journey. The designed events map with experience journey represents the expat – the user of this service, reflecting their needs, issues, priorities, behaviors, and emotions. The results from this method were very useful to this study in two ways, first for measuring and evaluating the service proposition and second for generating ideas for the design of the service.

Prototyping

Prototyping is the key to the design process. It reflects the results of hard work of gathering insights and it is the visual representation of the service concept which will be used for further research to accomplish the final design of the service. Doing the correct research but a weak prototyping will not complete a successful service design process. Having a great service proposition but a distorted service prototype will cause the design of a final service with a high risk to fail. Although prototyping is acknowledged to be such a crucial stage of the design process, the creation of proper prototyping often is threatened by budget cuts, deadlines, or lack of access to sophisticated tools. This can lead to distorted, incomplete, and ineffective prototypes which will handicap the following generative and

evaluative research about the service. The prototyping method of design is a complex method, and in this study, it is developed based on the following tools and sub-methods.

Screen Renderings

In interface design, screen renderings may be used for documentation and presentation, without any interactive functionality (Martin and Hanington 2012, 138). The prototyping of this service is about designing a website. In the low-fidelity level of prototyping, the objective is about the content of the information and its structure. It is more about these touchpoints representing *the boxes.* Thus, screen rendering is the adequate technique to build the low-fidelity prototypes of this service. This technique is not efficient for building the high-fidelity prototype of this service, where the prototype interactivity is a must; creating those touchpoints representing *the arrows* is the main objective of the high-fidelity prototyping stage.

Levels of fidelity

At the first stage of prototyping, *low-fidelity prototypes* of the service are created. At this stage, the prototypes are used to collect all the generated ideas about what kind of information should be included on the website and how this information should be divided, grouped, and displayed. At the second stage of prototyping, a *high-fidelity prototype* of the service is created, based on the users' feedback from evaluation of low-fidelity prototypes which were created at the first stage. By using Microsoft Excel, a digital interactive prototype capable of providing a real user experience for feedback has been created.

Flexible Modeling using Card Sorting

The service to be designed for this study is about a large digital platform of country information. All this database must be clustered, categorized and structured according to relevance and priorities for the user. One of the biggest challenges in user interface design is creating the information architecture, about *what goes where*. Without the adequate structure, the database will be inconvenient to use and the service will fail to provide its core values to the users. As mentioned by Martin and Hanington (2012, 88), *flexible modeling method* is an adequate participatory design method that allows users to configure a software interface from a set of predetermined feature elements provided by the designer. The *co-design* activity in the flexible modeling method is important to help developing frameworks that maximize the chances of users being able to find the information they need in the easiest and most convenient way. *Card sorting* is the participatory design technique that might be helpful to explore how participants group items into categories and relate concepts to one another, in cases of building digital interface design or a table of contents (Martin & Hanington 2012, 26). Using powerful co-creation methods to build the low-fidelity prototypes was the motivation for choosing to combine together flexible modeling and card sorting.

Parallel Prototyping

Martin and Hanington (2012, 122), define the parallel prototyping method as "*the process of considering a range of potential design ideas simultaneously before selecting and*

refining one specific design approach". They highlight its benefit of keeping an open mind by exploring multiple design opportunities, which might lead to a better design direction then the initial one, or bring more design critiques which might lead to more effective design results. This method consists of creating several low-fidelity prototypes independent to each-other, and then test them with end users (Martin & Hanington 2012, 122). The parallel prototyping method has been applied for this study in the design stage of low-fidelity prototyping, aiming to achieve thinking out-of-the-box about the service design by experimenting with other design alternatives of service proposition.

A/B Testing combined with Desirability Testing

As stated by Martin and Hanington (2012, 8), A/B testing method, as a quantitative research method for evaluation, can be used "*to compare two versions of the same design to see which one performs statistically better against a predetermined goal*". As an optimization technique, the A/B testing was used to compare the different versions of design generated from the parallel prototyping. The results collected from this evaluative research method was useful by ranking the low-fidelity prototypes to see which one is closer to the service proposition objectives. The disadvantage of this method is that it gives only quantitative data, and will not help me understand why the design was preferred over the alternate. To overcome this gap of information the design process was enriched with a qualitative research method for evaluation, the desirability testing. Martin and Hanington (2012, 64) suggest that "*when there is disagreement about which design direction to pursue, desirability testing shifts the conversation from which design is "best" to which design elicits the optimal emotional response from users*". Based in the above argumentations, a combination of both methods, A/B testing and desirability testing were planned to be applied for low-fidelity prototypes testing.

Think-aloud protocol

Martin and Hanington (2012, 180) define the *think-aloud protocol* as a method which requires participants straightforward to say aloud what they are thinking and how they are feeling while performing a given task. Think-aloud protocol was used while performing the flexible modelling combined with the card sorting method and the A/B testing combined with the desirability testing method.

6 Personas and Experience Journey

At this stage of the design work, the challenge was to define personas which best represent the main customer profiles, and crafting them into detail enough to make them seem as real people. The next challenge was creating a detailed path of their journey, garnished with meaningful experiences that they had to live during this path.

6.1 Creating Personas

Martin and Hanington (2012, 132) define personas as characters *"…crafted from information collected from real users through sound field research*" which are crucial to attain a responsible design as they create useful design targets.

Based on gathered insights from interviews and questionnaires three personas were created to represent the customers of this service proposition. The personas are of different nationalities, have different status and different purpose for moving to Albania. They also represent different needs about support and services for settling in the host country. This diversity among the personas aims to cover most of the customers 'segments. These personas are described as follows.

Figure 28. Persona no. 1, Vanessa. (www.plus.google.com)

PERSONA NO.1

VANESSA - the English teacher from USA

Pre-Departure Preparation
"*When I needed to decide which country to choose for moving in, I did a lot of research to find out where I wanted to be.*"

Vanessa (visualized in Figure 28) found herself at a moment in her life when she needed a big change. She wanted to visit a country which she had never visited before and have a new life there. She wanted to leave her life in USA and start a new life somewhere in Europe. Vanessa does not have any savings, thus finding a country with job opportunities for her is important. In college she was an excellent student in the subject of the English language and literature, so teaching English language abroad seemed to be the best job opportunity for her. For making the decision where to go, she had to invest a lot of time doing research to get to know the countries, their cultural lifestyle, cost of living, and chances for her to find a job easily and fast. She had to do research about the education system and people`s attitude about learning the English language. Her believe is that the more she engages herself into being prepared for this move – physically, mentally, emotionally and educationally – the better her experience will be. Vanessa is a very outgoing and social person, so for her it is important to understand how the local people are and especially how open they are to friendships with foreigners. She is used to have a very vivid city life and getting herself busy with many activities and hobbies. Currently she is active with sports` clubs, dancing classes, book club, and a gardening forum. Vanessa is vegetarian and tries to eat organic. In her city, she knows already in which shop to find her particular food and in which restaurant good vegan food is served.

Figure 29. Persona no. 2, Ben. (www.animatedimages.org)

PERSONA NO.2

BEN - the student from Malta

Cultural Differences

"*I have never been to Albania and had no information so I was nervous about its culture and people. It took me some time and effort to realize that my host culture and home culture have more in common than I could ever think! Afterwards, it was fun to celebrate the similarities and recognize the differences.*"

Ben (visualized in Figure 29) has just finished college and is looking for different universities to continue his education. He has always thought of his profession as something where he can help others. The last year of college he had the opportunity to know some Albanian students coming to his school as exchange students. He has heard from them about a university in Albania which is offering programs in the Italian language. The University has a very high qualified teaching staff with Albanian professors and Italian professors. While navigating this university website, he finds a subject which seems to fit him, the physiotherapy. The fees of this university are very low in comparison to any university in Malta, and he heard from his Albanian friends that life in Albania is less expensive than in Malta. These were supporting reasons to decide to continue his studies in Albania. Ben applied to follow this physiotherapy studies in Albania and he succeed to be enrolled in the program. He hasn't been in Albania before and he was nervous about what to expect. The Albanian exchange students were the only locals he knew, but at the moment they were not living in Albania because of studying abroad. In a host country it is somehow easy to meet new people but not so easy to make real friends. After some months in Tirana he could find a good friend, another student at his university, a local coming from the south of Albania. His local friend was a big help for Ben to get familiar with Albanian culture and could explained to him understand many occurred situations. He also taught Ben some useful Albanian phrases. With time, Ben perception about Albanian people was about them being very warm and welcoming, and are very outgoing. After more than half year of living in a host country, Ben realized that studying abroad in a foreign county is not just about that, or trying to improve your language skills; it is about adapting your whole life to a new – and sometimes hard-to-understand culture. For Ben it took a while to understand the Albanian culture. When this culture got less mysterious to him, he realized that in the end there were quite many similarities with his home culture. He started to be able appreciating those aspects which were different and enjoying the new perspectives.

Figure 30. Persona no. 3, Nicole. (www.animatedimages.org)

PERSONA NO.3

NICOLE - the expat wife, mother of 3 children

Previous relocation experience
"*Even with a previous relocation experience I again experience the culture shock. It's not that I didn't expect it, but you can just never really predict what the differences will be and how they will affect you.*"

Nicole (visualized in Figure 30) is a German housewife who has been following her expat husband to four countries, so far. The company of her husband has just opened a new subsidiary in Albania and he was assigned to move there. Nicole has gained that experience of how to prepare and organize things for a quick and easy adjustment, so that the family feels at home as soon as possible after arrival in the new country. She was aware that language is not the only difference in communication between the cultures. Beyond that, their customs and values have to be learned. It is important to observe how host country nationals act and do things. She was not much worried about herself; her biggest concern was her children`s integration in this new country, which seems to be quite different from other countries where they used to live before. In her previous expat experience, for her children to quickly integrate she was engaging them in several activities where they could interact with local children, such as dancing, playing soccer, playing instruments, summer camps. Of course, taking language classes to learn the local language was the first thing in their agenda; kids are incredibly skilled when it comes to learning a new language. From the previous experiences, she knows that she had to be proactive, and she knows what she needs to do the necessary arrangements for her children, starting with the most basics such as healthcare, education, babysitting, day care. She and her husband have decided lately to make their children wish about having a pet, a little puppy, come true. It would be less complicated to travel without an animal, so they decided to get a puppy once they arrive in Albania. Nicole knows that this new comer in their family would need her commitment as much as having another child to take care of. But it will be a fun experience, and after leaving the country it will be a nice souvenir from their life in Albania. Regarding herself, she loves shopping for her and the family. She has a fashion blog where she shares the fashion trends of the countries where she is living. She looks forward to her shopping experience in Albania.

6.2 Mapping Events with Experience Journey

Based on several research findings, each transition process is unique, but still there is an identifiable pattern of ups and downs that expats typically go through. This process is often referred to as the *Adjustment Cycle* or *Cross-Cultural Adjustment Cycle*, which can be segmented into five different stages, and in the case of going back to their home country then there is also a sixth stage involved. The term used in the following is *Expat Journey* and the focus will be on each of the stages occurring in his transition journey, the five stages occurring in the host country lifetime plus the additional sixth stage for repatriation

occurring in the home country lifetime. The expat journey, as shown in Figure 31, is created with reference to the W-curve theory. This expat journey design is developed further in a coming stage of this study, as described in sub-chapter 7.4.2. The expat journey has seven touchpoints which represent six main stages, such as *preparation, honeymoon, culture shock, recovery, mastery,* and *reverse-culture shock*. In this journey there is included a short appearance of one of the main stages, the *recovery* stage, as an early appearance which fades quickly, and is named *short-term recovery*. These touchpoints are explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

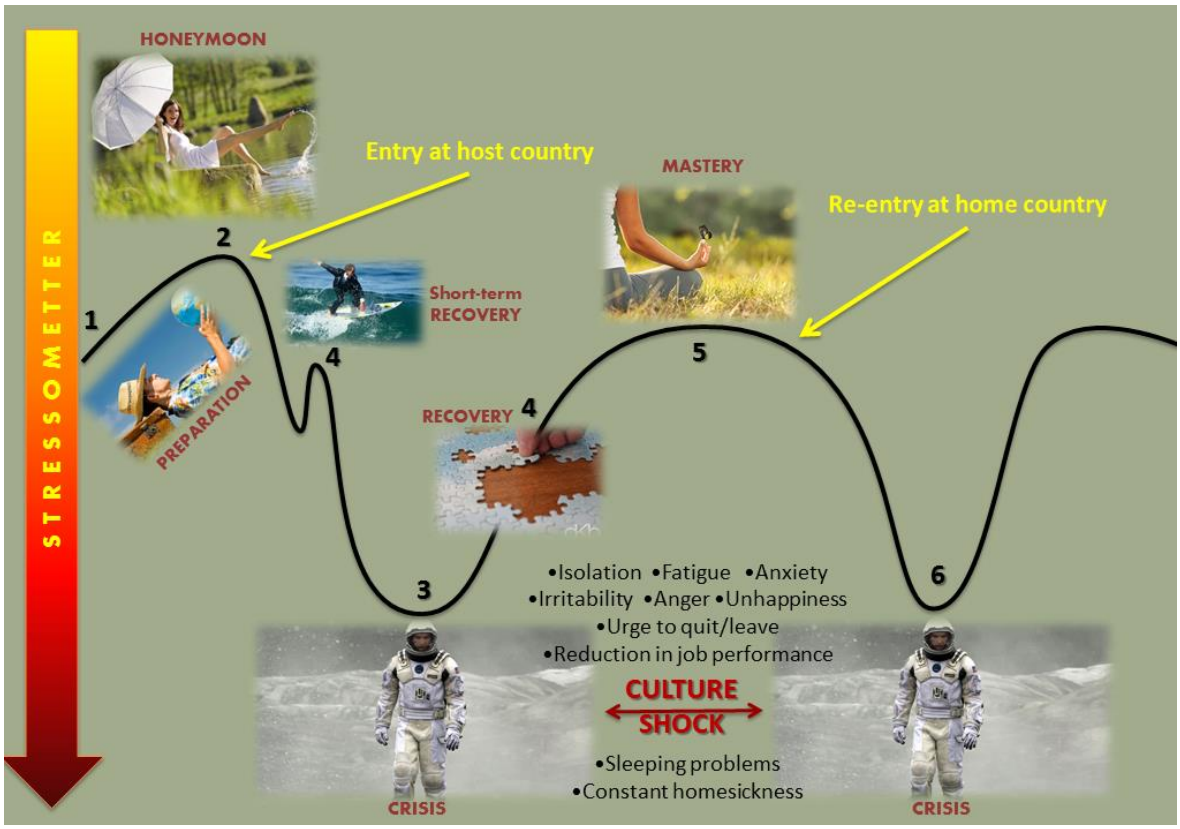


Figure 31. The Expat Journey.

1st stage of the journey

<u>The Preparation / The Leaving</u>

This stage usually starts when the expat become aware that he is about to move abroad. This might be a decision coming from the expat himself or induced from others, for instance might be the company`s decision to assign an employee abroad or the parents' decision for their children to continue education abroad. If the expat is involved in the process, his first reaction will be positive and looking forward to the change. If the expat is not involved in the decision-making process about the change, his first reaction will be negative and he will perceive himself as a victim, as he is being forced to this change. The perception about the change would be as an undesirable event. Thus, changes might happen with or without the expat`s approval, regardless of whether we're ready for it or not.

This very first stage is the most crucial in the expat journey as it heavily influences how the expat is going to cope with the next stages of his expatriating journey. In case of a

positive approach from the expat about the change, at this stage the expat will mostly feel excited about the new life ahead, probably mixed by anxiety about leaving an established life and loved ones behind. In the case of a negative approach, when the expat is not convinced about the change, he won`t be willing for that change to happen and his reaction is the denial. Another very natural reaction for a change in the negative approach is anger, which usually directs to the person responsible for the change: the partner, the parents, the work giver etc. But it can also be directed towards ourselves or others around us, being angry at life in general or the economy and politics, all these blamed by the expat to be the reason for the change. Classical symptoms for this stage are irritability, frustration and short temperedness. Starting the transition process with a denial and/or anger status will most likely make the expat struggle with the following stages, making the transition difficult.

However, the decision to change has affected the expat positively or negatively, moving abroad is a stressful event which demands a great deal of emotional strength. Some very common factors contributing to the stress in this stage are the separation from relatives and friends, and the fear of the unknown future. Separation from relatives and friends can cause feeling of sadness, and even guilt when elderly parents are being left behind. This may be taken as disloyalty or abandonment, which can be particularly stressful for people from certain cultural or religious backgrounds, because of their traditional emphasis on family and the elderly. Another major stress factor for people about to move is fear of a future difficult to picture.

2nd stage of the journey

The Honeymoon

This stage begins with arrival in the new location and lasts, on an average, the first couple of months. This stage can be perceived as some sort of extended vacation, as it can be compared with when people are on holidays, where everything that is different is exciting instead of stressful, and people express curiosity for the new instead of denial. Even if the *Leaving stage* has been under strong negative conditions and the expat starts his journey with denial and anger, he still begins to think of ways to make the most of the situation. The expat may try to negotiate the situation and compromise with himself that this change is not that bad as it looked after all and try to focus on the positive aspects of the change. This happiness is also a self-mechanism to deal with the fear of coping with the change and new things ahead. This attempt will bring positive feelings and improve his emotional status. Like on a honeymoon, everything is exciting, new and special in this stage.

3rd stage of the journey

The Crisis - The Culture Shock

This stage starts at the moment when the expat realizes that he is staying longer than expected, his pseudo-vacation doesn`t have a turn back home. The expat starts to feel insecure in the new surroundings, less confident in his behaviors, temporarily dysfunctional as things are not going as expected, and have the impression that he needs to learn life from scratch. He realizes that many things are different and may not make sense for him as he compares them with behaviors, values and beliefs that he possessed so far. The expat feels out of his comfort zone and tend to be more self-centered than normal. He gets angry easily, starts stereotyping the host country and culture, and feels homesick, helpless, hopeless, irritable, alienated, disoriented, confused, and lonely. In this stage, the

expat experiences a state of shock due to arousing from the *Honeymoon stage* and finally facing the reality, a reality full of stressful challenges on a psychological and emotional level. This shock caused from facing the new culture is called *Culture Shock*.

Culture shock emerges in different forms among individuals but some symptoms are very common in most of the sojourners. Below, the main symptoms of Culture Shock are published from University of California Merced's on its webpage addressed to its international students.

- changes in eating habits and sleeping habits
- acute homesickness; calling home much more often than usual
- being hostile/complaining all the time about the host country/culture
- irritability, sadness, depression
- frequent frustration; being easily angered
- self-doubts; sense of failure
- recurrent illness
- withdrawing from friends or other people and/or activities

4th stage of the journey

The Recovery

This stage begins when life no longer feels chaotic. However, the expat still feels the ambivalence about the change and his journey still feels like a roller-coaster ride. His emotions fluctuate between excitement and homesickness, but he is starting to find answers for many questions. At this stage, the expat realizes that fighting the change or the different is not going to make his life easier, on the contrary. The outcome will be that the expat will stop resisting the change, by resigning to the situation or accepting it. Even if resigning is a non-positive reaction, it is still a beneficial reaction as far as it makes the expat moving on – and in the transition process, movement is positive. This recovery will facilitate the expat to start making plans about personal and professional life and get more involved into the host country surroundings.

In-between Honeymoon and Crisis

A Fragment of Recovery

Some models of the U-curve have a little bump upwards before going down in a deep trough towards the *Crisis stage*. This little bump is when *Recovery* first kicks in. The expat begins to feel more competent but then he may run into that value clash and identity confusion, and that can really throw him off.

5th stage of the journey

The Adaption / The Adjustment / The Mastery

The adjustment stage is the one where the expat accepts the differences, finds out what aspects are similar to those he knows from his home country or other places where he has been living, and adapts himself to the differences found in the host country. This stage begins when the expat finally is becoming settled and productive in the new environment, and somehow is appreciating the new culture. The expat is familiar enough with the local culture to feel confident, the language barriers are not a big issue anymore, he has made

friends and there is a true sense of feeling at home. He finally knows *how it works*, start feeling to belong, and others see us him as part of the group. At this stage, the expat has integrated into the host culture and is able to function without much effort, perhaps even adopting a dual cultural identity.

6th stage of the journey

The Repatriation -> The Reverse Culture Shock

The expat lifecycle would not be complete without taking the expat repatriation into account. After being abroad for some years and especially if the expat has spent a long time in the mastery stage, the process of returning home can be as traumatic as the initial relocation. The expat has problems adjusting back to the *normal life* again. While the expat was away, his home country and its people have changed – and he has changed, too. Thus, he has to learn about the changes in his home country such as the local news, movies, politics and trends because when you come back the people will not get why being totally clueless about what happens in society. Furthermore, his international experience is perhaps not appreciated by family and friends to the extent that the expat would expect, and neither does his different perception of reality due to this experience. For him it's a cultural transition again, but this time on home soil. The expat again feels stressful challenges, not fitting in, and alienated. He is experiencing a culture shock again, which in this case has been named *Reverse Culture Shock*.

Immigrant counselors discuss whether the shock of the going out or going home is worse. It much depends on where you have been, how long you have been away and how much you had been integrated. When expatriates relocate back home after having been away for a long time, they are likely to experience similar stages of transition as when they relocated in the host country. These stages are explained in details in the following paragraphs.

Repatriation 1st stage -> Elation (pathological euphoria)

When back home, the expat feels overwhelmed by the warm welcome from family members and friends. Everything feels secure, and the expat feels appreciated and loved by people around him, knowing this is his or her *real* home. He is in a good place inside his comfort zone. Things seem pleasant and calm at home. Such feelings remain for the first several days or weeks.

Repatriation 2nd stage -> Re-entry Shock / Reverse Culture shock

A while after his re-entry, the expat will start to feel very different from everyone around. This will make him feel content for being unique, interesting and different. At the very beginning, family and friends will demonstrate interest in the returnee's stories about many things which are unknown to them but their attention spans are short. Their loss of interest and lack of understanding the different *Him*, is a great surprise and disappointment that leads to feeling disoriented and isolated. Most people around the expat are not aware of probable changes influencing a person from living abroad. These people believe that him still thinks and acts exactly the same way, as if he had never left. The returnee may therefore feel inhibited from saying or doing anything that could appear misunderstood or unexpected. He may be reluctant to discuss any feelings of disappointment or disorientation at being back, for fear nobody will understand. He starts to realize that he is not fitting in as it was supposed to be. He is not getting the support he needs while going through such overwhelming phase. Faced with the day-to-day routine, the expat begins to

long for his life in the foreign land. A returnee may begin to think back, and he starts to appreciate even more things now than when was he was living there. Such disorientation can easily make people lose their balance and feel stupid, vulnerable and alienated. It can lead individuals to conclude that returning was a bad choice. They may even refuse or resent readjustment to the lifestyle of the home country. The re-entry shock, named Reverse Culture Shock, comes as a painful surprise to the returned expat. Most commonly happens that the returnee decides to leave his home country and move abroad again.

Repatriation 3rd stage -> Metamorphosis

The returned expat starts the transitional process of losing his expatriate identity, yet without having totally re-established a new sense of identity for himself.

Repatriation 4th stage -> Re-adaption to Home Culture

Re-adaptation is a gradual process rather than a distinct stage that a person goes through. During this process, a returned expatriate will re-familiarize himself with the home environment and start appreciating what is there. He finally accepts giving up the foreign life he left behind and settling down at home. Individuals returning from foreign places need time to readjust and confront their reverse culture shock, which might be as little as six months or as long as two years. Inevitably, the discomfort and negative feelings will dissipate and the ex-expatriate will fit back and feel comfortable in his home environment, but he always will be a different individual because of his unique experience.

7 Prototyping

As already mentioned, the service proposition development has a special focus in this study while going through the whole process of the service design. For that reason, before starting to create prototypes, this study proceeds with a closer look at the service proposition development. At this point of the study, the service proposition has evolved at each step of the research process. This process is described in the sub-chapter 7.1 and sub-chapter 7.2. The upcoming stage, the prototyping, involves the build-up of prototypes on both levels, low-fidelity and high fidelity, by using generative and evaluative methods with a co-design approach. These methods are used on the low-fidelity prototyping level by involving test users. This process is described in the sub-chapter 7.3 and sub-chapter 7.4.

7.1 Defining Service Proposition

Defining the service proposition consists of defining its objectives, name, logo, delivery channels, and explaining how it developed through the service design process. The definitions of its objectives, name, logo and delivery channels gives this service an identity, and the outcomes from research work determine the service frame by supporting the service concept evolvement.

Objectives

This new service concept is about creating a digital information platform relevant for practical issues and required arrangements that challenge expats when moving to Albania.

- A survival guide

This service is expected to be the *survival guide* to provide directions to expats for most of the practical issues they will face when moving to Albania. This service aims to access necessary information they need during the first months when settling down in the host country, by making this process less stressful to them. Knowledge form literature review explains how considerably stressful this process can be and its consequences; it shows worthiness of any service that will make the burden of expatriating less weighty to reduce this threatening stress.

- An intermediate agent

The service is expected to offer the service of an *intermediate agent* between them and the entities which provides services related to expats` needs while settling down in the host country. The service is a website with many stakeholders. The information platform about these stakeholders` services is only at the introduction level because the stakeholders are passive in this service. For instance, at the *housing section* of information database there will be a list of real estate agencies displayed to the user, but the user will only get the contact information about these real estate agencies from this section, such as location, phone numbers, email address, and website address. The customer and the stakeholder will connect through streams out of this service platform.

Service Name, Logo, and Delivery Channel

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2005), the word *Alien* can be defined as: "*belonging or relating to another person, place, or thing: strange <an alien environment>*" and "*relating, belonging, or owing allegiance to another country or government: foreign <alien residents>*"

Feeling like an alien, is a way we express how we feel in certain situations or certain surroundings, enigmatical to us in many ways. Well, this is how we feel when first landing in a new country. The word *alien* is widely used instead of expatriate or expat. Expats in Albania are the customers in focus of this service, and for that reason this service was named *Alien in Albania*. The service is delivered through a website which is designed based on the insights gathered from this study. The design of its logo and domain name are shown respectively in Figure 32 and Figure 33.

Alien in Albania

Figure 32. Designed service logo.

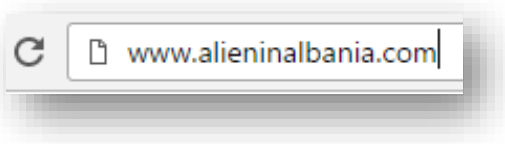


Figure 33. Designed service domain name.

Service Proposition Based on Insights

Being aware of the problem area and having a rough idea about a service that might serve to this problem area, is probably the start of a good business idea. Afterwards, there are two different approaches that might be followed: the *optimistic approach* or the *skeptical approach*. The optimistic approach will go on by developing the business idea of a certain service proposition without caring much to investigate about the probability of this service to be needed. In other words, the service potential to be used after it is launched is not sure. Chances of failure are high and the worst is that the failure comes after many costs are already generated. The skeptical approach is about wearing the glasses of the investigation and go on with careful research beforehand. For sure this approach takes more time for the service design process to start, but it will save time and money which might be wasted for nothing if the service concept is destined to fail.

Real and deep insights are necessary to be gathered to discover and/or verify if there is an unmet need, a gap in the market, an underdeveloped market, or a changing environment. The outcome leads to a business idea and develop the service proposition. During this study, searching for the unmet need was the first objective of the insights gathering process. This process has started by collecting information about the customers, the expats, about what they need to settle down and start a life routine in Albania; what issues makes the transition difficult and challenging. The next step was collecting information about what services are being missed to support them while having the transition process in the host country Albania. The following research was about discovering what can be done for the expats coming to Albania to facilitate their transition process and their culture shock. The service proposition was developed beside the research process as all gathered insights has provided direction for its development. Integrating research outcome into the service proposition and let it evolve around the customers` needs, is the key of designing the best tailored service for its users.

7.2 Integrating Service Proposition into Prototype Design

After defining the service proposition, the next step in the study was about defining a strategy for action; which is the best way to design the service prototype, the website, in order to reflect the proper and complete proposition of the service.

7.2.1 The Game Plan for Success

According to Teixeira (2010) in his book *Your Google Game Plan for Success*, having a plan of action or any direction whatsoever would be the most obvious and first thing a business owner would want to do before starting the business. When a service designer is about to start a new project assigned from a business owner, or someone with a business idea, the initial step would be the action of checking, understanding and clarifying the project plan behind the business idea. Teixeira (2010, 3-4) suggests to take this action by asking the question: "*What`s your game plan for success?*".

In this study I had two roles; as a service designer and as a business owner. Before starting to create the website of this service, I had to pose this very fundamental question to myself

and provide a clear answer: "*What`s my game plan for success?*". In order to respond to this question there are some specific sub-questions to be answered (Teixeira 2010, 4-7).

Thus, there were several sub-questions which needed reflection about the right answers revealing how this website should be in order to be successful. These sub-questions and the corresponding answers are described in the following paragraphs.

Sub-question number 1: Why Are You Building a Website?

I am building this website to offer an innovative service to expats in Albania. This website will not only fill the gaps of missing services for expats in Albania but will bring a new competitive edge with reference to similar service precedents in other countries. This website is expected to provide a useful tool for every expat, by giving a meaningful positive impact on their expatriating experience.

Sub-question number 2: What Does Your Website Look Like?

The question "What does your website look like?" does not ask only about aesthetically pleasing qualities. It also asks what you are doing on the website to keep the attention of visitors so they'll hang around for more than just a few seconds.

My website "speaks" with the expat`s voice. This is planned to be accomplished by including a narrative about my own expat experience of the service provider.

My website includes a personal, direct, and appealing writing style, which makes the reader feel exclusive, closer to the service, and welcomed.

My website includes strong calls-for-action displayed in an eye-catching way on every page, which are expected to impact the reader as soon as he opens the page and engages him to read further, navigating more, and finally become a user of the website service(s).

Even my website is mainly about a large platform of country information, the main focus of its design is to avoid overwhelming the reader with content and information. This part of the website design, for sure is one of the most challenging.

My website looks real - not fake, emotional and empathic - not sterile, and trustworthy, grateful - by including *Thank you* page and *Feedback* tool, flexible - giving the choice to have additional service(s) over the main service, and cheerful - the transition process is depressing enough, so some bright and warm colors and uplifting images might help a bit.

Sub-question number 3: What Does/Doesn't Your Website Do?

My website does offer access in a large amount of information about the host country Albania, which covers almost every issue that an expat will have to face at one moment while settling. My website does offer a very convenient organization of this large database which provides easy and fast access. My website does offer empathy because its customers` leading path (information architecture and navigation) is reflecting their expatriating journey, is understanding their concerns, is showing solutions even before they realize about the upcoming issues. My website does increase customer awareness

about their major and inevitable threat: The Culture Shock. My website does offer knowledge about vital topics which significantly influence their expatriating journey, such as acculturation. To make this basic service more exclusive, my website does offer personalized professional service to expats related to their expatriating journey, as an additional service. My website doesn`t solve issues, but instead it does lead toward solutions by showing them. For instance, the website gives access to its customers about names and contacts of international coach lines agencies who currently offer transport service, instead of offering the international transport service itself.

My website does offer to expats the service of networking with locals. It doesn`t offer the expat-expat networking service for the reason that it does not represent a gap among existing services in Albania (*InterNations* organization does offer this service in a very good way, and in addition the Facebook group *Expats in Albania*).

Sub-question number 4: How Does Someone Benefit from Your Website?

My website is serving a wide customer target, such as foreigners who are living in Albania because of different reasons (e.g. studying, working, etc.), customers with a different status (e.g. alone, as a spouse, with children), customers in different stages of the expatriating journey (e.g. pre-departure, adjustment, etc.), customers having different budgets, customers with enough time on their hands or very little time (e.g. housewife, retiree, executive employee, etc.), customers with different culture backgrounds (e.g. introvert culture countries versus extrovert cultures), and even to locals who are repatriating in Albania.

In order to make all these potential customers benefit from my website service, the website is offering three main services, and each of them charged separately. The first service is about the country information database, the second service is about the personalized support provided from a relocation consultant, and the third service is about the expat-local networking. All these three services are substituting each other or complementing each other, it depends on the customer characteristics and needs. The customer benefits of this website from the flexibility to choose what fits him best, and what fits best to a certain timing through his expatriating journey. This flexibility for sure is not responding only to his needs but also to his pocket. The customers benefit from this website those services which they can afford, and most importantly they do not pay for services which they do not need and dislike, or feeling reluctant to be involved in.

7.2.2 Service Key Touchpoints - Boxes versus Arrows

Service design is a discipline where often, many different disciplines are overlapping each-other, and a service designer needs to be well equipped with knowledge of more than one domain. Depending on the projects that the service designer finds himself to carry out, it might always be something new to him. In order to assure project success, the service designer has to be eager to learn the missing know-how, at least its basics and core elements. This will enable the service designer to see the whole big picture, to know when and what to ask an expert for collaborating and supporting him with the project, and to better understand the experts involved in the project team.

When we meet new people, there is an expression believed to be true, saying that *the first impression is important*, and this saying is true also for a website, about the very first visualization that the visitor perceives when he finds himself in the website homepage. This is the part where the website catches the visitor`s attention. But it is a little more than that. A successful website is not only about the aesthetic, but also those action features that will keep the attention of visitors and make them explore more. There are many small details that can do the trick, that make the difference from the competition, that build customers trust, and improve the overall user experience. (McFedries 2008, 109-138.) In the following paragraphs, these invisible key elements of website design are described.

Especially when a website is about selling products and services, competition is not a thing to be left aside. Differentiation from the competition, is another key element when designing such a website. Every fact that makes the service different from others has to appear on the website. (Teixeira 2010, 379.)

Even for a website service which the user does not need to contact any service provider to use or access the service, still it is necessary to include contact information (*Contact Us* element) and make it easy to find. This makes the user feel more comfortable and it might always become useful to him in certain circumstances, such as website failure of action, giving feedback to the service provider (maybe to improve something), and more. These needs of contact might arise at any time at any location of the website while the visitor/user is navigating. For that reason, it is important not only to provide this element to the website but also to make it visible all the time, no matter where the visitor/user is in the site. (McFedries 2008, 88, 127.)

Photos showing who is behind the service are always welcomed and appreciated by the visitors. This element gives them the opportunity to know the people who are offering this service to them, and will boost their trust. In addition, this feature should be developed further by adding to the site (besides the photo/s) some content telling about the person behind the service, such as personal information, professional background, experiences, how did the idea of the service come out, and so on. (McFedries 2008, 126; Teixeira 2010, 360-361.)

Also getting real with other images (pictures, graphics, etc.) in the website is an element to consider. Including images which are original, unique, real, strongly related to and/or clearly identifying the service, have a better impact on visitors/users instead of including some random images found in other internet sources. Just imagine how the user will feel disappointed to see a picture that he has already seen in another website, for sure it does not give a unique feeling about this service. Images are also the new trend for designing fancy button links instead of using ordinary text links. (McFedries 2008, 17; Teixeira 2010, 360-361; MacDonald 2011, 39, 465.)

Keywords are a crucial element for several reasons, mainly for creating user awareness (through search engines like Google, Yahoo, and Bing), increasing customer convenience while using the service, and narrow the distance service-user. Besides keywords included in the text, also title tags of individual pages require design focus by including well-thought-out keywords to make as clear as possible the content of the page and spare confusion or misleading the user. When well designed with compelling keywords which makes the user perceive a direct and personal statement/message, this element can bring the visitor/user closer to the service. (McFedries 2008, 229-230; Teixeira 2010, 65-67.)

The call-to-action is a vital element to convince the visitor to be a user, and next to convince the user to use all that the service has to offer. Each page on the website has its own purpose toward the user, thus every page needs to have this element in order to make the user fulfill this purpose (e.g. to make the visitor sign-in, to become a member, to pay for an additional service, and so on). (Teixeira 2010, 63, 293, 356-357.)

A special focus on website design should be on site navigation by making the navigation logical, using terms which people know and understand, making things easier for them to find, avoid wasting their time and patience, avoid causing confusion and irritation. Besides fluent navigation, an important element related to site navigation is the leading path, designing the content in such a way that it will give control of visitors' navigation path. (McFedries 2008, 112, 121, 139-140; Teixeira 2010, 351.)

Elements such as margins, header and footer are a must-have today`s websites with the purpose to make the users` navigation easy. These elements are used to make a specific site content more visible or less visible, in order to create less confusion and easier to absorb overall page content. A header is the area at the top of each site page, which should be especially used for making the site`s title more visible, its icon/logo, and links to the main areas of the site. A footer is the area at the bottom of each site page, which is used for making less visible some of the page content, for instance the *Contact Us* information. A margin is used to be purely decorative, or to highlight a certain content through site page. (McFedries 2008, 49-62.)

Making the reader feel welcome is another feature which should not be left out when designing a successful website (McFedries 2008, 112). It is similar to that *Welcome* doormat that many people place on the very entrance of their home to make their guests feel at home. The same applies about a website which represents the digital domicile and the readers which represent the guests. Although in case of the website is a bit more complex, as it is needed to create a virtual welcome mat. Features such as *Thank You* page(s) and users *Feedback* tool would do the work (McFedries 2008, 127; Teixeira 2010, 119). Including a *Thank You* page seems like a very small detail but the impact on the customer is bigger than it looks. One of the service design principles is about taking care of the customer till the end of his journey, and this end is not always when the service is concluded. The post-service is a crucial stage which needs design focus while creating a service. A post-service element that should be applied in a service design is the visitor/user feedback. No website is perfect, so all websites need customer feedback to improve, thus, including a feedback tool in the website is a great, inexpensive, and intelligent way to improve it (Teixeira (2010, 12). Besides, it will give satisfaction to the visitors/users as it will make them count.

McFedries (2008, 112-113) says that a well-designed website is about the design of the content itself because the content is the king, means that the designer need to think carefully about what to say in there, to make every site page a unique experience for its users. As content means text; words and phrases are the tools that the designer has to use carefully and in a smart way to make the content have a particular impact on the user. This particular impact will lead him to take those particular expected actions, such as read further, navigate more, sign up, use the service, give positive feedback to others, become a loyal customer, and so on. The main features to integrate in the content are: write about topics that interest you, write with passion, write in your own voice, and tell stories – a narrative that captures the imagination of readers and leaves them looking for more (McFedries (2008, 114).

Website information architecture is another element which is quite complex and needs special focus from the designer. Information architecture of a website is about dividing the content and information into web pages; web pages are the basic unit of a website, and every website is a collection of one or more pages. MacDonald (2011, 19) explains that *"…the ideal web page strikes a balance: It avoids the lonely feeling caused by too much white space, as well as the stress induced by an avalanche of information*". McFedries (2008, 122), suggests using the *principle of one-topic-one-page* when designing website information architecture. This principle means dedicating a separate page for each topic. This way of organizing content and information will make the reading more convenient for the visitors/users by familiarizing them faster with the website, perceive the service proposition better, and understand how the service works more easily. The problem within applying this rule is about creating long pages when the represented topics are particularly long. There are two main disadvantages with lengthy web pages. The first one is about possible technical issues as those files can take too long to load, especially if accessing the web from a slow connection, and increases the risk that the users will abandon the site instead of waiting. The second one is about scrolling through endless screens of text as they become hard to navigate and tend to be confusing for the reader. In order to avoid these pitfalls, dividing large topics into smaller subtopics and assigning each one a separate page should be considered. Then, when necessary, breaking up a text into reasonable-size sections and make smart use of headers to identify each section. (McFedries 2008, 122-123.)

After dividing the website content into pages and sub-pages, the following challenge is about what to include in each page, about which are the most important elements within a page. A *title tag* for each page is a must-have to identify them from each other and also to give a hint about the content of the page. But this element is somehow limited as only a few words can be used in a title tag. Thus, another element is necessary to support the purpose of title tags, the *headings*. Including on every page a corresponding heading which determines what the page content is about, through a concise and clear sentence. Another additional element which might become helpful for this purpose, is the *introductory paragraph* which can be included below the web page heading. (McFedries 2008, 10, 126, 128.)

All these elements mentioned in the above paragraph are crucial, but not enough to design a successful website. The other big challenge in website design is about designing the relation between them, because a web is all about navigation. McFedries (2008, 112) says that "*Good site design means making things easy for your visitors to find… no user likes to waste time trying to find things on a page*". The core element to achieve this is web *links*; enabling the user to surf page-to-page via links in the most fluent and pleasant way possible. The right design from the navigation perspective is achieved by including links on each page and on each sub-page in a way that will make the reader follow the topic sequentially. The links are important "arrows" in a web design, and their purpose is to make the customer journey fluent, easy, fast, and why not also fun. Links seem to have the same importance on every page and sub-page. (McFedries 2008, 128-130; MacDonald 2011, 213-216.) Actually, this element is more of a core element to the *Home* page of the website. McFedries (2008, 123) advices to tie everything together with the website home page, as most of the time this is the starting point of the visitors` journey and they should be able to navigate to almost anywhere on the site starting from there.

While designing a website, another element to think of is time, and most importantly the customers` time. A good service is a service which offers to the customers the right thing at the right time, means *what and when* they need. A good service is a service which offers

to the customers time efficiency while using it, means that it does not waste customers` time. Both statements apply for a good website which delivers a digital service. Besides the core elements for having good information architecture and fluent navigation, there are some additional elements which the professionals' advice to apply to save customers` time. One advice is to display the most important things of the website in eye-catching ways, in terms of location and layout. For instance, placing them on the top of the page where readers are more likely to see and if possible keep them visible while they scroll down the page (especially if the page is long), use large size fonts and contrast color fonts for headings and other important information (also contrast background colors), use navigation elements which enable the user not only to go forward but also backwards (the user should easily find his way back to Home page, to a parent page when he is currently located on a sub-page).

The layout elements are also relevant, as they define a website to be visually attractive or not. To avoid designing an ugly website there are some features to be avoided, such as ugly backgrounds that make the text hard to read, colors that clash with each other, and excessive use of fonts. After making sure to avoid all these, there is a core element about a website layout: *consistency*. Designing a consistent layout involves using the same or similar information architecture in as much pages as possible (especially in pages with similar nature of content), using the same or similar color scheme on each page, place important elements not only on every page but also in the same spot on every page. (McFedries 2008, 112, 124-125.)

After being supplied with so many elements to integrate in the website design, there is still one important guidance to keep in mind while designing a website. Both McFedries and Teixeira in their books advice on keeping the website content simple in order not to annoy the visitors; the website elements which have no purpose should be excluded. This guidance creates a conflict inside the designer about what is too much and what is too less to have in the website design.

All the above-mentioned elements are integrated in the high-fidelity-prototype designed for the website service of this study. The process is described in Appendix V.

7.3 Low-Fidelity Prototyping

In this study, low-fidelity-level prototypes have been built based on outcomes from the research work and service proposition development, and by applying co-creative generative and evaluative methods with test-users.

The initial work of this service design stage has been the build-up of two different low-fidelity prototypes, which are identified in the following as low-fidelity-prototype-A and low-fidelity-prototype-B. The low-fidelity-prototype-A creation was based on the results generated by the method of *flexible modelling using card sorting*, which was applied during a workshop with two expats as test-users. Based on this workshop outcomes, screen renderings of a website interface design have been created. Microsoft Excel was the tool used to build-up this prototype. Low-fidelity-prototype-B creation was based on the outcome generated by desk research for service precedents. By using Microsoft Word, screen renderings of a website interface design have been created. Both low-fidelity-prototypes, A and B, are shown in Appendix III.

7.3.1 Flexible Modelling Using Card Sorting

Flexible modeling method by using the card sorting technique was a good starting point to generate options about information structuring, and to identify different schemas for organizing the website navigation structure. Card sorting has provided a mean for the service users to organize the information to be presented in the ALinAL website in a way that makes sense to them. This method has supported this study by understanding how users want this large country information database to be organized, by identifying how they perceive and describe different groups of information, and by generating several possible ideas for primary, secondary, and tertiary navigation categories.

In the following, there is an overview of the workshop which was conducted to apply flexible modeling with card sorting, as a participatory design method with users. The objective of this workshop was to make the participants view the content items of the website which were pre-determined by the service designer, and then group these items into categories, arranging and labeling groups for helping to identify a logical structure. Their comments while sorting the cards were very valuable insights for analysis and information architecture creation.

The first step for me as a service designer and workshop moderator was to prepare the cards. The items included in the cards were reflecting the fieldwork research, were about those results coming from the synthesis with word cloud method and brainstorming web method (refer to sub-chapter 4.2 and sub-chapter 4.5). Preparation of cards consisted on listing each of these items on a separate index card. The items on these cards would reflect the information type to be included in the ALinAL website. This service consists of a large amount of information; thus, the cards could have been quite a lot. It was thought that too many cards might make participants feel frustrated even before starting the sorting and tired while they sort out the cards, thus risking an unproductive workshop. In line with this thinking, the number of prepared cards had a certain limitation. The coming challenge while preparing the cards was to have a vast variety type of information to avoid excluding crucial information categories. Thus, in the type of information listed in the cards were mostly about probable information to belong primary and/or secondary categories, and the type of information belonging to similar content was limited into a few. For instance, *Repair Services* card represents a possible primary category. Furthermore, *Cinemas* and *Theatres* cards have similar type of information thus it was possible to represent the same group, and other similar type of information such as art *exhibitions*, *opera*, and more has been left out. As these similarities are clear, they were added in the information architecture by the designer in the next stage of prototyping. To each card, including the blank cards, a unique number to help identify them easily and to record the sorting at the end of the session is given.

For this workshop it was decided to do card sorting with a group of participants working together at the same time instead of individual workshops. This decision was made by thinking that a group will probably talk more with each other, thus enhancing the benefits of think aloud technique by gathering more users' insights. To find participants for this workshop, the users' database created from previous research was used. During the survey research conducted with online questionnaires distributed to direct individual channels (personal Facebook inbox), there were some expats who expressed their availability to support this study further if needed. Five expats received an invitation for this workshop and only two could attend. One of them offered his work office as a location for the workshop. In the office there was a big table which was offering enough room to spread

the cards out, so all cards were visible to the test-users. The workshop took place on January 27, 2018.

The workshop started by showing to the users the set of cards, describing clearly and briefly the service proposition, and explaining that they were required to find what categories of information should be on the site's webpages and how those categories should be named/labeled. Several blank cards were provided to the users for adding other type of information or for labeling the crated groups of information. The participants were asked to spread all the cards out on the table in order to let them get familiar with the types of information the cards contain. Afterwards, it was suggested to start by sorting cards one-on-one to see what groupings of cards make sense to them, and then defining a name for each grouping. It was clarified that they can set cards aside if the information type doesn't fit within a group. When the participants finalized sorting the cards into different groups and sub-groups, they were asked to think how each group should be called, and to write down each group name on a blank card. The participants were asked to speak aloud their thoughts and when discussing with each other while they were working. While the participants were completing the card sorting, I was standing beside them, without interfering, to watch the groupings they were creating and to listen their comments. I was taking notes of their comments during the sorting session. At the end of the session, I have recorded the numbers of all the cards in each group under the number of the card labelling the group. This way, a written record of the card sort was provided. Based on these recorded results, I have proceeded with the prototyping design of low-fidelity-prototype A, as described in sub-chapter 7.3.2.

The information architecture created from users through the card sorting technique was a valuable starting point in the ALinAL website prototype designing, because its structure reflected the users desired workflow. Using the think-out-loud protocol gave me a wealth of additional information. For instance, when participants had doubts about where to place some cards their comments helped me to work out what alternative arrangements might be feasible, and when they were determined about some other cards then it gave me an increased confidence about their placement.

7.3.2 Parallel Prototyping

In this study, the parallel prototyping has been applied by creating two low-fidelity prototypes. After creating the low-fidelity-prototype-A based in flexible modelling with card sorting, the low-fidelity-prototype-B based in desk research of service precedents was created. The low-fidelity-prototype-B was inspired by gathered insights from this secondary research performed in earlier stages of the design process. As already mentioned in sub-chapter 4.4, there are two main types of existing services about expats, the impersonal/standard information service and the personal/customized service. The personal/customized service is an individual and interactive service offered as a consulting or coaching service. While the low-fidelity-prototype-A was representing the first type of service, the low-fidelity-prototype-B representing the consulting service was created. The idea behind was to create a very different parallel prototype which might represent an opponent service proposition to the original one. The purpose was to test the usability of the initial service proposition. An additional purpose was also to stimulate an out-of-the-box thinking for me as a designer and for the tests-users involved in the A/B testing method.

The service offered in the low-fidelity-prototype-B is about myself offering relocation consultancy services in Albania as a professional Service Designer. This service package was structured in four groups and titled as follows: *Pre-departure* services, *Settling-in* services, *Integration* services, and *It`s Time to Leave* services. Based on literature review outcome, these four groups of services are aiming to represent the most challenging transition stages for expats. In each of these four groups, services for supporting the most common issues that expats face in each of these transition stages were included. These individual services within each group provide support for expatriating common issues, such as finding accommodation, get to know the country systems, getting familiar with local people customs and values, supporting with necessary arrangements when leaving the country at the end of their expatriating time in Albania, and so on. The design of these individual services was based on gathered insights and generated conclusions during the forerunning stage of research. Furthermore, other services were designed based on the empathic approach toward the users, by offering emotional support beside practical support, such as *Let`s talk about Culture Shock* service and *Let`s talk about Reverse Culture Shock* service. The empathic voice of the service, as a key element for a website design, has been included in the prototype design through its service proposition description, stated in the following sentences: "*My personal expat experience enables me to have the necessary empathy for understanding your situation and my Service Design knowledge provides me with the expertise to help you with it.*" Another important element which was involved in the design of low-fidelity-prototype-B was one of the underlying goals of the design process in this study: the *co-designing* - designing with people, not just for them. This important goal has influenced the creation of the service titled *Understanding your individual needs and preferences*, which is offered to the user at the very beginning, before his departure to Albania. This service was thought to be a must-have service for better tailoring the other following services that the user might order to use. In other words, this particular service will play the role of a leading service to the upcoming services, because these services will be customized based on the outcome generated from understanding the customer needs and preferences. Another feature of this service, which reflects the co-design underlying goal, is the flexibility offered to the users to build their own individual service package according to their unique needs and situation. This service design idea is implying the wide diversity of the service users. This feature of the service has been included in the prototype design through its service proposition description, stated in the following sentences: "*I propose a personalized service where you can choose among the services I do offer by tailoring yourself the service package that fits best to your unique needs and situation.*" and "*My belief is that every transition experience is as unique as you are…*".

The price for such service is thought to be somehow expensive as it is a direct service to one user and it is customized to its individual needs and preferences. Thus, the low-fidelity-prototype-B is designed as a more exclusive and expensive service than the service offered in the low-fidelity-prototype-A.

7.3.3 A/B Testing combined with Desirability Testing

After creating two parallel low-fidelity prototypes, the following work for this study was the engagement of users in the evaluation process by using the combination of two methods, A/B testing with desirability testing. The users involved in this work were three expats living in Albania, who has been involved already before in the research stage by

responding to the distributed online questionnaire. These users have been offering since then their availability to help further with this study. Two of them were expatriating alone in Albania for work reasons, and the third one has joined her expatriate spouse together with her little daughter. The test took place separately with each of them in a quiet cafeteria in the city, on February 7, 8 and 10, 2018. The usability test was performed by using the think-aloud protocol. Beforehand, to the test-users it was provided some of the service precedents which were discovered during the desk research (refer to sub-chapter 4.4) and it was asked to navigate those websites for getting familiar with the types of services that already exist. This step was thought to be useful for giving them a competition perspective and evaluate the innovativeness in the new service to be designed.

The users were asked to navigate first the low-fidelity-prototype-A and then the low-fidelity-prototype-B. The test-users were asked to navigate the prototypes by thinking of themselves back in time when they were still in their home country and about to move to Albania, then about the very first months after arrival. These two moment represents the pre-departure stage of the expatriating journey and the following stages right before reaching the recovery stage. Next, the test-users were asked to navigate the prototypes by thinking of those needs and issues they were having during that time. Before starting the navigation, they were provided with a list of features to be examined during the test and they were asked to say out-load what they feel and think with reference to these features. These features list are considered to be quite relevant to a successful website design by referring to professional books (refer to sub-chapter 7.2.2). The users were asked to evaluate each website prototype, A and B, and determine what and why it was not effective or pleasant to navigate. They were asked to express aloud all the relevant thoughts and emotions they were getting while navigating, and to rank them accordingly.

During the test, the test-users feedback has been registered by keeping notes. While navigating through the prototype sites A and B, it became apparent from the users' comments that there were multiple factors in each prototype which were probable to contribute to its lack of success. Beside these negative quotations there were also positive ones which highlighted the core elements of their success. All the received feedback was synthetized in a comparison list, as shown in Table 1. This comparison list includes the features provided to the test-users before the test, which are written with red color, and other features that they have added during the test.

Table 1. Results of A/B Testing combined with Desirability Testing.

Comparison List

Service Features	Low-fidelity Prototype A	Low-fidelity Prototype B	Ranking		
			Test-user 1	Test-user 2	Test-user 3
About Us	Missing	Clear	B	B	B
Access to host country information	Faster and flexible on time	Need to wait for appointment	A	A	A
Attractiveness to use the service	Moderate	High	B	B	B

Convenience	Receiving the service from everywhere at anytime	Receiving the service on scheduled time at a certain arrange place	A	A	A
Contact Us	Missing	Present and visible	B	B	B
Service delivery frequence	Unlimited	Only once	A	A	A
Innovativeness versus service precedents	Host country information	Design of service	A	B	B
Information architecture	Not a convenient ratio between primary, secondary, and tertiary levels	Pleasant because is matching the user sequence of events/journey	B	A	B
Keywords	Sterile/Generic	Catching attention	B	B	B
Navigation flow leading	Missing	Present	B	B	B
Price	Affordable	Expensive	A	A	A
Quantity of provided information	Very wide	Limited	A	A	A
Service proposition statement/s	Not enough	Enough	B	B	B
Target customers	Unclear, narrow	Clear and addressed to all potential users	B	B	B
Trustworthiness	Low	High	B	B	B
User wasted time	Unavoidable as user need to search on his own	Efficient as the user receives exactly what he needs/asks for right away	B	B	B
Total ranking	17 times	31 times			

While creating prototype-A, the service was thought as one-way service which does not require the customer to contact the service provider for having the service delivered, and that the users do not want to lose time reading an *About Us* section. Test-users remarked the lack of *Contact Us* information and *About Us* page in prototype-A, which are present, clear, and visible in prototype-B. The lack of an *About Us* page (the missing information about the service provider and related photos) and the sterile content (a missing voice, little / poor service statements) in prototype-A, made test-users perceive less trustworthiness in comparison to prototype-B. They commented that prototype-A shows a generic-looking website that lacks credibility and looks fake to them. The presence of these features in prototype-B seemed to increase the trustworthiness of the user about the service, by getting to know who is behind this service. Prototype-A was including a narrative about the service provider professional background and life experience, which was ensuring an empathic service to the users.

Prototype-B was ranked as being more attractive then prototype-A from all test-users. This prototype was more satisfying to the test-users because of the aesthetic layout, the presence

of keywords which catch attention, having enough service proposition statements, and the presence of call-to action phrases.

Furthermore, the *Homepage* of prototype-A does not describe who is its target customer. Meanwhile, prototype-B service proposition statement is clear, direct and addressing to all potential users with its very first statement: "*Planning to move to Albania for professional or personal reasons*?".

Regarding convenience of using the service and received access about host country information, all test-users ranked prototype-A as they can use this access faster, wherever, and whenever from their computer. Instead, prototype-A is limited as the service can be delivered by appointment from the service provider, so not having the time and place flexibility as much as delivered service in prototype-A. The same ranking was about the quantity of provided information and its frequency, because in prototype-B the information range offered by its services is limited and it is delivered only once (the service provider delivers the service once when meeting the user). However, test-users ranked prototype-B regarding the user time efficiency (wasted time when the user is receiving the service), because to get the needed/required information they have to waste time searching for it (navigating for long time) in prototype-A while the service in prototype-B delivers the required service right away.

Even though prototype-A was ranked about the quantity of provided information, prototype-B was mostly ranked (2 out of 3) regarding information architecture. They commented that they like how the information in prototype-A is organized into groups and sub-groups, but it is not easy to navigate, and gets very overwhelming to find particular information. They mentioned that prototype-A has very less primary levels, too much secondary levels, and sometimes very few tertiary levels. Instead, navigating prototype-B was much more pleasant as its matching the user sequence of events/journey. This also makes them feel closer and more familiar with the service. Prototype-A is missing the leading path of navigation for the user in its design. This feels more present in prototype-B. Prototype-A is offering a large amount of host country information which covers almost all the needs of a person moving to the host country. Meanwhile, prototype-B is designed to offer a customer journey which fits the expatriating journey. According to the test-users, each of these features bring innovation when compared to existing similar services for expats. The service of prototype-B has been ranked more (2 out of 3) about the innovativeness feature.

Regarding the price levels, the test-users' comments referring to the prototype-B were about a quite expensive service for many users to afford. Thus, they ranked only prototype-A regarding the price level because it represents a service which could have many users than the service of prototype-B.

Overall, low-fidelity-prototype-A website was representing a very useful service because of its substantial and large content with lots of information about the host country, and about being convenient and affordable. Although, it was commented about being a bit sterile and generic because it was lacking in stimulating emotional quality, which was commented to be much more present in low-fidelity-prototype-B. According to the quantitative outcome, prototype-B seems to be more successful as it was the most desired from test-users in comparison to prototype-A. Prototype-B has been ranked 31 times in comparison to prototype-A which has been ranked 17 times, as shown in the total ranking in Table 1. This test outcome was very useful to understand the pitfalls of the service proposition and to its design. As it was difficult to integrate all the prototype-B desired

features into the prototype-A, it was decided to integrate the whole prototype-B service into the original service proposition.

7.4 High-Fidelity Prototyping

At this stage of design, a high-fidelity-level prototype based on the gathered insights from the low-fidelity-level prototyping stage has been built. Tree model technique and Microsoft Excel tool supported the high-fidelity-level prototype creation. This study does not include the final work in the service design process, the high-fidelity prototype test and evaluation and the service implementation. Instead, methods such as business model canvas and customer journey, have been used to describe the business model behind the service and to give some guidance in case of service implementation.

7.4.1 Microsoft Excel for Effective Prototyping

The tool used for creating the high-fidelity prototype in this study is Microsoft Excel. The purpose of turning Excel into a prototyping tool is about showing how a software such as Microsoft Excel can be used in service design for effective prototyping; Microsoft Excel can be efficient, creative, visual, and easy to use for design work as it is efficient, accurate, analytical, and easy to use for data processing in other disciplines. Another important advantage for choosing Excel as a design tool instead of online tools is about keeping safe the confidentiality of the service design idea and project; by working with online tools there is no absolute assurance that the provider will not steal our ideas, publish our work, and so on. In addition, this prototyping tool is inexpensive thus the prototyping stage of this study will benefit from having no cost limitation. (Berger, Arent, Arnowitz & Sampson 2009, 5-16.) All the above arguments are the source of motivation for using Microsoft Excel as a prototyping tool for this service design. The process of building the high-fidelity prototype of this service website by using Microsoft Excel is described in Appendix V. The prototype itself is provided as a link in Appendix V.

Tree Model technique

Before starting to build the prototype in excel spreadsheets, the *tree model* technique to build a rough draft of the website anatomy was used. This work includes creation of several drawings till getting a final version to be used as a starting point for building the prototype with Microsoft Excel. This rough draft is shown in Figure 34, and in Appendix IV.

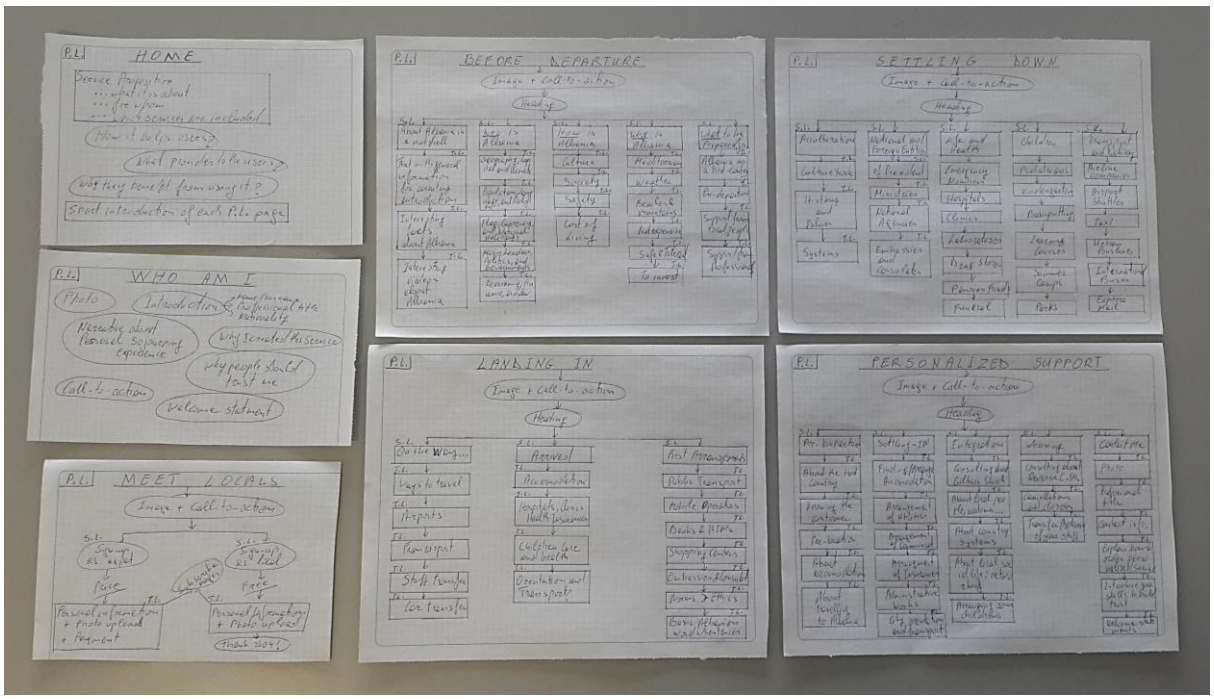


Figure 34. Tree model of website anatomy as a rough draft for prototyping.

The initial service concept was about a digital country information database mostly about the logistic matters. Some findings from questionnaire states that 73% of respondent did not receive any cross-cultural training before departure, and 85% of them tried to gather information by themselves before arrival. These results generated the idea that besides the general information about the host country and about its logistics, the service should include also detailed information about the host country and about the culture shock. This way was created the concept of *Be aware of Culture Shock* section of information to be included in the service represented by low-fidelity-level-A, and this idea was also integrated in the consulting service represented by low-fidelity-level-B. The synthesis of online ethnography outcomes through the word cloud method, shows that networking is one of the most discussed topic among expatriates in Albania, representing one of the main challenges for them (refer to Figure 25). Based on service precedents research, the networking service expat-with-expat already exists in Albania. The existing gap of a networking service expat-with-local supported with the findings from literature review about how crucial role this relation has for a better adjustment of the expat, generated the idea of creating an exclusive networking service expat-with-local. This service would create facilities to expats for connecting with host country nationals (HCNs). The desk research for service precedents has found that very few of them had a combination of the information database service and consulting services. Thus, the combination of those two services, and in addition also the third service about networking with locals, was thought to give a competitive edge to this service.

So far in the design process has been created two prototypes for the service. Both of these prototypes were considered to be integrated in the final prototype. The tree model diagramming was thought to use one individual paper sheet for each webpage of the service website. The following steps refer to the principle of *one-topic-one-page* when designing website information architecture (McFedries 2008, 122).

The service represented by low-fidelity-prototype-B was thought to be assigned to one paper sheet. The content of this service was not very extended, thus including in one webpage would not create overload. On the other side, the service represented by low-

fidelity-prototype-A was thought to be assigned to several paper sheets, as due to its large information content the split into several webpages was necessary for avoiding to create overloaded individual webpages (McFedries 2008, 122-123). During the A/B testing with desirability testing, the test-users mentioned that prototype-A has very less primary levels, too much secondary levels, and sometimes very few tertiary levels. Instead, navigating prototype-B was much more pleasant as its matching the user sequence of events/journey. These insights generated the idea of rearranging the information architecture. The design thinking during the process has followed the expat customer journey. The generated idea was about creating three individual webpages representing the main stages of this journey: before departure, landing in, and settling down. Three individual paper sheets were assigned to each stage and labeled with the same name accordingly. For the website design it was important the amount of information that the user receives should not be overwhelming. The underlying goal: having the right conversation at the right time has generated the idea about the flow of the information among these three webpages. This thinking created the information architecture in these three webpages, by creating a leading path for the user of the service according to his needs in the expatriating journey. Next steps within each of these paper sheets was about organizing secondary and tertiary information mostly based in the work already done for creating low-fidelity-prototype-A. In each paper sheet was written a header representing the content of the related webpage. A new paper sheet was created to represent the About Us webpage. All the key elements mentioned in sub-chapter 7.2.2 were integrated in the design of this page. The same thinking created the Homepage, assigned in another paper sheet which was summarizing all the key elements for a well-designed Homepage to be integrated in the final prototype.

Considering customers coming from different culture backgrounds was the starting point of thinking about designing this service as flexible as possible to the customers` needs, for making its use the most convenient. For instance, customers coming from introvert culture countries will be less willing to use personalized services and networking services than customers coming from extrovert culture countries. Besides, individual differences might affect this choice as well. Thus, the generated idea was about creating a flexible service package by separating it in three main service: digital information database, meet locals, and personalized relocation service. This idea was also supported from the A/B test with desirability test findings, that those services belong to different customers` budgets. This way, the users can pay what they need and what they can afford.

7.4.2 Customer Journey

The Customer Journey (CJ) in this study is designed somehow differently from a typical model. The CJ in this study was created by referring to the U-curve model (Lysgaard, 1955) of the sojourner transition process. The CJ based on this model has already been designed at an earlier stage, as shown and described in sub-chapter 6.2. This CJ reflects all the psychological and emotional outcome of the sojourner while going through the process of sojourning in the host country (refer to Figure 31). This outcome, summarized as the sojourner well-being, is closely related to the adjustment degree of the sojourner into the host country. Thus, the measurement of this journey is done with those two parameters, well-being and adjustment degree, strongly correlated to each other, as described in details in chapter 3.

The main purpose of CJ design was to show how the ALinAL service might impact the customer journey, and to visualize this impact by using the U-curve model. The CJ design

is blending the ALinAL service use touchpoints with the customer experience outcome. The customer using the service is one of the created personas which is described in sub-chapter 6.1, named Vanessa. The service use touchpoints refer to the high-fidelity prototype built for this service. The customer experience outcome is generated based in the gained knowledge from the literature review. The CJ design is using the U-curve model to visualize the impact of the ALinAL service into the customer journey experience. This is shown by bringing together two different U-curve diagrams in CJ design. The CJ design is shown in Figure 35, and further details are included in Appendix VI. In CJ design, the first diagram represents the customer journey without using the ALinAL service. It is visualized with a dashed line in brown color, and later in the text is referred as the *U-curve-without-service-use*. The second diagram represents the customer journey when using the ALinAL service. It is visualized with solid line in blue color, and later in the text is referred as the *U-curve-with-service-use*.

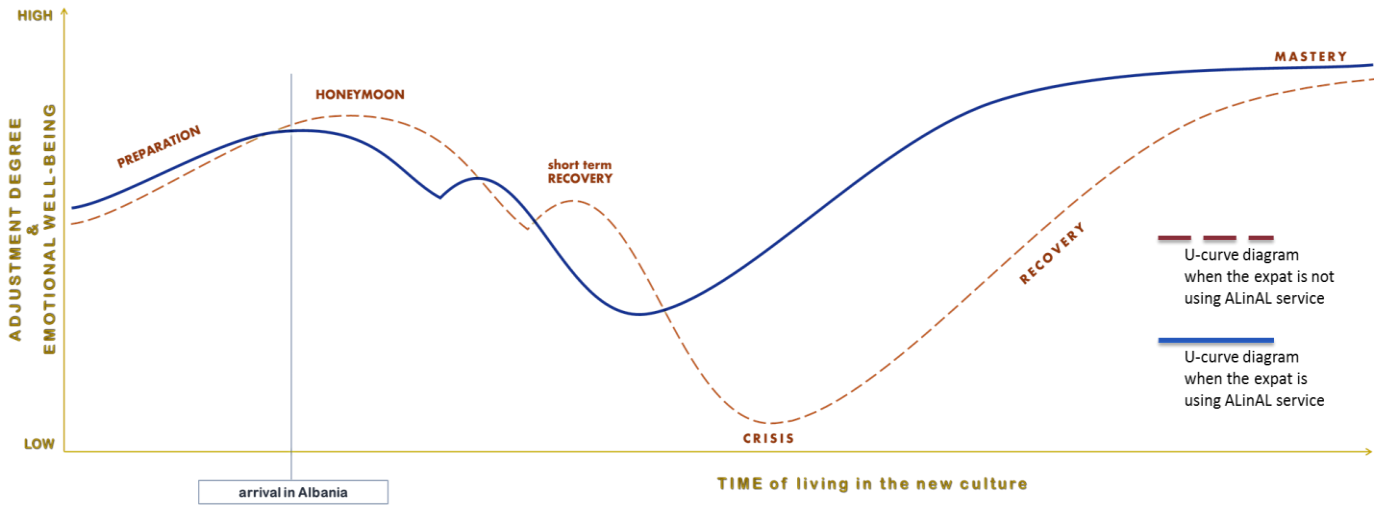


Figure 35. The Customer Journey design based on the U-curve Model.

The CJ is designed based on the customer use of several service touchpoints, and lays in all the service stages, from the customer awareness (pre-service) till the customer leaving the service (post-service). The CJ design includes detailed outcomes and benefits by using ALinAL service from the customer`s experience perspective. These outcomes and benefits are visualized by the U-curve diagrams, the *U-curve-without-service-use* versus the *U-curve-with-service-use*. The comparison between these two U-curve diagrams interprets the meaningful improvement of customer journey from the ALinAL service usage, shown in each stage of the journey. From the CJ design it is noticeable that the *U-curve-with-service-use* is flatter (vertically) and narrower (horizontally) than the *U-curve-without-service-use*. This means that the sojourner transition process, the customer experience, has improved by using the ALinAL service. The detailed description of CJ is provided in Appendix VI. In the following paragraph of this sub-chapter, a general description which shows the big picture of how the ALinAL use impacts the customer journey experience is provided.

Pre-departure

The ALinAL service has the power to influence the expat experience even before arriving in the host country, in the so-called pre-departure (or preparation) stage of the expatriating

process. Using the ALinAL service before arrival in the host country, gives the expat three crucial benefits: supports the decision-making about moving to the host country, builds-up adequate expectations about the host country, and lessens the burden of matters to solve before departure. When the decision of moving is not coming from outside but is the expat`s decision to make the change, the ALinAL service is useful to provide the expat with all the needed information to get to know Albania properly, its culture and its people. Other additional information, such as safety and cost of living, are crucial information that every expat would search for and consider for making the decision of moving to this host country or not. Also, having this information for making comparison with other host countries involved in his decision-making. This support by the ALinAL service leads to less frustration for expats in the decision-making process. Later on, after arrival in the host country, this gained information about the host country decreases the risk of disappointment and expatriating failure. Receiving the correct information about the host country enables the expat to build up expectations which are close to the reality. Those adequate expectations are inhibiting him to hold himself in some sort of illusions about the host country which will turn into disillusions once he arrives there. After making the decision to move, there are many matters needed to be handled by the expat before the day of his departure. The expat`s overload before departure is about matters of leaving the home country (e.g. closing bank accounts, packing, selling furniture, etc.), matters of transport and delivery to host country (e.g. convenient travelling alternatives, transporting/delivering the personal items, etc.), and matters of necessary arrangement in the host country before arrival (e.g. arranging accommodation for having a place to stay as soon as arrived in the host country, etc.). The expat who receives the support from using the ALinAL service, will be less frustrated and with less matters to deal with, giving him the benefit of continuing his life routine (e.g. still having time to go to the gym), having less stress (e.g. no overload and worries to disturb his sleep), celebrating the old-life good bye (e.g. meeting with family and friends, having a farewell party). This way, the expat`s well-being will be at a higher level when using the ALinAL service than when not using it. In figure 35, this is shown by the diagram representing the *U-curve-with-service-use* which is in a higher-level of well-being (in vertical axis) than the diagram representing the *U-curve-without-service-use*.

Honeymoon

At this stage, the diagram representing the *U-curve-with-service-use* in CJ design (Figure 35) shows a lower well-being level (in vertical axis) for the ALinAL service user. At a glance this seems to be a negative impact of the ALinAL service in the customer experience, but in fact it is not. Based on gathered insights from the literature review, the stages of the transition process are well-connected, and the experience in each stage plays its own role in the time span of the transition process and its severity. Every stage is affected by the experiences carried out from the previous stages, making the stages having a domino effect in the whole transition process. In the *honeymoon stage*, the build-up expectation while being in the *pre-departure stage* are a key factor about how this stage is experienced, and most importantly how this experience will determine the experiences of the following stages: *pre-recovery*, *crisis*, *recovery*, and *mastery*. The expat who has built up adequate expectations about the host country by using proper information from the ALinAL service, is more realistic and will not be overwhelmed by any exaggerated euphoria about being in the host country. For that reason, his emotional status will not have a drastic oscillation, and he benefits by having stable emotions and a good well-being balance. Furthermore, when the *honeymoon stage* is over, the drop-down from this initial euphoria will be in less degree, the well-being decrease is diminished. In CJ design, this is

reflected with the *U-curve-with-service-use* diagram which is flatter (vertically) than the *U-curve-without-service-use* diagram. Overall, the expat`s well-being has been preserved by keeping it in a tighter range, thus more balanced. The main negative emotional elements, such as disillusionment from the host country and disappointment from oneself, are not claimed to be totally prevented from the ALinAL service user experience, but this service has the power for diminishing them.

Pre-recovery (including *short-term recovery* and *crisis*)

For the expat who is using the ALinAL service, the *honeymoon stage* will finish earlier because of an accelerated adjustment. As consequence, this little kick of *recovery stage* named *short-term recovery*, which is very common to appear before the *crisis stage* starts, will start earlier for him than for the expat who is not using the service. This is again due to the domino effect of the transition process stages. The drop-down experience from the *honeymoon stage* is less severe, less deep, thus the expat well-being level at the end of the stage is higher if using the ALinAL service, and so does the start of the *pre-recovery stage*. This is shown in CJ design with a bump of *short-term recovery stage* in the U-curve diagram, which stand higher in the vertical axis and appears earlier (in horizontal axis) for the *U-curve-with-service-use* diagram than for the *U-curve-without-service-use* diagram. As a consequence, the expat well-being in this stage is higher from using the service and the adjustment is more accelerated. The ALinAL service impacts the customer journey by not keeping the expat too long in the *honeymoon* and *pre-recovery stage*, which means that this service has power in moving the expat faster through his transition process. Even if it does not sound very beneficial to not have these nice-to-experience stages (*honeymoon stage* and *short-term recovery stage*) for long while using the ALinAL service, considering the big picture the expat is moving forward in the transition process faster than in case of not using the service. Not being stuck for too long in these stages brings benefit in better dealing with the upcoming stages: *crisis* and *recovery*.

Crisis

For the expat who used the ALinAL service, this service has had an impact on the carried experience from the previous stages of *preparation*, *honeymoon*, and *pre-recovery*. The continued support of this service offered to expat about dealing with all sorts of challenges in the *crisis stage*, will benefit him from suffering less *culture shock* and a shorter *crisis stage*. This impact is shown in the *U-curve-with-service-use* diagram which is flatter and narrower than the *U-curve-without-service-use* diagram. The *U-curve-with-service-use* diagram shows a less deep fall of expat well-being and a negative peak in an upper level than shown from the *U-curve-without-service-use* diagram. In other words, the expat`s well-being will be more intact when using the ALinAL service than without using it, and the result is a diminished suffering from the *culture shock*. The ALinAL service accomplishes this impact on the customer journey experience in several ways, such as by increasing expat awareness, by helping to sort out all the practical challenges, and by providing social support.

Recovery

The expat who uses the ALinAL service leaves the *crisis stage* earlier and with a higher well-being level, and this determines a better experience in the upcoming stage, the

recovery stage. The *U-curve-with-service-use* diagram shows a higher well-being level during all the recovery stage accompanied with a better adjustment. Better terms of adjustment mean that the expat is in the right direction to have a complete acculturation, which determines the start of the *mastery stage*.

Mastery

The *mastery stage* starts when the *recovery stage* ends. The expat who uses the ALinAL service has the benefit of enjoying this stage earlier and being in a much better health condition, both physical and mental. In CJ design, this is shown by the *U-curve-with-service-use* diagram which stand higher in the vertical axis than the *U-curve-without-service-use* diagram. Also, the *U-curve-with-service-use* diagram shows an earlier start of the *mastery stage* in the horizontal axis. This means that the ALinAL service has the power to make its expat-user reaching a higher level of well-being and much faster. Instead, the expat who is not receiving the support from ALinAL service might reach the same level of well-being in the *mastery stage*, but with a delay; he will experience it in his journey at a much later period of time.

Overall Transition Process

The impact of the ALinAL service in the U-curve model diagram is about making it flatter and narrower. The U-curve diagram generated from the user experience of the ALinAL service, is showing that the well-being of its user is not suffering drastic changes. Instead, the expat`s well-being is moving within a narrowed range, and this is important to keep a healthy balance in his emotional and psychological status, which often affects also the physiological status. Also, the average level of the expat`s well-being shows to be on a higher level while using the service. The negative peaks of well-being level go less deep down when the service is used. The accelerated adjustment due to the use of the ALinAL service means a faster and easier acculturation process. This means that the expat will succeed in having a complete acculturation earlier in time.

7.4.3 Analysis of the Expatriating Journey

The process of acculturation is not an easy one, and it affects everyone differently. Many expats struggle through this process, and it is at this point that the ALinAL service can help. The goal of the ALinAL service is to provide a helping hand for making the transition less stressful and more productive. This sub-chapter is about measuring the ALinAL service proposition by highlighting its core features which generate meaningful added value for its potential users, the sojourners in Albania. The following analysis is expected to bring enough evidence to gain assurance for success and worthiness to go on with the implementation of this service design.

Based on the outcomes from the literature review, if the expat`s own culture is very different from the host culture, then the challenges to recognize and understand the proper behavior models are bigger. People use their own culture, what they already know, to identify the new culture. But if there is not much to match, then the process is very difficult and frustrating, as he will be in the state of unknow-the-unknow for long. It will take time for the expat to know a new culture, especially when it is so different to his own culture.

As already explained previously in sub-chapter 3.2.1, the main factors of culture in a country are its *history*, *values* and *systems*. Thus, these three factors can be considered key factors which impact on the adjustment process. The ALinAL service will provide help to expats in getting familiar with the Albanian history, values and systems as soon as having arrived in Albania (refer to webpage *Settling Down*, URL path *Acculturation / History and Values* and *Systems* in the high-fidelity prototype, shown in Appendix V). As sooner the expat knows-the-unknown the easier the acculturation; the adjustment stage will last for a shorter period of time and with a reduced culture shock.

In sub-chapter 3.2.6, how *willingness to establish relationships* and *self-efficacy* have strong influence in experiencing the transition process has been explained. The higher those features in the sojourner personality the less severe the transition process will be, and as a consequence he will have a less unpleasant sojourning experience.

As already mentioned, the shift from culture shock to adjustment is a function of the individual's ability to learn and reproduce new behaviors. High self-efficacy and willingness to establish relationships means increased attention and observation from the sojourner of those new behavior models in the host country, from HCNs or other sources. However, just having willingness to establish relationships is not always enough to establish relationships, places and ways reaching other people plays an important role. The same stands for self-efficacy as just having it is not always enough if the sources providing the new behavior models are missing or are limited. From this SLT perspective the ALinAL service increases self-efficacy by providing guidance about appropriate behavior models in the new culture, the Albanian culture (refer to webpage *Settling Down*, URL path *Acculturation / History and Values / Behavior Models* in the high-fidelity prototype, shown in Appendix V). For example, the new comer in the host country knows that he is making mistakes and is exhibiting inappropriate behavior, but he does not know what appropriate behaviors to substitute for the inappropriate ones (known-the-unknown). This will take him on suffering the typical symptoms of culture shock, such as frustration, anxiety, anger, and more. The ALinAL service can turn the unknown into the-known for its users. The ALinAL service provides the right conditions for expats willing to establish relationships with HCNs. The ALinAL provides to expats the access for networking with HCNs; it offers a facilitating service to help them establish those relationships (refer to webpage *Meet Locals*). This networking service also supports users' self-efficacy, as HCNs are a good source for new modeled behavior.

Beside individual key factors influencing the journey, there are also society key factors, such as *social support*. The ALinAL service provides social support to sojourners in Albania, by offering *informational support* (refer to webpages *Before Departure*, *Landing In*, and *Settling Down* in the high-fidelity prototype, shown in Appendix V), through which they can also reach the *instrumental support* (e.g. babysitting, medical care, furniture arrangement, repair services, etc.) by providing contact details of the third parties services (refer to webpage *Settling Down*) and also gain *emotional support* (for instance, the content design of the website has in its focus to make the users welcomed and supported, and motivated them through the process). In addition, the individual customized services offered by the ALinAL service (refer to webpage *Personalized Support*, in the high-fidelity prototype shown in Appendix V) provides exclusive social support to the user in the most challenging steps of its journey. By providing these kinds of support, the ALinAl service is likely to increase the expat`s psychological well-being.

Awareness through *anticipatory adjustment* is one of the key factors influencing the transition process. Based on SLT, the measurement of anticipatory adjustment

effectiveness is performed through two features of information provided in making anticipatory adjustments: *accuracy* and *form*. If the utilized information is inaccurate, then the individual would perform inadequate behaviors in the host country. If the information is accurate but its form is not, the way the information is displayed to the individual is failing to catch his attention and retention, this information will not accomplish the individual`s reproduction objective, thus the individual will fail to perform adequate behaviors in the new culture. The accurate information and the proper form of information leads to greater anticipatory adjustments, and this will lessen the culture shock severity during adjustment in the new culture. There are several sources which might build-up awareness through anticipatory adjustments, coming from the individual himself, such as his own previous international experiences, and from third parties, such as HR trainings, private consulting and coaching. These sources providing anticipatory adjustment to the individuals, will make it possible to increase their attention to information and retention of information which will result in a successful reproduction processes of adequate behaviors in the new culture. This will in turn shorten the honeymoon and culture shock stages of adjustment. (Black & Mendenhall 1990/1991, 241-242.)

Another alternative for expats moving to Albania will be using the ALinAL service before departure. Understanding the stages of the expatriate adjustment lifecycle is at the core of the ALinAL service. The purpose of the ALinAL is to provide the expat with the powerful tool of awareness, and this starts already in the pre-departure stage (refer to webpage *Before Departure,* and webpage *Personalized Support* in section *Pre-departure Services,* in the high-fidelity prototype shown in Appendix V). Of course, even a short trip in the host country before moving will be helpful (refer to webpage *Personalized Support,* path *Pre-departure Services / Pre-location tour,* in the high-fidelity prototype shown in Appendix V). But to make it more convenient for the sojourner, the ALinAL service provides that needed support before the expat`s departure from the comfort of his home (refer to webpage *Before Departure,* in the high-fidelity prototype shown in Appendix V). The ALinAL service helps the expat being aware what to expect from the host country by providing the correct information about the country (provides accuracy of information), its culture and its people, and how things work. This information is presented in the right form by displaying the right amount and type of information that is needed at each stage of the journey, in order to avoid the user feeling overwhelmed which decreases user's attention to and retention of the information. The expat will be better prepared prior to arrival how to deal with the new surrounding and his new life challenges. All is about expectations, if things happen to be far from them, then the anxiety and stress will take over. The ALinAL service helps the expat to increase awareness and build the right expectations so the expat can deal better with the emotional changes which are inevitable when moving abroad.

Each stage gets nurtured by experiences of previous stages. So, the expat perception of the situation could be escalating in 'severity' as he goes through the phases. Each stage experience will impact the expat anticipation of future events. Negative experiences accumulated in previous stages and will make the coming stages longer and with higher negative amplitude, as the expats feels desperate, losing control over the situations, have a negative perception about himself and experience a negative journey. (Fisher 1999.) The ALinAL service design is focused on each of the stages by considering them having the same importance, and also its touchpoints sequence is in the same flow as these stages themselves during the expatriating journey. The ALinAL service is designed to serve the sojourners even before arriving in Albania, in the very first stage: Preparation (or Pre-departure stage). For this purpose, *Before Departure* webpage focus on that part of journey which happens before arrival in the host country. *Landing In* webpage focus starts with the matters happening with the travelling of the sojourner from the home country to the host

country (including the transport of his things, etc.) and continues with all the matters happening during his first months of the journey since the very first moment of his landing in the host country, represented by the stages of honeymoon, short-recovery, and crisis. The *Settling Down* webpage is that part of the service which provides the user with a large quantity of information about the transition process and the culture shock phenomenon (sub-section *Be Aware of Culture Shock* under section *Acculturation,* in the high-fidelity prototype shown in Appendix V), about the Albania history, values (sub-section *History and Values* under section *Acculturation,* in the high-fidelity prototype shown in Appendix VI), about Albania systems (sub-section *Systems* under section *Acculturation,* in the high-fidelity prototype shown in Appendix V), and about plenty of instrumental information serving to practical issues that the sojourner is facing on a daily basis in his life in Albania (sections Life and Health, Children, and so on, which gives access to third parties services related to these matters). As already mentioned in the literature review of this study, *acculturation* is the most suffering stage where the expat experiences the culture shock, and it can last from six to nine months, or for some expats, even one year and a half. For this reason, the ALinAL service has this stage in high focus. The design of the ALinAL service around the stages of expatriating journey will help expats to increase the positive outcome of each stage. The more positive the outcome, the more control the expat will perceive over the transition process, and the result will be a shift from a negative journey into a positive one (or at least less negative). The expat using the ALinAL service will have a transition process which stages last less and have lower amplitude then an expat not using the ALinAL service. In the U-curve theory perspective, the shape of the U-curve will be flatter and shorter in time. The ALinAL service will enable its users have adequate expectations about the host country, will make them aware of transition / change process and culture shock phenomenon and learn how to manage them. All these will result in having a low-amplitude of honeymoon stage for the user, less deep diving into the crisis stage, a quicker jump out of crisis into the recovery stage, and an easier adaption and integration stage by reaching the mastery stage faster.

The ALinAL service will be useful not only for individual expats, but also for companies who have international assignments. Most of these expatriates initially do not know how to appropriately and effectively behave in the host culture, they unknow-the-unknown. Thus, they will need a period of learning about the country's business and social norms, which is unavoidable before personal and job productivity can occur. If their assignee employees experience a difficult transition process then the probability for delivering a poor-quality work and/or for quitting is high. These will cause the company costs and troubles. The ALinAL service can be useful to the Human Resources (HR) department if the companies for providing the needed support to their expats. The ALinAL service provides the right and convenient means to HRs so they can actively support their assignee employees. This will prevent a severe culture shock which can be fatal for the expat and his family and as a consequence will generate unexpected high costs to the hiring company.

As mentioned in sub-chapter 3.2.6, according to both acculturation theories and social learning theories, within the same host society, the transition process is experienced in different ways among sojourners. This due to the fact that individual variables (their society of origin, personal characteristics) and characteristics of the situation might impact adjustment, by interfering in different points of time at different stages of the journey. The purpose of the ALinAL service is to encounter all this wide spectrum of variables in order to cover the wide variety of expat needs. For instance, about sojourners with children has been designed a separate section titled *Children* in webpage *Settling Down* where these users have the convenience to find any information they need about arranging their

children`s life in the host country; about sojourners coming from an introvert culture, the service of networking with locals (refer to webpage *Meet Locals*, in the high-fidelity prototype shown in Appendix V) is offered separately from other services.

7.4.4 Business Model Canvas

Stickdorn et al. (2011) describe Business Model Canvas (BMC) as a beneficial tool to be used before implementation after accomplishing a service design project. They explain that ”*The business model canvas is a useful tool for describing, analyzing, and designing business models...*” and ”*... identifying its strengths, weaknesses, and priorities*” (Stickdorn et al. 2011, 208-209).

In addition, Polaine et al. (2013, 110) highlight the importance of designing a business model that lies behind the service, as follows: “*It is important that some kind of business model lies behind the service—even if it is a free or public service—otherwise it will not be sustainable or resilient to change*”.

Referring to the above statements, after finalizing the service design, a BMC related to this service proposition for the purpose of measurement and also having a business frame in case of implementation, was created. The business model canvas created in this study, shown in Figure 36, provides a complete overview of the business behind the designed service. The model provides a good measurement tool for the service design as it states the worthiness of the existence of this service for its users (as described in *User Segments*, *Value Proposition*, and *User Relationships* sections included in the BCM shown in Figure 36), for its owners (as described in *Revenue Streams* sections included in the BCM shown in Figure 36), and for its key partners (as described in *Key Partners* section included in the BCM shown in Figure 36).

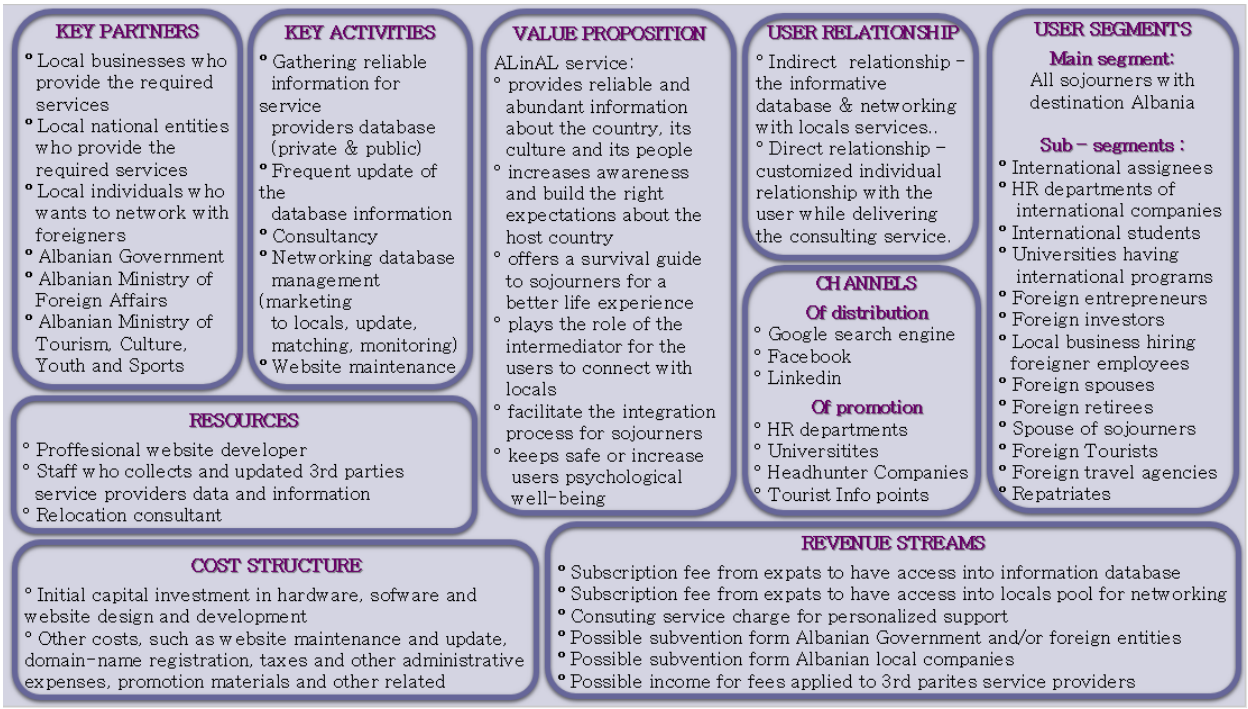


Figure 36. Business Model Canvas of the ALinAL service.

Key Partners

The main key suppliers for this service are all the local providers of those services which sojourners will need to establish a new life in Albania (the local businesses and the local national entities who provide the required services). These service providers are both private and public. Their existence and their contact details are what the ALinAL service provides to its users, and the services which these providers deliver are the key resources for the ALinAL service. Without these third parties' services, the ALinAL core service could not exist. Another key supplier is about the local individuals (named also HCNs) who want to network with foreigners in Albania. The resource they provide to the ALinAL service is a pool of host country nationals (HCNs) who can offer social networking and behavior models to sojourners (users) for improving their acculturation process in Albania. Without them, the *Meet Locals* service (the networking with locals' service provided in the ALinAL website) could not exist. Regarding other key partners, the Albanian Government and its entities such as Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Albanian Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports play an important role in the success of the ALinAL service. They might affect the ALinAL service success through their politics related to foreign investment, tourism infrastructure, foreign relations, and other ways for boosting the inflow of foreigners in Albania. These partners have a strong impact on increasing the number of the ALinAL potential users. On the other hand, these key partners might benefit from the existence of the ALinAL service, as it promotes Albania and the living in Albania (attracts foreign entrepreneurs, investors, retirees, students, and tourists), it makes this host country less unknown and friendlier to the foreigners, it promotes the cultural exchange between locals and foreigners, and it provides customers for local businesses (to local businesses who provide the required service). Overall, this service clearly creates win-win situations with all its key suppliers and partners.

User Segments

The main user segment is the sojourners coming to Albania for one reason or another. The differnt reasons of their sojourning create the sub-segments of the ALinAL service users. Some of those sub-segments are defined by foreigners who move to Albania because their company assigned them with a new job in their branch in Albania (international assignees), because a local business has hired them for a certain job position (local business hiring foreign employees), because they want to open their own business in Albania (foreign entrepreneurs), and because they want to invest in Albania (foreign investors). Others are about foreigners who move to Albania for studying reasons (international students), for choosing to spend their retirement life in Albania (foreign retirees), for choosing to accompany their sojourner spouse (spouse of sojourners), and who choose to leave home for joining a local partner (foreign spouses). Sub-segments related to tourism reasons are divided into two groups, the independent tourist who visits Albania on his own (foreign tourists) and the travel agencies which organizes vacations with destination Albania (foreign travel agencies). Repatriates, the Albanians who are moving back to their home country after living abroad, define another sub-segment as they can benefit from the ALinAL service for an easier reentry and re-adaption which will result in less severe reverse-culture shock for them. The last sub-segments are Human Resources (HR) departments of international companies, local business hiring foreign employees, and universities having international programs. These three sub-segments have something in common: the direct correlation between their lost revenues / occurred costs and expatriating failure. International assignments are a substantial strategy for multinational businesses in using the human asset. In the world of business, globalization is already a

fact. From different business aspects, such as strategical, operational and activity growing, the trend for business internationalization is constantly increasing. Black and Gregersen (1999) state that "*Very often, however, such companies consign the responsibility of expat selection, training, and support to the human resources department. Few HR managers—only 11%, according to our research—have ever worked abroad themselves; most have little understanding of a global assignment's unique personal and professional challenges*". Thus, it is obvious that HR of these companies in Albania might take advantage by suggesting the AlinAL service to their new comers from abroad. The same stands for local business hiring foreign employees and universities. Both sub-segments will benefit by receiving a better performance (in work / studies) from the foreign new comers (this reduces opportunity costs for the company/university), and a lower risk of quitting (this reduces lost revenues).

Channels

Distribution channels are about how we reach our customers to make them aware of the service. In sub-chapter 7.2.2, has been explained how in a website the content is king, and its purpose is to increase the visitors traffic of the website. Search engines, such as Google, Yahoo and Bing, are the main distribution channels. Using these channels means working on the content of the website to make it more captive while people are using these tools. Keywords are the key element of an efficient website content for attracting visitors. Next task is to retain people attention for looking more into the website. Service proposition, statements, call-to-action, aesthetic layout, the used voice, images and photos and other website features, already explained in sub-chapter 7.2.2, are the key elements to accomplish this task.

Promotion channels are about driving people to check our service. The promotion strategy about the ALinAL service was thought about creating service brochures and distributing them to HR departments of international companies, universities having international programs, headhunter companies, and tourist info points.

Customer relationship

The ALinAL service establishes and maintains two different types of relationships with its users: direct and indirect relationships. For providing the country information service and the networking with locals' service, the ALinAL website establishes indirect relationship with the users. The country information service plays the role of the survival guide for the users when moving to Albania and the networking with locals' service plays the role of the intermediator for the users to connect with locals. For those users who require a more exclusive service, the ALinAL website provides a customized individual relationship with the user while delivering the consulting service, so it settles a direct type of relationship with its customer. The services of the indirect relationship are less expensive than the service of the direct relationship. This due to the fact that the consulting service is more limited in terms of service provider, and is unique for each delivery as it is customized around the user characteristics and needs. For instance, the consultant has to adapt the communication to the user according to his native culture.

Value Proposition

The ALinAL service provides reliable and abundant information about the country, its culture and its people, increases awareness and build the right expectations about the host country, offers a survival guide to sojourners for a better life experience, plays the role of the intermediator for the users to connect with locals for providing to them a social life, facilitates the integration process for sojourners, and increases users' psychological well-being.

Key Resources

A professional website developer is a key resource at the very beginning of the implementation of the service. Building the correct website as per the prototype design it is needed to assure the arrows versus boxes (refer to sub-chapter 7.2.2); integrating in the website those crucial elements for having a successful service design.

Another key resource is the staff who will be in charge of collecting and updating the data and information related to the third-party service providers, which are included in the country information database of the service. They are crucial as they are responsible for gathering reliable information and keep it up to date, which is at the core of the service value proposition.

The relocation consultant is another key resource as it is delivering one of the main services of the ALinAL website, the *Personalized Support*.

Cost Structure

While designing a service, the designer should be aware of the budgeted cost limitations. Of course, the ideal situation would be of having all the needed financial support for the best final service. But in the real world, money is always making boundaries, and the service design cannot go beyond those. Thus, a designer should know how to make the best use of this money for the service he is designing. Polaine et al. (2013, 117) suggest that "*choosing a few key touchpoints that express the core of the service is a useful way to get started, whether innovating new services or improving existing ones*", means that choosing where to focus resources is a good strategy.

The most important costs inherent in the AlinAL service business model are related to the key resources and key activities. First costs which will occur and are considerably high are about the initial capital investment, such as hardware, software, and website design and development. The following costs are about those costs which will occur frequently, such as website maintenance and update, domain-name registration, taxes and other administrative expenses, promotion materials, and more.

Revenue Stream

So far, the business case can be described as a website service which generates income from its main users, the foreigners moving to Albania. This income occurs by charging the subscribed users with a monthly fee in separate ways: first for giving access into the digital information database (refer to *Before Departure, Landing In,* and *Settling Down* pages in

the ALinAL high-fidelity prototype in Appendix V), and second for giving access into locals` pool for networking (refer to *Meet Locals* page in the ALinAL high-fidelity prototype in Appendix V). Both services are priced and charged as separate services within the ALinAL service. The other stream of income is from the customized charges made to individual users for receiving the personalized consulting service (refer to *Personalized Support* page in the ALinAL website prototype). Possible other stakeholders` willingness to pay for this service are the third-party service providers included in the information database. At the beginning of the business, when the service will be implemented, these stakeholders are considered key suppliers, but in the future when the ALinAL service is well established and successful, some of these key suppliers might be treated as customers. The ALinAL service provides customers to the third-party service providers, thus in a way performing marketing service for them. Especially new service providers (business starters) might consider the AlinAL website as a marketing service and willing to pay for being included in its database. Other potential streams of revenue might be subventions from Albanian Government (its entities) and foreign entities, for the reasons already explained about them being key partners of the ALinAL service (refer to the paragraph *Key Partners* in this sub-chapter).

7.5 Conclusions

The aim of the study is to design a digital service for expats moving to the host country Albania, which provides a useful database with relevant information about Albania (history, culture, values, customs) and practical information of everyday life in Albania that expats need to know for a better transition process experience. It is important to highlight that the study is about defining the kind of information to access in this database and the most convenient structure of this database.

Methods such as *personas* and *mapping events with customer journey* has been useful to frame the users` segments and to better understand their needs. The generated insights from these methods were the stepping stones for the prototyping phase. Before starting with the prototyping, a special focus was given to the service proposition development. This work was helpful to understand how to properly integrate the service proposition into the prototype design. During the first stage of prototyping, for developing the low-fidelity prototypes, participatory methods which includes co-design activities, such as *flexible modelling with card sorting* and *A/B test combined with desirability test*, were used. These methods used in the early stage of prototyping generated valuable information about further improvement of the service prototype. The result was the design of a high-fidelity prototype, with a certain interface and database structure, which was thought to provide the best customer journey based on the analysis results from earlier work in this study.

Quantitative methods and *qualitative methods* have been applied during the design research work. Both types of methods were performed at the same time by accomplishing one of the main underlying goals of the process: using *methodological triangulation*. The results generated from methodological triangulation technique, were a combination of quantitative data with qualitative data, which was more valuable to service design than having only qualitative data. For instance, the qualitative data collected from the *desirability testing* helped gain a deeper understanding of what and why makes the service more pleasant and approachable to use for the customer. During the testing of low-fidelity prototypes, using only the quantitative data from the *A/B testing* could lead into choosing

only one prototype version among the several prototypes. Usability of the qualitative data from the *desirability testing* did generate ideas leading the design process in creating a new prototype based in both tested prototype versions, by creating a hybrid version.

The scope of this thesis, represented in the main research question, was to design a digital service which would serve in the best possible way to sojourners in Albania as a helping hand through the transition process, and as a result benefit to them with a reduced culture shock. The design process in this thesis is ending with the creation of a high-fidelity prototype, thus excluding its evaluation and production. Nevertheless, this study describes in the end the business behind the service through the design methods, such as *business model canvas*. The designed *business model canvas* is expected to be a useful guidance in the case of service implementation in the future.

8 Discussion

An individual or family relocating overseas is about to undergo tremendous changes in their life. Besides the normal adjustments associated with moving—setting up a house, finding new friends, familiarizing themselves with new geography and climate—new expatriates face a lot of other changes. Almost all of them are about to experience a lot of negative emotions occurring from the phenomenon of culture shock, and will have to struggle for overcoming them.

This thesis addressed one main research question to understand how to develop and design a new service concept for reducing the culture shock phenomenon, as follows.

What digital service can be designed to help expats coming to the host country Albania, that can ease the transition process and lessen the culture shock?

For answering this research question, in-depth insight was applied to investigate the process of expatriating, the reasons why the expats undergo culture shock phenomenon, and how to design a service which might have significant power to lessen the culture shock. In order to conduct this thorough research, the study addressed three research sub-questions. Primary research and secondary research is conducted, and several service design methods and techniques are applied to undertake this project. These research sub-questions, their related study work, and provided answers are recapped in the following paragraphs.

1. ***What is culture shock and the most common challenges of the transition phase for expats?***

The answer to this question is the initial work of this study, and it was provided from secondary research. The used method was literature review. The purpose was to conduct exploratory research for gathering in-depth insights, at first regarding the concepts of *culture* and *shock*, and next concluding with the concept of *culture shock*. This thesis brings several theories and models found in studies from fields of anthropology, psychology, and intercultural communication. Based on those previous studies, the culture shock can be defined as a specific physical, psychological, and behavioral reactions which are very likely to occur when individuals start to live, work, or study in unfamiliar cultural

contexts. The most common challenges of a sojourner are related to learning about the new culture (history, values, systems), adapting themselves with the new behavior models, dealing with practical issues and matters in an unknown country. Even though this thesis title is addressed to expatriates, in its content attempts to universally address the topic for all the sojourners, trying not to limit this study to corporate contexts only. These insights provided a wide range of common challenges that expats have to suffer during the transition phase. The U-curve and W-curve of adjustment models found in the literature review have been used further in this study to visualize the expatriate journey. The outcome of this research gives clear directions to the service design process in this study.

2. ***How is the transition process of expats in Albania and which are the challenges?***

The answer to this question is provided from both primary and secondary research conducted in this study. Primary research methods such as face-to-face interviews, online ethnography, and online questionnaire have been used by having in focus the sojourners in Albania. Tools such as word cloud, brainstorming web, and affinity diagramming have been used for the synthesis of the gathered insights. Secondary research was about service precedents` desk research. The purpose at this stage of the study was to conduct both exploratory research (through online ethnography and questionnaire) and inspirational research (through interviews and service precedents). The research outcome proves the existence of a challenging transition process for sojourners when moving to Albania and detects the most common challenges. At first, the results from literature review define Albania as a host country. Albania has a unique environment and it exist a certain gap in the resemblance with other countries, thus Albania can be defined as a host country where expatriating has a considerable risk of failure. Furthermore, the results from service precedents research and online questionnaire prove the lack of services in Albania which support sojourners in their transition process. The research results, especially those from online questionnaire, validate the service proposition worthiness towards its users. The answer of this question approved the further continuation of this study.

3. ***How should the website be designed in order to provide the best possible customer journey?***

The answer to this question is provided from both generative research and evaluative research conducted for this study. In this stage of work, a series of tools were utilized to form the service concept. These tools are from service design perspective and they are shown as visualizations. The created *personas* represent the main users' segments and their detailed crafting provide a visualization of the main service users. *Mapping events with customer journey* provides a dynamic visualization of their transit process. *Prototypes* are design to visualize the service proposition. The final prototype presents an image of the entire service by visualization of all the key elements involved, their links and the flows of content, and information architecture. *Customer journey* map focuses on the touch-point from the visitors' point of view, which refers to the customer value. The business model to verify, implement and maintain this service is visualized by *business model canvas*. This tool helped presenting the key partners and stakeholders of the service. To summarize, applying the above-mentioned service design tools played a role of helping mediate between customer needs and the service proposition scope, as well as clarifying the service concept in the service concept development process. The service proposition in this study

is considered to be a crucial element in the service design process, thus it was constantly evolved and measured during all the design process.

Gathered insights from this study are used to design a service which might be helpful to expats in Albania, by offering the benefit of reduced culture shock. Less culture shock makes the expats less stressful, and as a consequence there is less probability that expats dislikes their life in the host country and leave the country earlier than planned. In order to have the right skills for designing this service which would guide expats through their transition process, it was necessary for me to understand beforehand the transition process itself and the feelings overwhelming the expats. With the approach of a careful service design, I have tried to measure/evaluate every step through the process. A series of suggestions about the business model behind the service were gathered in the business model canvas, which may be considered practically helpful for the future design and implementation. With regard to service design and future challenges, this study could have been developed further, by considering the dynamics of Albania as a host country. Evaluation methods, such a SWOT analysis, might be used to design a proactive service and to maintain its success. This service definitely has the potential to develop further by offering additional services to expats, and by being adapted to other countries besides Albania. This service proposition has been evolved around research outcomes aiming a first a general context of the sojourning process and next focusing in sojourning process in Albania. Besides, the expatriating process has a common ground no matter the nationalities of the expats and no matter the host country nationality. Based in these arguments, the ALinAL service could bring value to other host countries as well, by being adjusted according to those countries` information. Even after these necessary adjustment, the service concept and its core design still would remain intact.

An important part of this study was about service website design. The first challenge for me as a service designer was to accomplish one of the underlying core goals of the design process: identifying the service touchpoints in a website, not only the visible ones but also the invisible ones; those vital touchpoints which determine the customers` journey experience to be satisfying or not. My efforts in such a new discipline to me, consisted of understanding the core features/elements and how they should be designed to make the website distinguish from other service precedents websites, to be attractive enough for making the visitors keep navigating instead of leaving the site, to turn a visitor into a user, to offer a convenient, easy, fast, pleasant, and efficient service experience. The second challenge for me was to build a website prototype from scratch. I had to get to know the website anatomy, information architecture, and the techniques showing how to place the *bricks in the wall*. To own this necessary basic knowledge, I have used as reference four professional books: *The Complete Idiots Guide to Creating a Website* written by McFedries (2008), *Your Google Game Plan for Success* written by Teixeira (2010), *Creating a Website – The Missing Manual* written by MacDonald (2011), and *Effective Prototyping with Excel: A Practical Handbook for Developers and Designers* written by Berger, Arent, Arnowitz, and Sampson (2009). The first three books have been a guide to me for conceptualizing and understanding the website anatomy and its core elements. They helped me learn about the critical touchpoints of a digital service. Furthermore, they helped me understand and determine the invisible elements of time and context of the service sites, which was one of the underlying goals of the design process: boxes versus arrows – finding the invisible connections. The forth book has been my practical handbook as a service designer for building the high-fidelity prototype of the website service, by using Microsoft Excel as an effective design tool. My individual purpose of reading those books was not to become a professional web designer, but obtaining a certain extent of knowledge in the website design discipline was a necessary engagement.

For me as a service design student, the importance of this thesis was my journey through its stages, learning how to put into practice the knowledge attained during my master`s studies and how to have a service designer`s mindset while working on a design project. I have learned how to choose the right methods, how to arrange them in a certain sequence through the process, and sometimes how to combine them with each other, for accomplishing specific design objectives. Design approaches such as co-design, methodological triangulation, and participative approach have been useful for achieving a successful design result. The most important lesson was about how crucial it is to invest time in gaining awareness and knowledge about the domain or topic we are about to design for. This is a must-do work at the very beginning of the design process in order to avoid wrong directions in the process and engaging ourselves in unnecessary work which will waste our time and resources. In the end, I benefited from this thesis in a personal aspect as I do understand much better my past expatriating experience, and I hope someone else might benefit by reading it through.

References

Berardo, K. & LaBrack, B. 2007. *Evaluating Study Abroad' s Past, Fashioning its Future.* Canada: University of the Pacific. [Online] http://www.culturosity.com/pdfs/CIEEPresentationBerardoLaBrack.pdf *(retrieved: 15.06.2017).*

Berger, N., Arent, M., Arnowitz, J. & Sampson, F. 2009. *Effective Prototyping with Excel: A Practical Handbook for Developers and Designers.* Amsterdam: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers. [E-book].

Black, J. S. & Gregersen, H. B. 1999. *The right way to manage expats.* Harvard Business Review, 77(2), [Online] https://hbr.org/1999/03/the-right-way-to-manage-expats (retrieved: 10.05.2017). Note: the article has no page numbering thus the automatic number counting has been used in the text referencing of this study.

Black, J. S. & Mendenhall, M. 1990/1991. The U-curve Adjustment Hypothesis Revisited: A Review and Theoretical Framework. *Journal of International Business Studies*, n/a, 225-247. [Online] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5222549_The_U-Curve_Adjustment_Hypothesis_Revisited_A_Review_and_Theoretical_Framework (retrieved: 22.08.2017).

Bridges, W. 2006. *Getting Them Through the Wilderness: A Leader's Guide to Transition.* [Online] https://wmbridges.com/featured/articles/getting-them-through-wilderness/ (retrieved: 26.09.2017)

Bridges, W. & Bridges, S. 1991/2009. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change.* 3rd ed. Philadelphia: De Capo Press. [Online] https://www.amazon.com/Managing-Transitions-Making-Most-Change/dp/0738213802 (retrieved: 17.09.2017).

Bochner, S. 2003. *Culture Shock Due to Contact with Unfamiliar Cultures.* Online Readings in Psychology and Culture: Migration and Acculturation, 8(1), 3-10. [Online] doi:10.9707/2307-0919.1073 (retrieved: 17.10.2017).

Denzin, N. K. 1970/2017. *Sociological Methods: A Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge. [Online] https://books.google.fi/books?id=9xwuDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ViewAPI&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false (retrieved: 03.01.2018). Note: the book preview has no page numbering thus the chapter number has been included instead in the text referencing of this study.

Dutta, N. (w.y.), *This Small European Country Is the Hottest Emerging Destination Of 2018.* [Online] https://www.tripoto.com/trip/criminally-underrated-albania-578a1ce80613f (retrieved: 03.01.2016).

Financial Times Lexicon. (w.y.), *Definition of expatriate, Expatriate employees struggle to readjust to old lives*. Financial Times, pp. n-a. [Online] http://lexicon.ft.com/Term?term=expatriate (retrieved: 16.09.2017).

Fisher, J. 1999. *John Fisher Personal Transition Curve concept and content* [Online] https://www.businessballs.com/change-management/personal-change-stages-john-fisher-162/ (retrieved: 13.08.2017).

Fowler, D. D., Euler, R. C. & Fowler, C. S. 1969. *John Wesley Powell and the Anthropology of the Canyon Country.* 670. [Online] https://pubs.usgs.gov/pp/0670/report.pdf (retrieved: 20.12.2017).

Hall, E. T. 1976/1989. *Beyond Culture.* 2nd ed. New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc.

Hofstede, G. 1980/1984. *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (Rev. ed.). California, USA: Sage Publications Inc. [Online] https://books.google.fi/books/about/Culture_s_Consequences.html?id=Cayp_Um4O9gC&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false (retrieved: 10.08.2017).

INSTAT (Albanian National Institute of Statistics). 2017. *Population of Albania, 1 January 2017.* [Online] http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/demography-and-social-indicators/population/publication/2017/population-of-albania-1-januar-2017/ (retrieved: 13.10.2017)

La Brack, B. (w.y.), *Theory Reflections: Cultural Adaptations, Culture Shock and the "Curves of Adjustment"*. [Online] http://www.nafsa.org/_/file/_/theory_connections_adjustment.pdf (retrieved: 16.06.2017). Note: the article has no page numbering thus the automatic number counting has been used in the text referencing of this study.

MacDonald, M. 2011. *Creating a Website – The Missing Manual*. 3rd ed. California: O`Reylli Media, Inc. [E-book].

Martin, B. & Hanington, B. 2012. *Universal Methods of Design: 100 Ways to Research Complex Problems, Develop Innovative Ideas, and Design Effective Solutions*. Beverly: Rockport Publishers. [E-book].

Masgoret, A-M. & Ward, C. 2006. *Culture learning approach to acculturation.* Sam, & J. W. Berry (Eds.). (Rev. ed., pp. 58-77). [Online] doi:10.1017/CBO9780511489891 (retrieved: 20.08.2017).

McFedries, P. 2008. *The Complete Idiots Guide to Creating a Website*. New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc. [E-book].

Mills, R. 2013. *Hiring Leaders: A global manager's failsafe guide to dominating any industry by employing its dominant people*. Singapore: Chalre Associates. [E-book].

Murgasova, Z., Ilahi, N., Miniane, J., Scott, A., Vladkova-Hollar. I. & an IMF Staff Team. 2015. *The Western Balkans: 15 Years of Economic Transition.* International Monetary Fund, Publication Services. [Online] http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/reo/2015/eur/eng/erei0315.htm (retrieved: 21.07.2017).

Naeem, A., Nadeem, A. B. & Khan, I. U. 2015. Culture Shock and Its effects on Expatriates. *Global Advanced Research Journals.* 4(6). [Online] http://garj.org/full-articles/culture-shock-and-its-effects-on-expatriates.pdf?view=inline (retrieved: 10.07.2017).

Neville, T. (2014), *52 Places to Go in 2014*. [Online] https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/01/10/travel/2014-places-to-go.html (retrieved: 03.01.2016).

Oberg, K. 1960/2006. *Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Culture Environments*. Krahl, W.& Krahl N. (Eds.), Practical Anthropology, 7, 177-182. Reprint. New York: Technical Information Clearing House. [Online] http://www.agem-ethnomedizin.de/download/cu29_2-3_2006_S_142-146_Repr_Oberg.pdf (retrieved: 20.07.2017).

Parks, M. 2016. *Just who is an expat anyway?* [Online] http://www.intentionalexpat.com/who-is-an-expat/ (retrieved. 02.06.2017).

Polaine, A., Løvlie, L. & Reason, B. 2013. *Service Design from Insight to Implementation*. New York: Rosenfeld Media LLC. [E-book].

Seeman, T. 2008. *Support & Social Conflict: Section One - Social Support*. [Online] http://www.macses.ucsf.edu/research/psychosocial/socsupp.php (retrieved: 02.11.2017).

Sims & Schraeder 2004/2005. *Expatriate compensation: An exploratory review of salient contextual factors and common practices.* 10 (2). [Online] from https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1108/13620430510588301 (retrieved: 05.08.2017).

Stickdorn, M., Schneider, J. & the co-authors. 2011. *This is service design thinking: Basics — Tools — Cases.* Amsterdam: BIS Publishers. [E-book].

Tan, D. & Mahoney, J. T. 2006. Why a Multinational Firm Chooses Expatriates: Integrating Resource-Based, Agency and Transaction Costs Perspectives. *Journal of Management Studies*, *43* (3), 468. [Online] doi:10.1111/j.1467-6486.2006.00598.x (retrieved: 22.08.2017).

Teixeira, J. 2010. *Your Google Game Plan for Success*. Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing Inc. [E-book]

Tsang-Feign, C. 1993/2013. *Living Abroad: The essential survival guide. Must Reading for Anyone Living Abroad.* 3rd ed. (w.p.): Pomelo Publishing. [E-book].

University of California Merced. (w.y.), *Cultural Adjustments.* [Online] https://iss.ucmerced.edu/resources/cultural-adjustments (retrieved: 08.08.2017).

Ward, C., Bochner, S. & Furnham, A. 2001/2005. *The Psychology of Culture Shock.* 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis Inc. [E-book].

World Bank Group. 2016. Country Snapshot: Albania. [Online] http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/481541475668231135/Albania-Snapshot-

Oct2016FINAL.pdf (retrieved: 16.08.2017). Note: the article has no page numbering thus the automatic number counting has been used in the text referencing of this study.

What Expats Can Do to Bring Hope To The World. 2017. *What Expats Can Do*. Paper presented at Families in Global Transition, The Hague, The Netherlands. [Online] doi: http://whatexpatscando.com/figt-conference-2017-what-expat-can-do-presentation/ (retrieved: 15.07.2017).

Whicher, S. E., Spiller, R. E. & Williams, W. E. (Eds.). 1964. *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume 2. 1836-1838*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Printing office. [Online] https://books.google.fi/books?id=F4Xfp8HbfxIC&pg=PA158&lpg=PA158&dq=Ralph+Waldo+Emerson+man+is+great+in+his+transition+and+not+in+his+goals&source=bl&ots=FWppdcGy8j&sig=XFWx9T6tonQs7iqHzJB58XTZIQI&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwje8vPp0e7aAhU0iKYKHaZcD20Q6AEIVDAN#v=onepage&q=transition&f=false (retrieved 07.08.2017).

Wittenkamp, C. H. 2014. *Building Bridges across Cultural Differences: Why don't I follow your norms?* (w.p.): Bookbone.com. [E-book].

1st sources that cannot be found and cited from 2nd sources:

Berry, J. W. 1980. *Acculturation as varieties of adaptation.* In A. M. Padilla (Ed.), Acculturation: Theory, models and some new findings (pp.9-25). Boulder, CO: Westview. 2nd source: Ward, C., Bochner, S. & Furnham, A. 2001. *The Psychology of Culture Shock*, 31-33.

Lysgaard, S. 1955. *A Study of Intercultural Contact: Norwegian Fulbright Grantees Visiting the United States*. Oslo: Institute for Social Research. 2nd sources: Black, J. S., & Mendenhall, M. 1990. *The U-curve Adjustment Hypothesis Revisited: A Review and Theoretical Framework.* Journal of International Business Studies, 227-228; Berardo, K. & LaBrack, B. 2007. *Evaluating Study Abroad's Past, Fashioning its Future*, 6.

Gullahorn, J. E. & Gullahorn. J. T. 1963. "An Extension of the U-Curve Hypothesis." Journal of Social Issues 19:33–47. 2nd source: La Brack, B. (w.y.) *Theory Reflections: Cultural Adaptations, Culture Shock and the "Curves of Adjustment"*, 1.

Maslow, A. 1940. *Conscious Competence Theory - the 4 Stages of Learning.* 2nd sources: www.businessballs.com; Wittenkamp, C. H. 2014. *Building Bridges across Cultural Differences: Why don't I follow your norms?* 1st ed. (w.p.), 17-18.

List of Tables

Page **Element**

78 ***Table 1.*** *Results of A/B Testing combined with Desirability Testing.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

List of Figures

Page **Element**

5 ***Figure 1.*** *A visualized framework of the study.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

6 ***Figure 2***. *The service design process of the study.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

7 ***Figure 3.*** *The research process and methods of the study.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

13 ***Figure 4.*** *Expat concept versus Immigrant concept, Family in Global Transition. Conference in Hague, March 2017.* [Online] http://whatexpatscando.com/figt-conference-2017- what-expat-can-do-presentation/ (retrieved: 03.09.2017).

15 ***Figure 5.*** *Literature review framework.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

16 ***Figure 6.*** *Model of factors influencing culture in a society.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017, using digital images, [Online] http://www.kimebinger.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/blog-image-bubbles.png (retrieved: 01.10.2017).

17 ***Figure 7.*** *The Cultural Iceberg, a model developed by anthropologist Edward T. Hall in the 1976s.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017, digital image retrieved from http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-KyuD-5Ir1h0/VEqlcFgEGuI/AAAAAAAAYTY/smadP_kfT1I/s1600/Pegasus_vertex_Iceberg.png (retrieved: 03.11.2017).

19 ***Figure 8.*** *Maslow`s theory of Four Stages of Learning Process. Image by Wesselien de Groot –Bright Alley.* [Online] http://dianahartsink.com/blog/the-process-called-learning/ (retrieved on 10.10.2017) Modified by Totaj, A. 2017.

20 ***Figure 9.*** *Bandura`s Social Learning Theory – SLT, 1977.* Created by Totaj A. 2017 using digital clip art. [Online] http://www.animatedimages.org/img-animated-student- image-0001-164143.htm (retrieved: 10.10.2017).

21 ***Figure 10.*** *John Fisher's personal transition curve theory, the revised version in 2012.* [Online] https://www.businessballs.com/processofchange.pdf (retrieved: 02.10.2017).

25 ***Figure 11.*** *William Bridges` Managing Transitions Model, 2009. Adapted from William Bridges.* [Online] http://osullivanfield.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Bridges-adapted.png (retrieved: 22.10.2017).

26 ***Figure 12.*** *John Wesley Powell and Southern Paiute Indians. Photograph by J. K. Hillers, 1873, from Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Collection.* [Online] https://pubs.usgs.gov/pp/0670/report.pdf (retrieved: 05.04.2018).

27 ***Figure 13.*** *John W. Berry`s Acculturation Model, 1980.* [Online] http://nchsbands.info/2017/acculturation.html (retrieved: 05.10.2017).

28 ***Figure 14.*** *The acculturation process adapted from Ward, 1996.* [E-book] Ward, C., Bochner, S. & Furnham, A. 2001. The Psychology of Culture Shock. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis Inc.

30 ***Figure 15.*** *Lysgaard U-Curve model diagram, 1955.* [Online] https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Lysgaard-1955-U-Curve-model-diagram_fig1_257938736 (retrieved: 05.08.2017).

30 ***Figure 16.*** *The U-Curve of Cross-Cultural Adjustment.* (Black & Mendenhall 1990, 227)

31 ***Figure 17.*** *The U-Curve model of 4 stages.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

32 ***Figure 18.*** *The U-Curve model of 5 stages.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

32 ***Figure 19.*** *The U-Curve model of 5 stages including a short-term recovery.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

33 ***Figure 20.*** *The W-Curve model of Repatriation.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

38 ***Figure 21.*** *Ksamil Beach in Saranda, Albania.* Photo by Totaj, A. 2012.

38 ***Figure 22.*** *Resort in Drimades - Dhermi, Albania.* Photo by Totaj, A. 2015.

43 ***Figure 23.*** *Becoming a member of InterNations expat community in Tirana – Albania, January 2017.* [Online] www.internations.org (retrieved: 07.01.2017).

45 ***Figure 24.*** *Becoming a member of "Expats in Albania", an expat public group in Facebook, January 2017.* [Online] https://www.facebook.com/groups/expatsinalbania/ (retrieved: 07.01.2017).

46 ***Figure 25.*** *Word Cloud of insights gathered from online ethnography conducted over "Expats in Albania" Facebook public group.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017. [Online] www.worditout.com (retrieved: 17.11.2017).

52 ***Figure 26.*** *The expat brainstorming web.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017. [Online] http://www.wisegeek.org/which-items-are-prohibited-on-commercial-airlines.htm#person-with-luggage-looking-out-window-at-airplane (retrieved: 15.11.2017).

54 ***Figure 27.*** *A visualization of the design process and methods of the study.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

59 ***Figure 28.*** *Persona no. 1, Vanessa.* [Online] https://plus.google.com/+TeacherVanessa (retrieved: 05.10.2017).

60 ***Figure 29.*** *Persona no. 2, Ben.* [Online] http://www.animatedimages.org/img-animated-student-image-0001-164143.htm (retrieved: 05.10.2017).

61 **F*igure 30.*** *Persona no. 3, Nicole.* [Online] http://www.animatedimages.org/img-animated-student-image-0001-164143.htm (retrieved: 05.10.2017).

62 ***Figure 31.*** *The Expat Journey.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017, digital images retrieved from https://www.pexels.com/ (retrieved: 01.12.2017).

67 ***Figure 32.*** *Designed service logo.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

67 ***Figure 33.*** *Designed service domain name.* Created by Totaj, A. 2017.

82 ***Figure 34.*** *Tree model of website anatomy as a rough draft for prototyping.* Created by Totaj, A. 2018.

84 ***Figure 35.*** *The Customer Journey design based on the U-curve Model.* Created by Totaj, A. 2018.

91 ***Figure 36.*** *Business Model Canvas of the ALinAL service.* Created by Totaj, A. 2018.

Appendices

Appendix I - Affinity Diagramming

The affinity diagramming technique was used during the online ethnography of *Expats in Albania* Facebook page. The key words of the expats` posts on the Discussion page, where documented in an excel spreadsheet, and their frequency has been counted. In the end, the collected data were used to generate the word cloud shown in Figure 25. The affinity diagramming applied in an excel spreadsheet was required by the used tool, the word cloud generator named WordItOut. This excel database of affinity diagramming is shown below.

Expats in Albania Facebook page - Discussions	
Online Ethnography - Affinity Diagramming	
WordItOut - word cloud generator - database	
KEY WORDS	**FREQUENCY**
Housing	15
Hostels	8
Hotels	5
AirBnB	7
Shopping-malls	8
Supermarkets	5
Organic food shop	7
Vegetarian shop	6
Furniture shops	8
Banks	5
Utilities	6
Bars	9
Cars	7
Motorcycle&bicycle	3
Spare parts	4
Driving licence	4
Activities for children	11
Schools for children	9
Babysitting	8
Children day-care	5
Pediatrician	6
Cleaning-lady	9
Cost-of-living	5
Culture&Art activities	7
Embassies&Consulates	2
Entrepreneurship	3
Home&appliances repair	6
Computer&phone repair	5
Repair services	4
Networking	19
Beauty salon & SPA	7
Physiotherapist	2
Hospitals	10
Clinics	5
Dentist	6

Expats in Albania Facebook page - Discussions	
Online Ethnography - Affinity Diagramming	
WordItOut - word cloud generator - database	
KEY WORDS	**FREQUENCY**
Health insurances	9
Psychologist	4
Oculist	3
Drug stores	2
Internet&TV services	5
Mobile services	4
Jobs	15
Language-courses	10
Library&Book-shops&Book clubs	5
Pet shops & care	11
Sports courts & clubs	9
Gym&Pools	4
Dancing classes & clubs	5
Political-system	1
Public&National-holidays	1
Residence permits	9
Restaurants	5
Selling belongings	13
Tax system	8
Public transport	9
Taxi transport	4
Airport - Downtown Shuttle	3
Local-tourism	8
Delivery-money&goods	6

Appendix II - Online Questionnaire

Online Questionnaire; the email text addressed personally to each expatriate member of Expats in Albania Facebook page.

The below text is sent to an expat named David.

Dear David

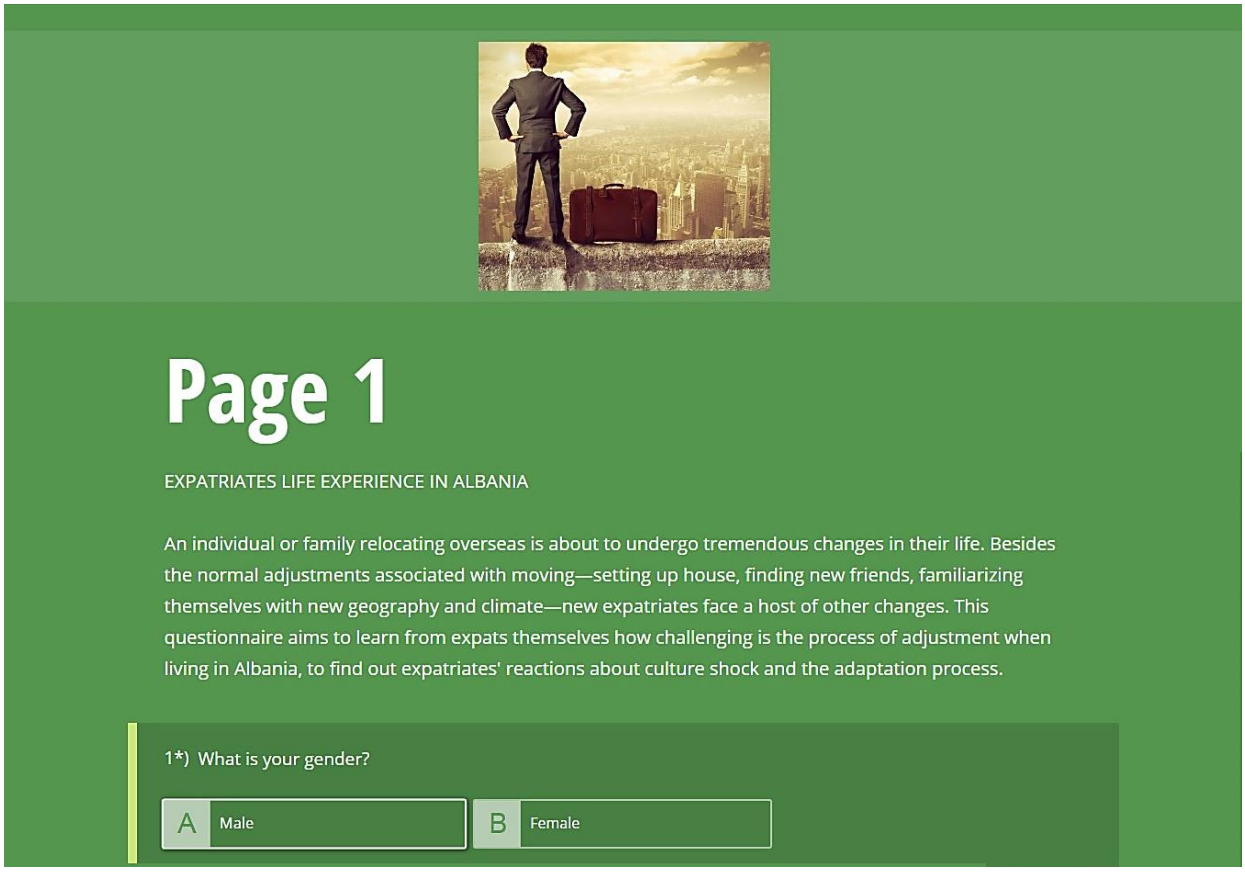
Your host country Albania is my home country but few years ago I have experienced myself the expat life in a country very different from Albania. Being through a long transition process and all its challenges gave me a great interest in expatriate experiences and therefore I have devoted my master's thesis for my degree in Service Design at Novia University of Applied Sciences in Turku-Finland towards this topic. Through this study I aim to discover how it is to be an expatriate in my home country Albania. I would be very grateful for your cooperation and your time. Your feedback will be valuable not only for my study but also give ideas about creating new services which might help expats in Albania have a better experience and enjoy life more. The questionnaire will take few minutes of your time. Please find below the link to the online questionnaire. Your answers will be treated with confidentiality and are anonymous. The data will be used for this master research only.
Please find below the link to the questionnaire aimed to study work – life experiences of expatriates in Albania.

https://kwiksurveys.com/s/jT3gUS9a

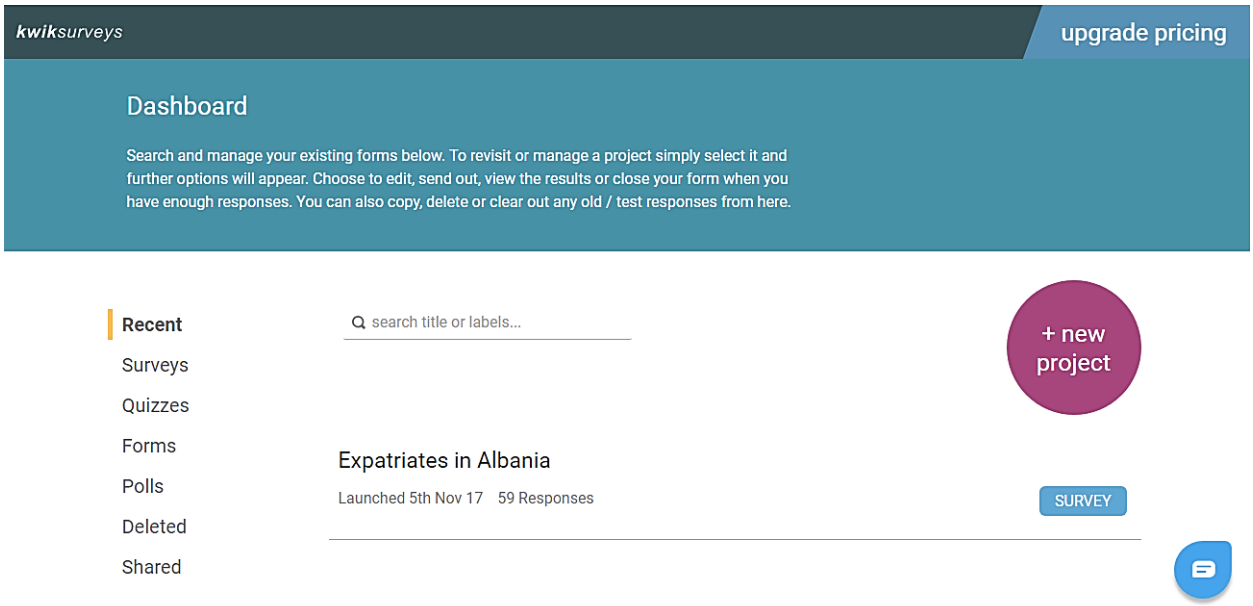
Thanks for your time and thoughts!
Armela Totaj

Master student in Leadership and Service Design
Novia University of Applied Sciences
Turku – Finland

Online Questionnaire; the introductory paragraph about the content and purpose of the questionnaire:



Online Questionnaire; information about it:



Online Questionnaire; the responses:

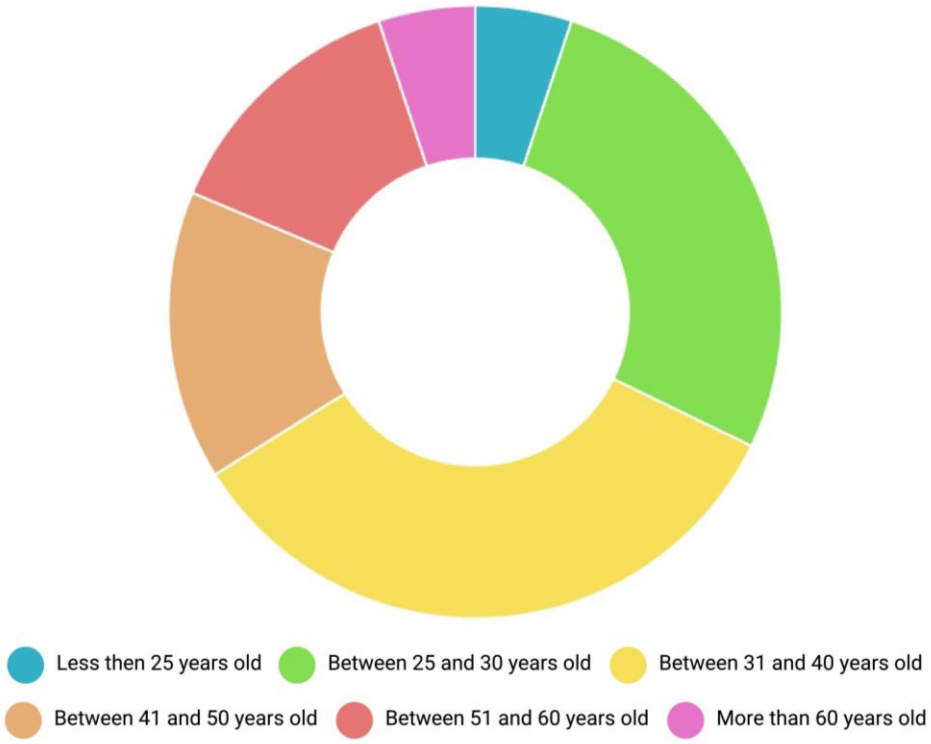
Quick Report

What is your gender?

	Male	Female	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	27 (46%)	**32 (54%)**	2.5	59

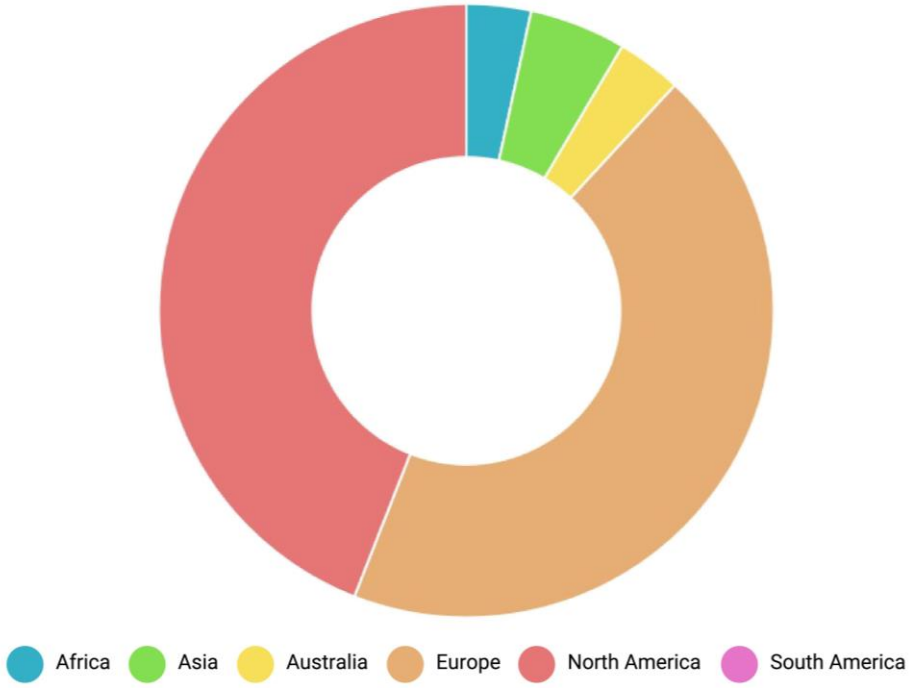
Which age group are you?

	Less then 25 years old	Between 25 and 30 years old	Between 31 and 40 years old	Between 41 and 50 years old	Between 51 and 60 years old	More than 60 years old	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	3 (5%)	16 (27%)	**20 (34%)**	9 (15%)	8 (14%)	3 (5%)	6.31	59



On which continent is your home country?

	Africa	Asia	Australia	Europe	North America	South America	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	2 (3%)	3 (5%)	2 (3%)	**26 (44%)**	26 (44%)	0 (0%)	11.47	59

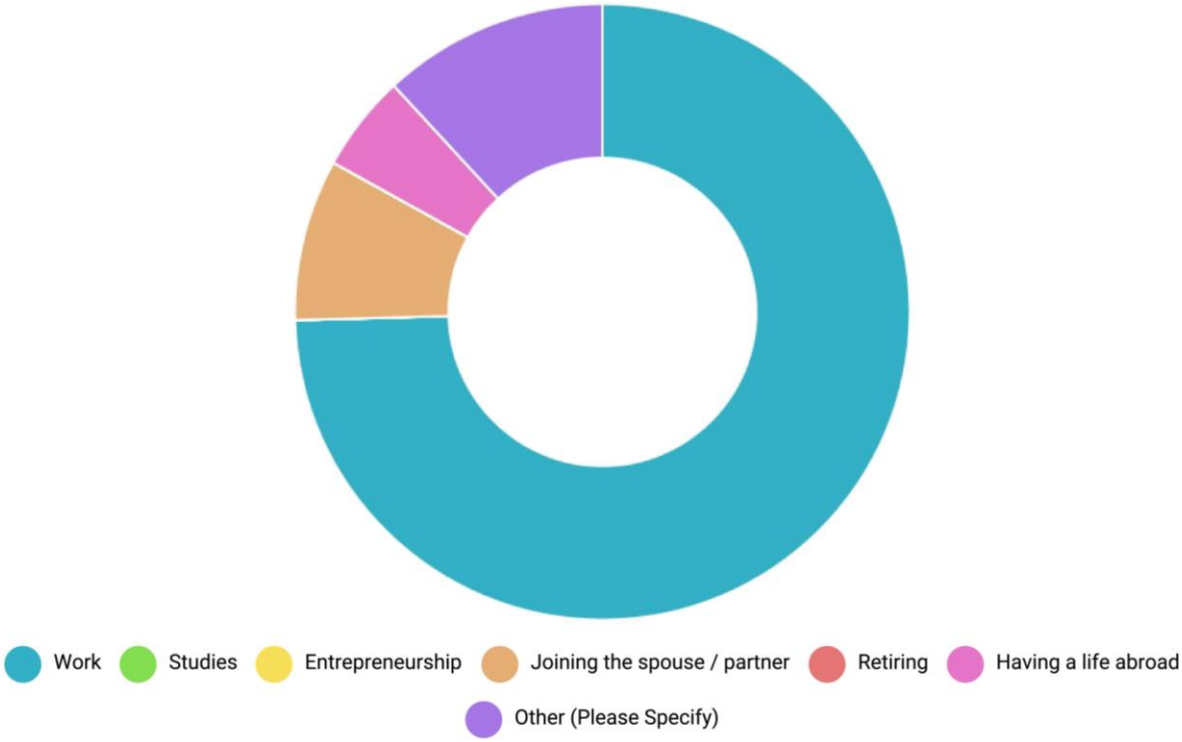


Do you have previous expatriating experience (s) before arrival in Albania?

	Yes	No	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	**44 (75%)**	15 (25%)	14.5	59

What is the main purpose of moving in Albania?

	Work	Studies	Entrepreneurship	Joining the spouse / partner	Retiring	Having a life abroad	Other (Please Specify)	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	**44 (75%)**	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (8%)	0 (0%)	3 (5%)	7 (12%)	14.74	59



Text Responses

2 year volunteer service

ministry - a 'calling' to live as a missionary in Albania for Prison Fellowship Albania

Working on my dissertation, specifically

Missionary

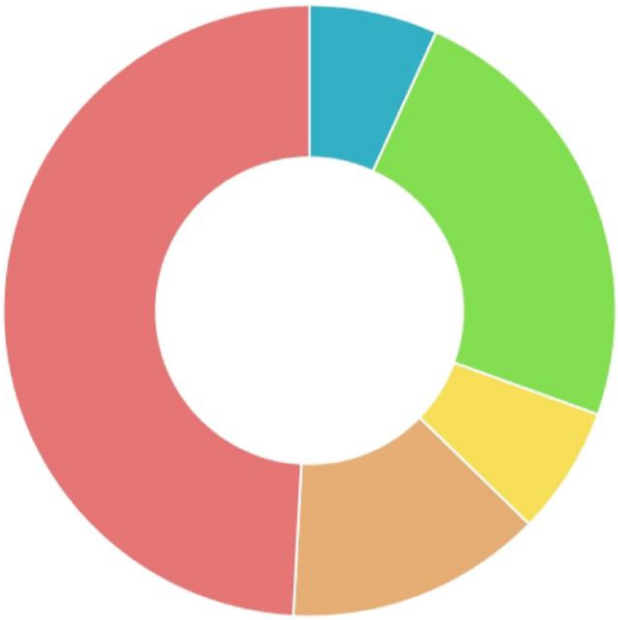
Family...my son is married to an Albanian woman.

I have my own registered Business in Albania " ALFAREEQ intercultural Business communication " , as well as I had shifted my study of master degree from Slovenia to Albania , in addition to entrepreneurship as Albania is a land of opportunities. above all i really was looking to have a new life experience abroad and I'm fully satisfied with it in Albania.

Returning to home country

For how long have you been living in Albania?

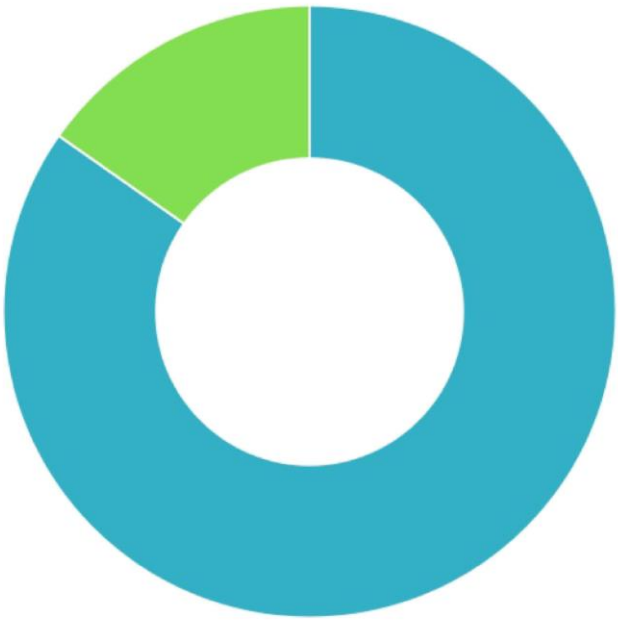
	Less than 3 months	Between 3 months and 1 year	Between 1 year and 1.5 year	Between 1.5 year and 2 years	More than 2 years	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	4 (7%)	14 (24%)	4 (7%)	8 (14%)	**29 (49%)**	9.35	59



Less than 3 months · Between 3 months and 1 year · Between 1 year and 1.5 year · Between 1.5 year and 2 years · More than 2 years

Before arrival, did you try to gather information about Albania for knowing more about the country and prepare yourself about what to expect?

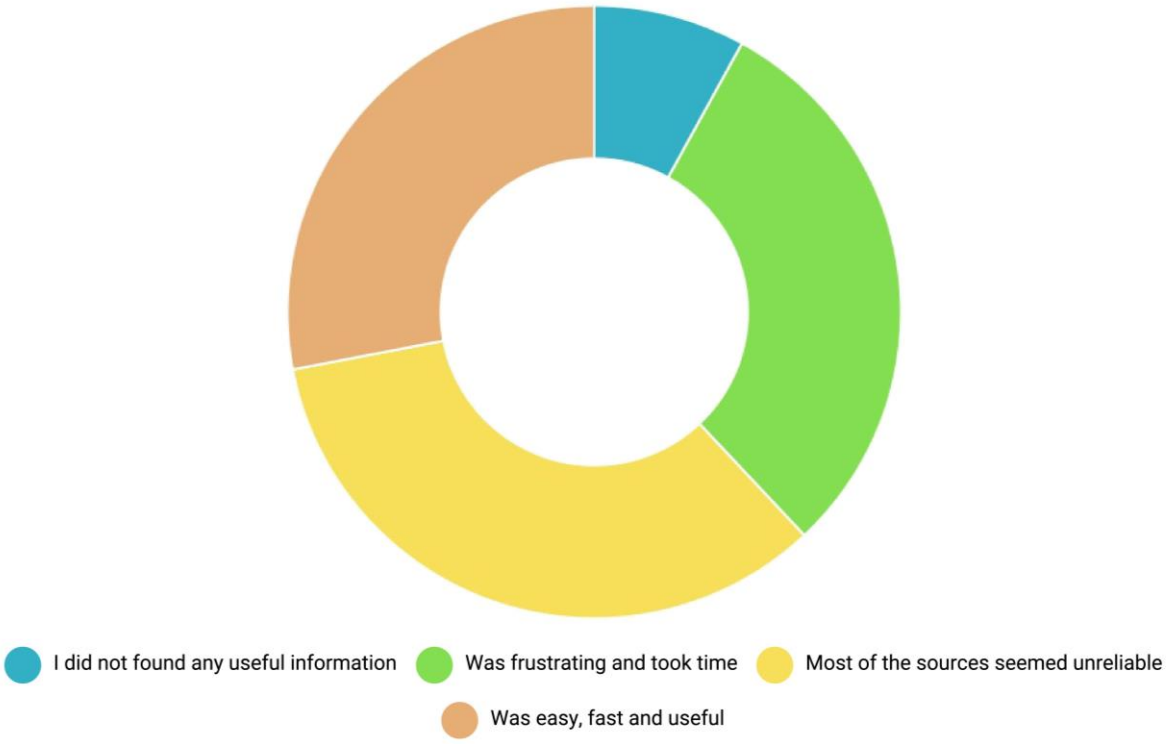
	Yes	No	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	**50 (85%)**	9 (15%)	20.5	59



Yes · No

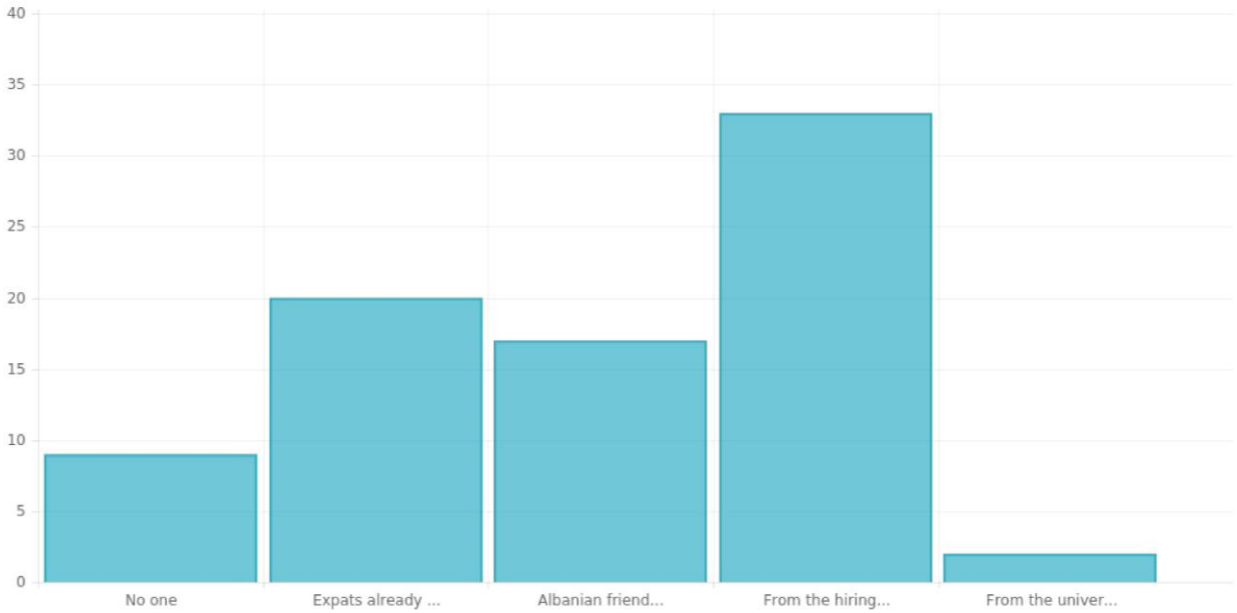
If YES then how would you describe the process?

	I did not found any useful information	Was frustrating and took time	Most of the sources seemed unreliable	Was easy, fast and useful	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	4 (8%)	15 (30%)	**17 (34%)**	14 (28%)	5.02	50



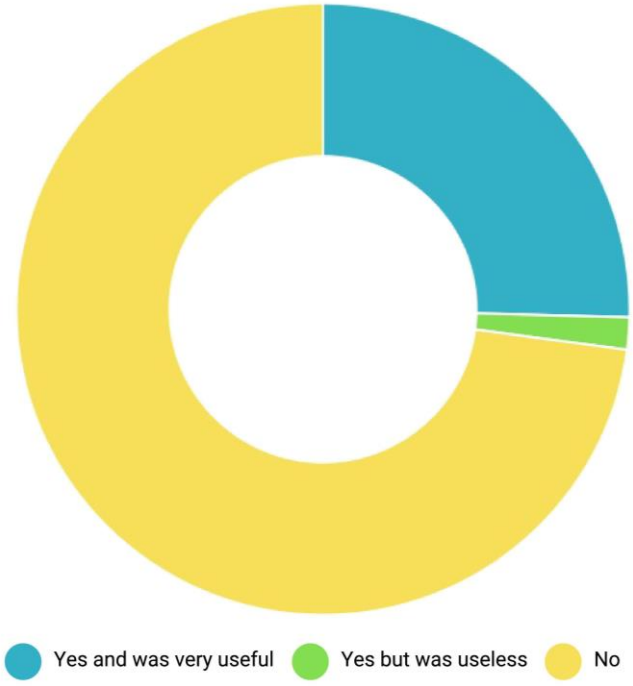
Before arrival in Albania, have you had connections in Albania that supported you with the starting phase? You can choose more than one answer if needed.

	No one	Expats already living in Albania	Albanian friends / occasional acquaintance	From the hiring company e.g. colleagues, HR staff	From the university e.g. students, teachers, administrative employees	Responses
All Data	9 (15%)	20 (34%)	17 (29%)	**33 (56%)**	2 (3%)	59



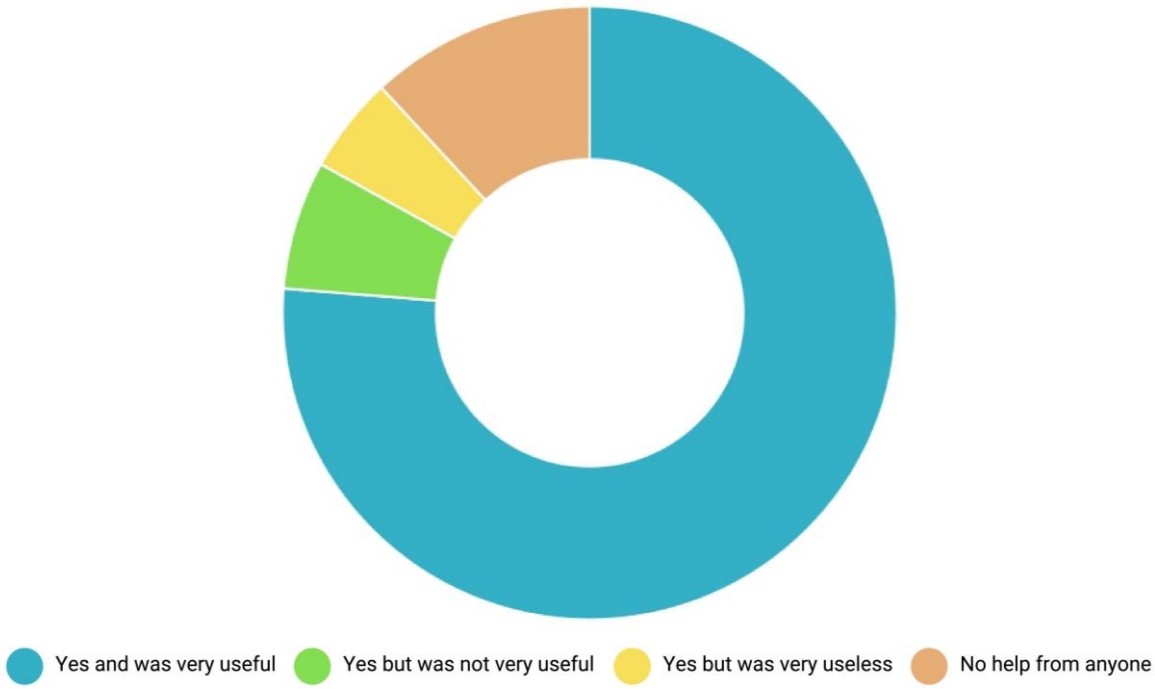
Did you received any cross-cultural training before your expatriation or when just arrived in Albania e.g. from your company, university, others?

	Yes and was very useful	Yes but was useless	No	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	15 (25%)	1 (2%)	**43 (73%)**	17.46	59



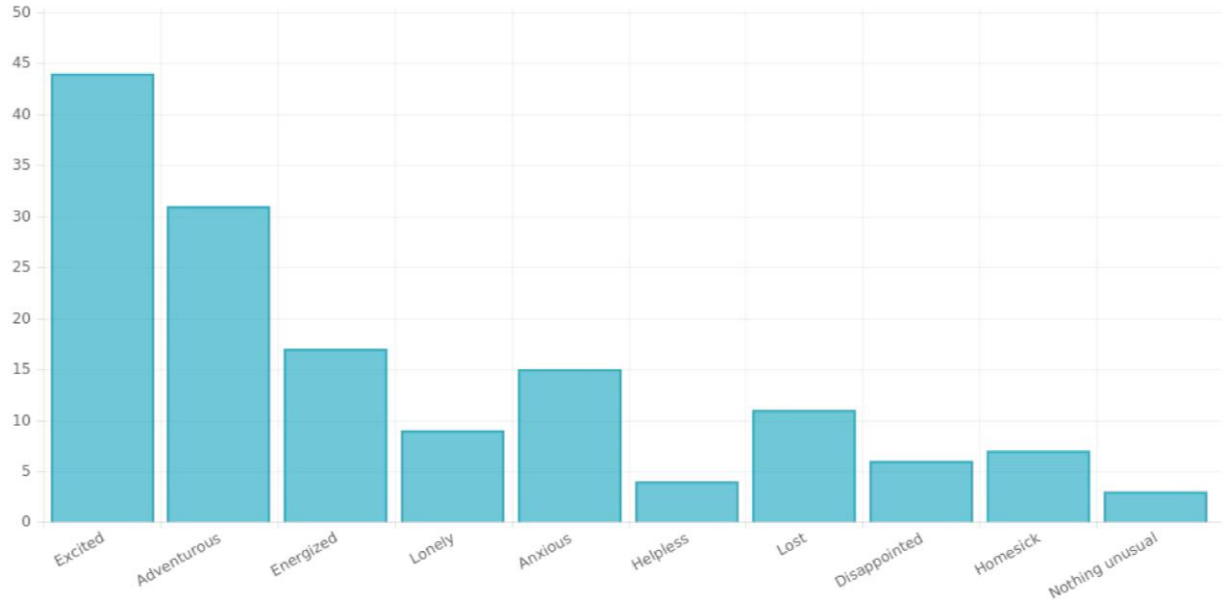
Did you had any post arrival help e.g. from your company, university, spouse, expat friends, local friends, others?

	Yes and was very useful	Yes but was not very useful	Yes but was very useless	No help from anyone	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	**45 (76%)**	4 (7%)	3 (5%)	7 (12%)	17.53	59



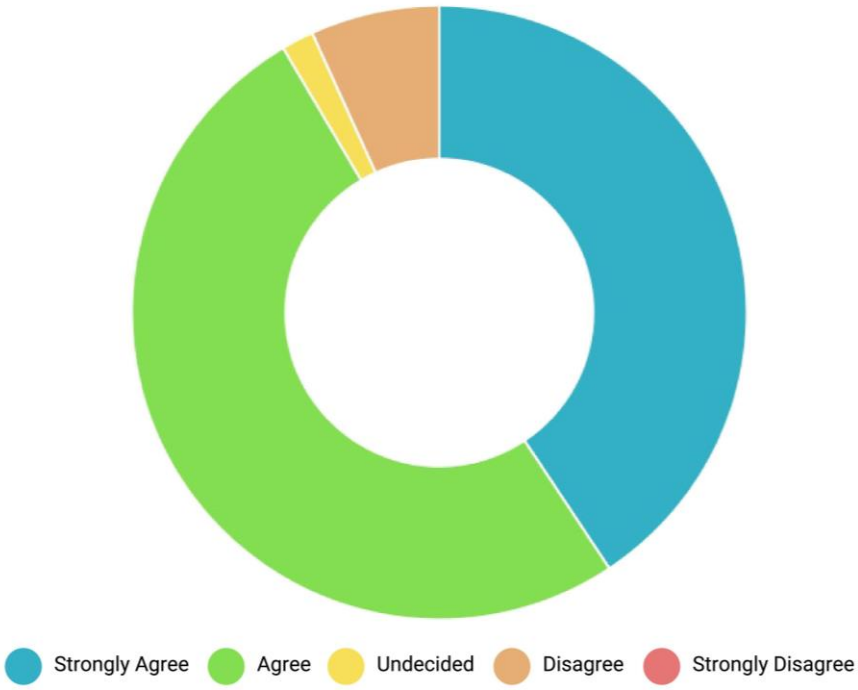
What were your first feelings when arriving in Albania? You can choose more than one answer if needed.

	Excited	Adventurous	Energized	Lonely	Anxious	Helpless	Lost	Disappointed	Homesick	Nothing unusual	Responses
All Data	**44 (75%)**	31 (53%)	17 (29%)	9 (15%)	15 (25%)	4 (7%)	11 (19%)	6 (10%)	7 (12%)	3 (5%)	59



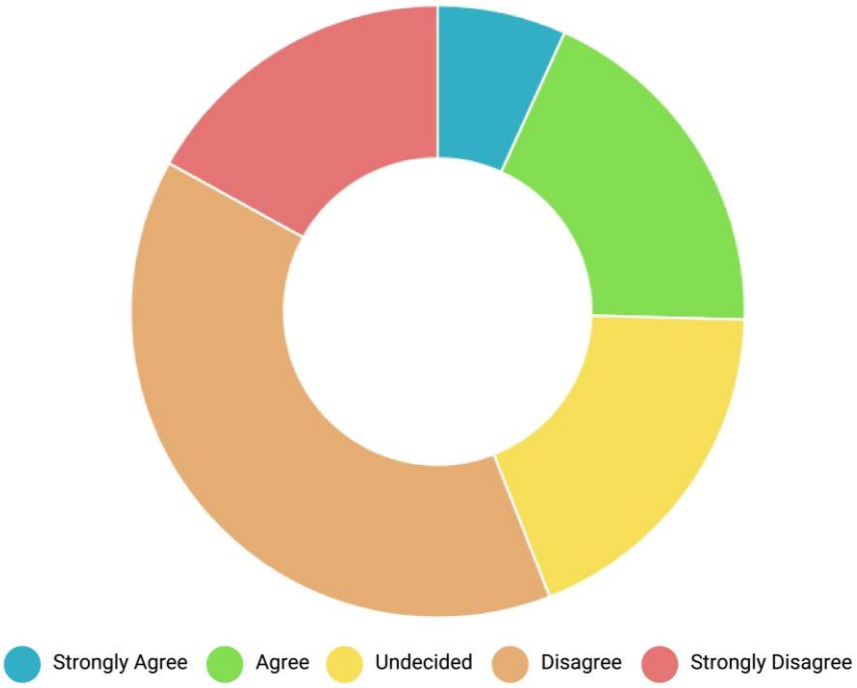
How do you feel about the following statement: "Albania is very different from my home country in many aspects"

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	24 (41%)	**30 (51%)**	1 (2%)	4 (7%)	0 (0%)	12.62	59



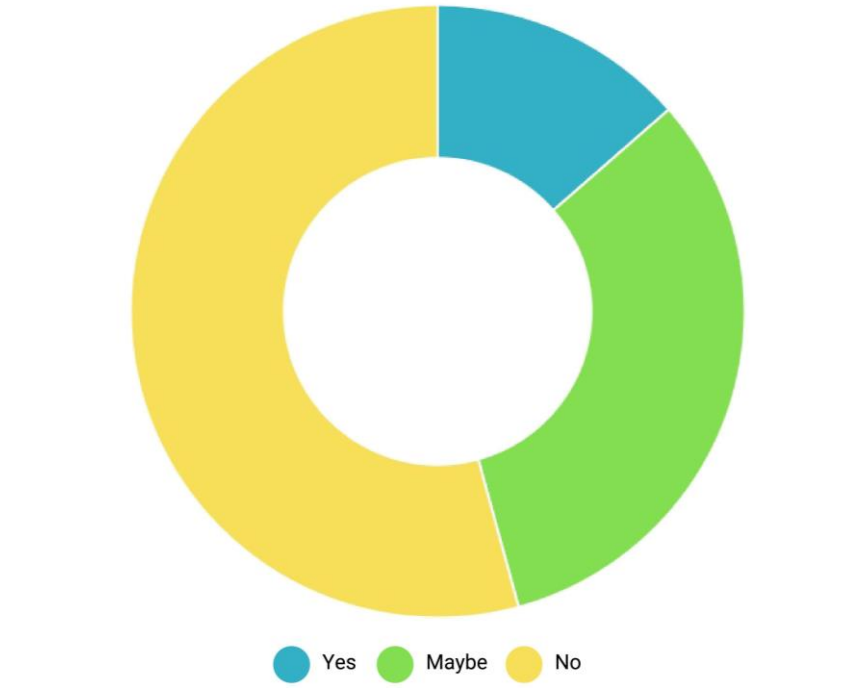
How do you feel about the following statement: "Being an expat in Albania is a very tough experience"

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	4 (7%)	11 (19%)	11 (19%)	**23 (39%)**	10 (17%)	6.18	59



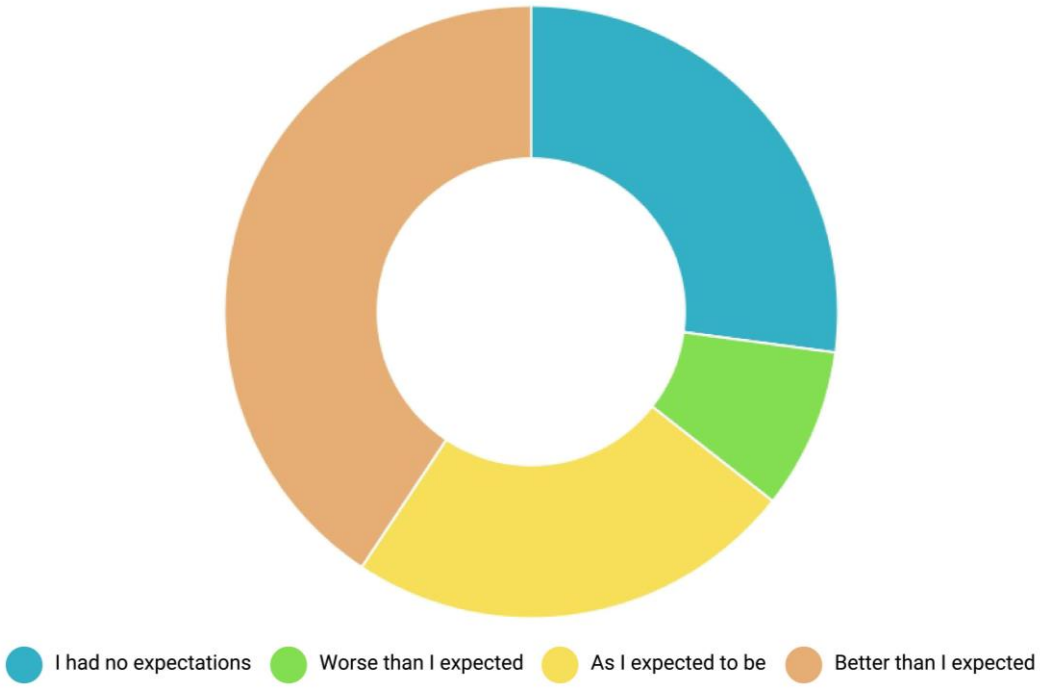
Do you believe that all those challenges you faced during adjustment in your host country, Albania, had a negative impact in your performance at work/studies/relationship/family?

	Yes	Maybe	No	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	8 (14%)	19 (32%)	**32 (54%)**	9.81	59



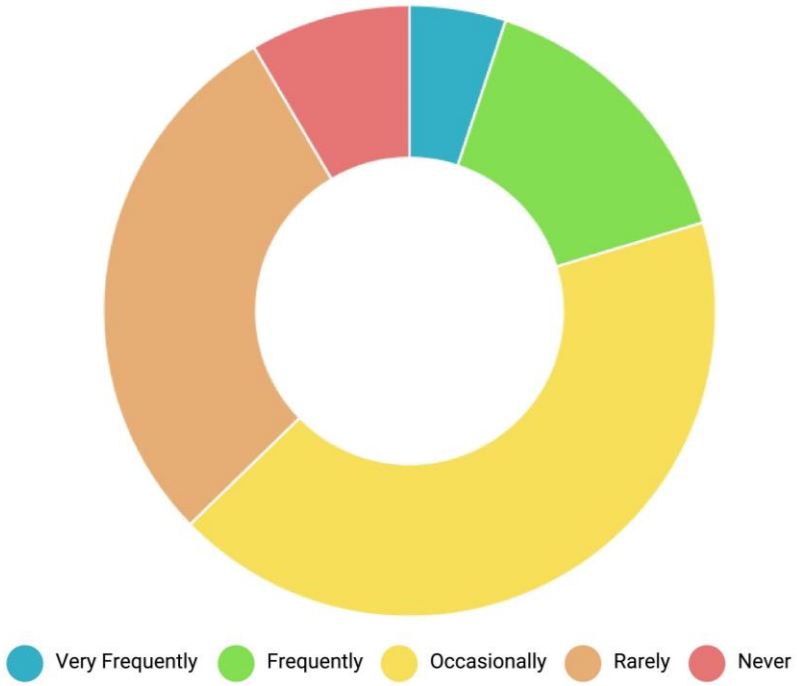
How different is your real life in Albania from your expectations?

	I had no expectations	Worse than I expected	As I expected to be	Better than I expected	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	16 (27%)	5 (8%)	14 (24%)	**24 (41%)**	6.76	59



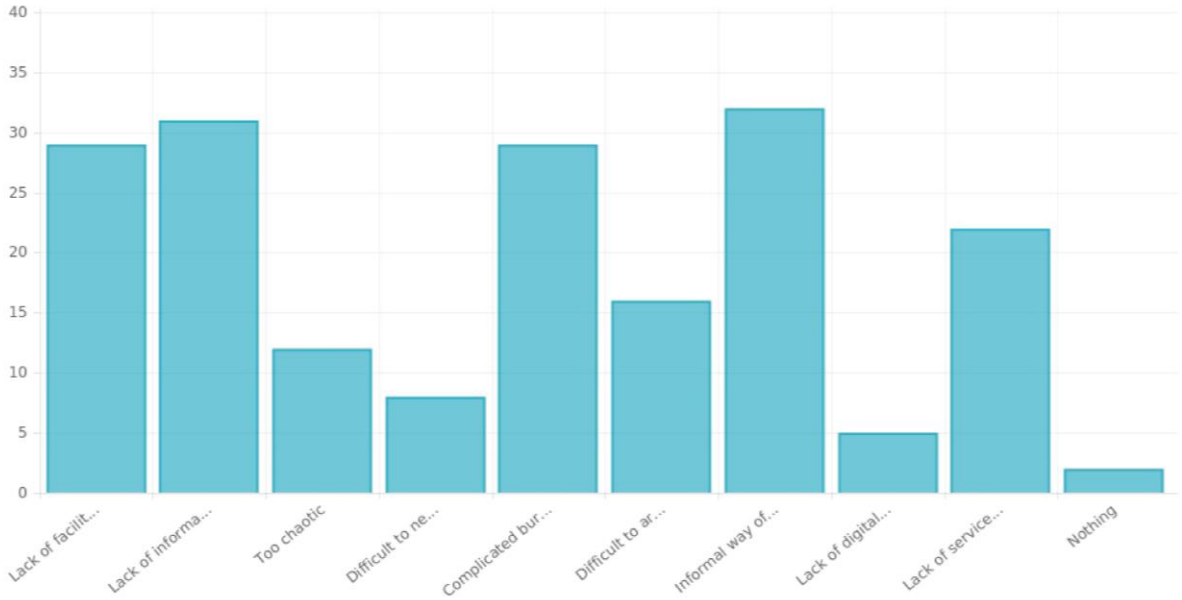
Do you ever feel helpless or powerless when trying to cope with your host culture?

	Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	3 (5%)	9 (15%)	**25 (42%)**	17 (29%)	5 (8%)	8.16	59



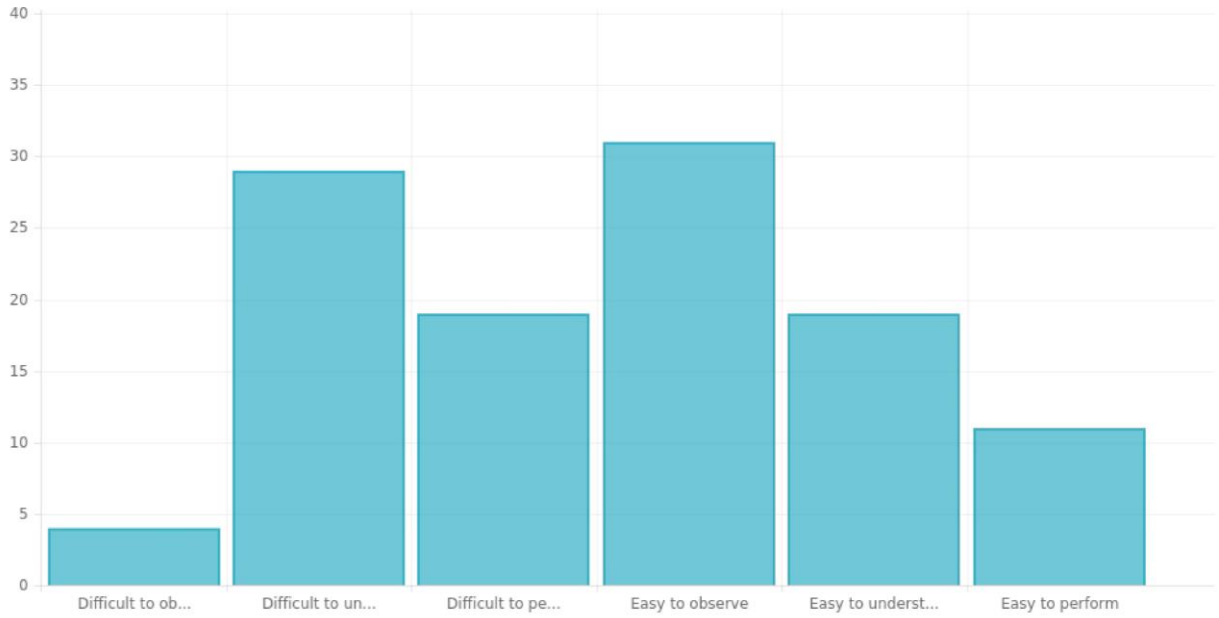
What do you dislike the most about your new country of residence, Albania? You can choose more than one answer if needed.

	Lack of facilities	Lack of information and sources	Too chaotic	Difficult to network	Complicated bureaucratic regulations and systems	Difficult to arrange the most basic things	Informal way of having things done is often the only way	Lack of digital services	Lack of services	Nothing	Responses
All Data	29 (49%)	31 (53%)	12 (20%)	8 (14%)	29 (49%)	16 (27%)	**32 (54%)**	5 (8%)	22 (37%)	2 (3%)	59



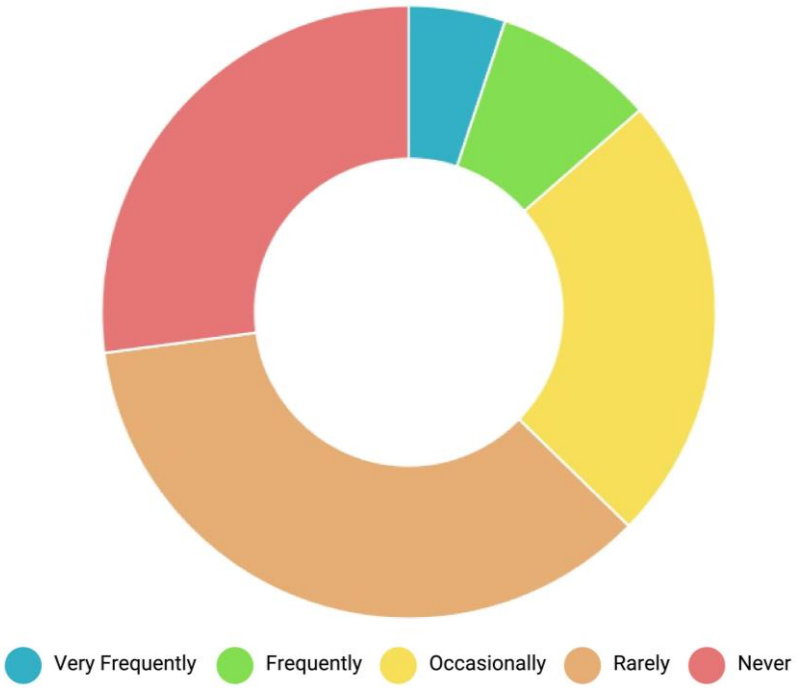
How was the adjustment process with the Albanian culture; how would you describe your experience about Albanian behavior models? You can choose more than one answer if needed.

	Difficult to observe	Difficult to understand	Difficult to perform	Easy to observe	Easy to understand	Easy to perform	Responses
All Data	4 (7%)	29 (49%)	19 (32%)	**31 (53%)**	19 (32%)	11 (19%)	59



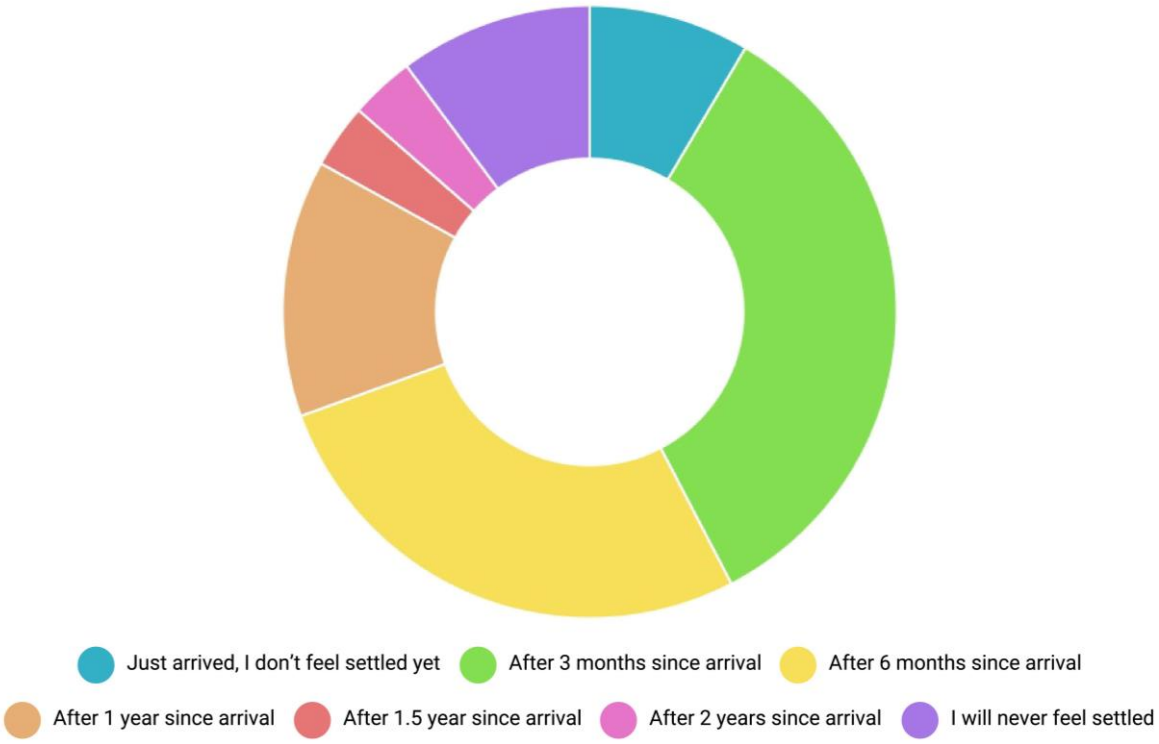
Have you ever felt so unhappy that you wanted to quit and leave your life in Albania?

	Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	3 (5%)	5 (8%)	14 (24%)	**21 (36%)**	16 (27%)	6.79	59



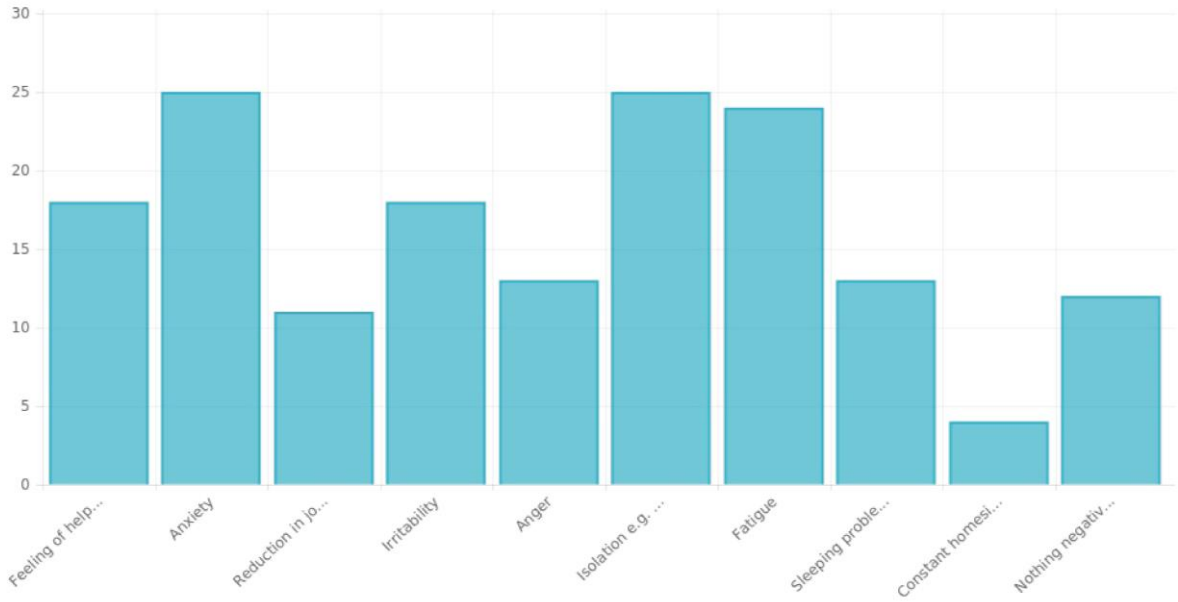
When did you start to feel settled into your new country of residence, Albania?

	Just arrived, I don't feel settled yet	After 3 months since arrival	After 6 months since arrival	After 1 year since arrival	After 1.5 year since arrival	After 2 years since arrival	I will never feel settled	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	5 (8%)	**20 (34%)**	16 (27%)	8 (14%)	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	6 (10%)	6.46	59



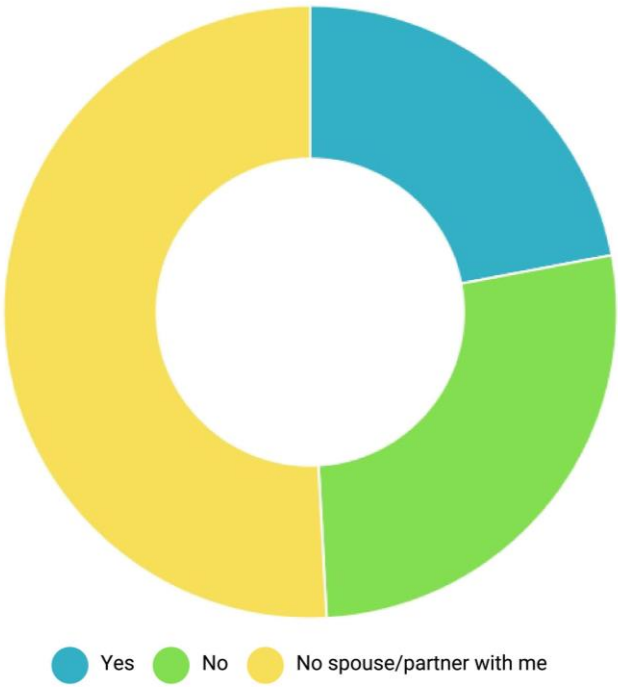
While settling, have you experienced any of the below? You can choose more than one answer if needed.

	Feeling of helplessness	Anxiety	Reduction in job performance	Irritability	Anger	Isolation e.g. staying home most of the time	Fatigue	Sleeping problems	Constant homesickness	Nothing negative	Responses
All Data	18 (31%)	**25 (42%)**	11 (19%)	18 (31%)	13 (22%)	25 (42%)	24 (41%)	13 (22%)	4 (7%)	12 (20%)	59



Did your spouse or partner have problems adjusting to their new home?

	Yes	No	No spouse/partner with me	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	13 (22%)	16 (27%)	**30 (51%)**	7.41	59

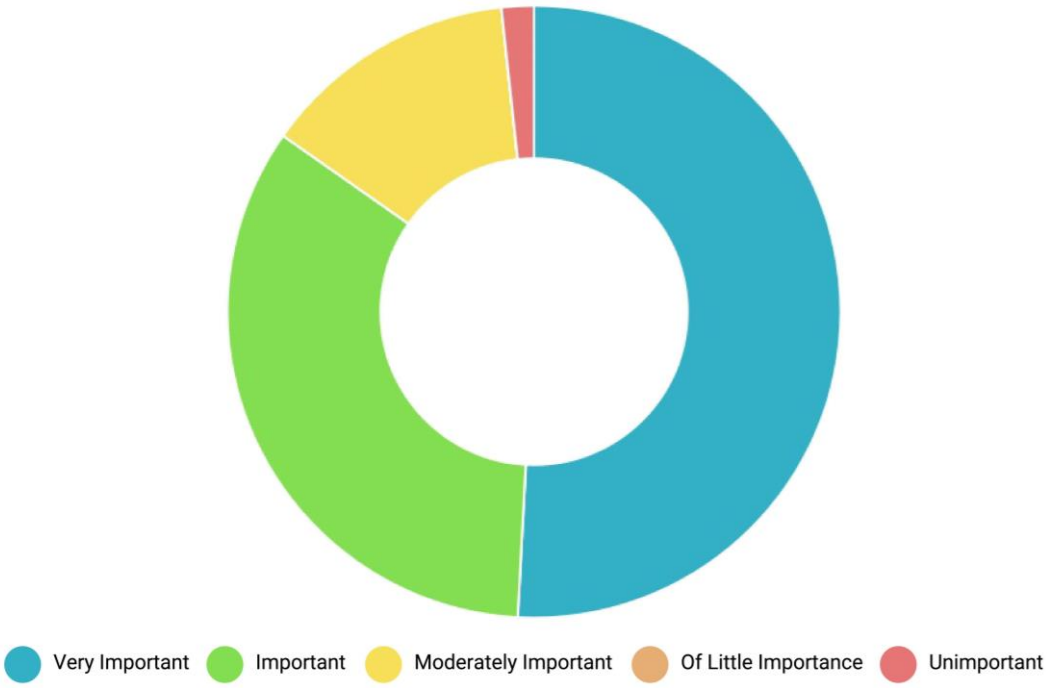


If you relocated with family, did your child / children settle in easily?

	Yes	No	No children with me	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	8 (14%)	1 (2%)	**50 (85%)**	21.64	59

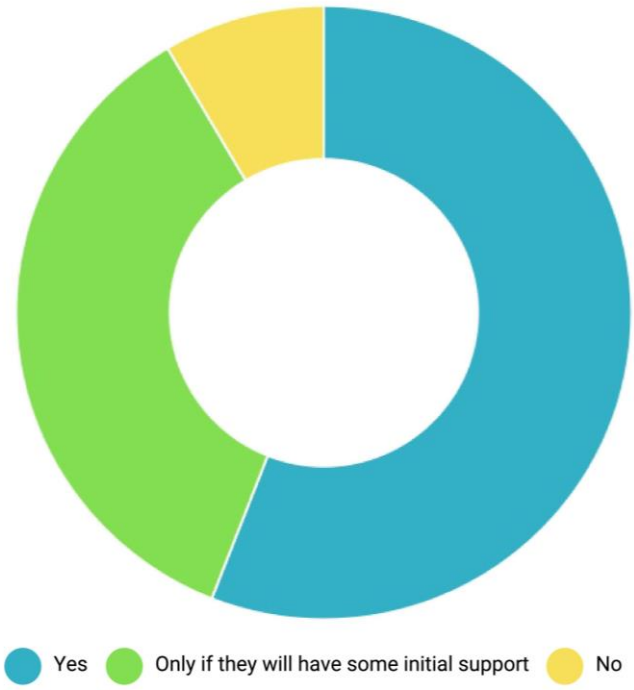
How important is for you to discover more about Albanian culture, its history, values, and systems (political, healthcare, education, etc.)?

	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Of Little Importance	Unimportant	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	**30 (51%)**	20 (34%)	8 (14%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	11.57	59



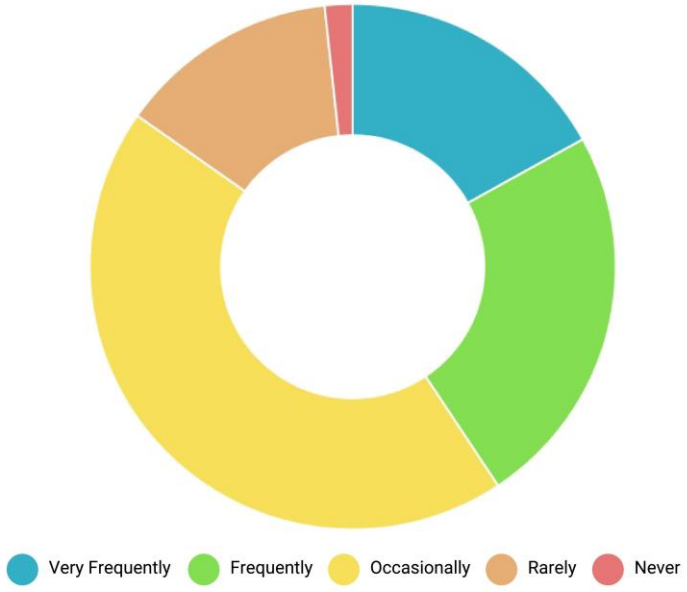
Would you recommend the expatriate life in Albania to other people?

	Yes	Only if they will have some initial support	No	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	**33 (56%)**	21 (36%)	5 (8%)	11.47	59



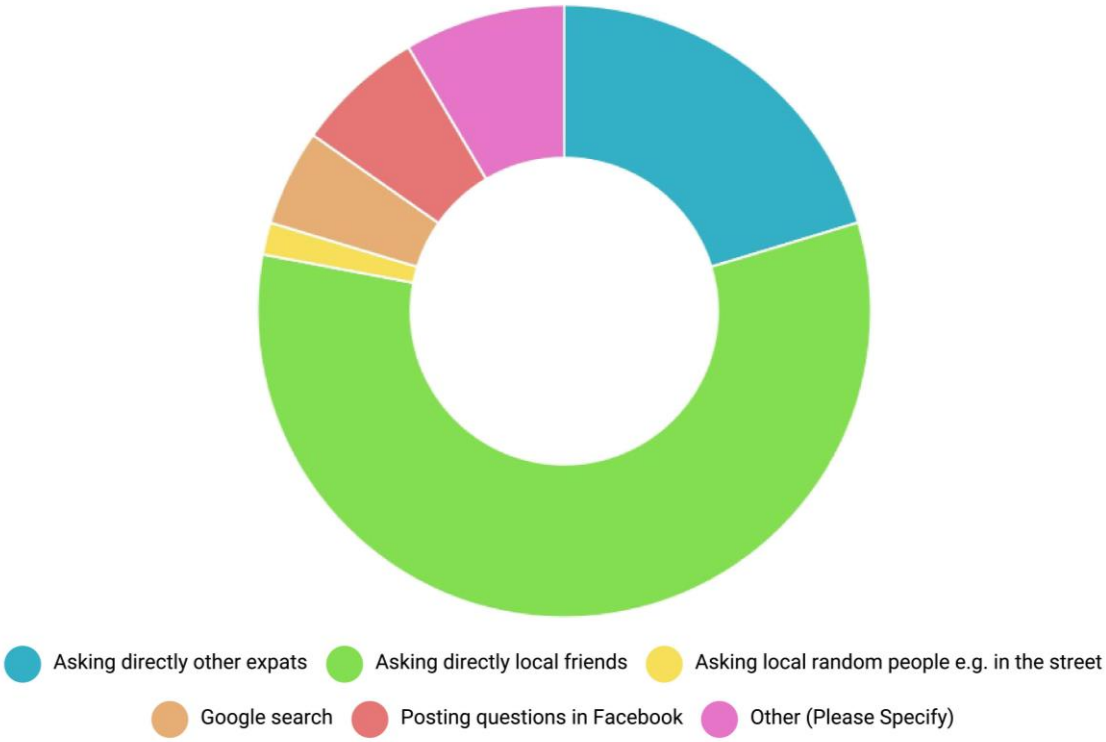
How often have you felt confused about getting something done but didn`t know where or how (e.g. solving a dental problem, having the car fixed, travelling in other cities in Albania, finding a babysitter for your child, being member of a hiking club, buying certain products, etc.)?

	Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	10 (17%)	14 (24%)	**26 (44%)**	8 (14%)	1 (2%)	8.26	59



When you needed to get something done but you did not know where or how, which way you used the most to get the needed information / guidance / instructions?

	Asking directly other expats	Asking directly local friends	Asking local random people e.g. in the street	Google search	Posting questions in Facebook	Other (Please Specify)	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	12 (20%)	**34 (58%)**	1 (2%)	3 (5%)	4 (7%)	5 (8%)	11.33	59



Text Responses

Asked my husband who is Albanian

My taxi driver

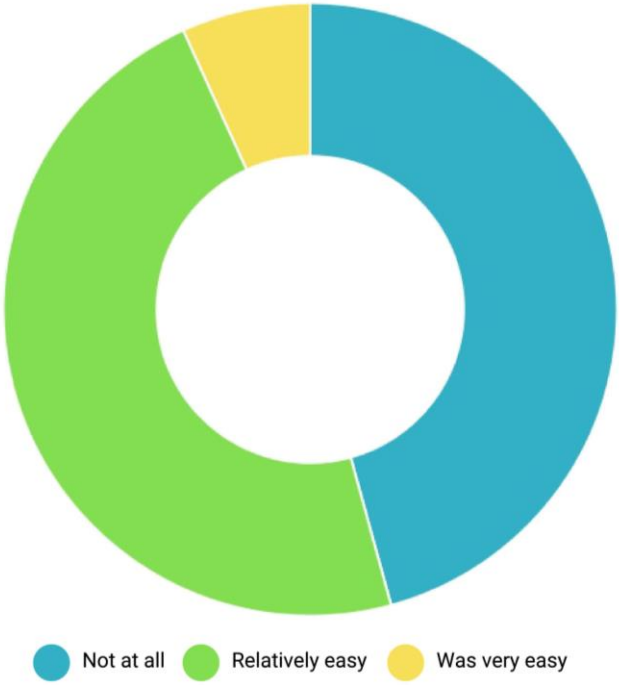
Asking place of work

Albanian colleagues at work helped me.

my work/colleagues helped me all the way through to get things done.

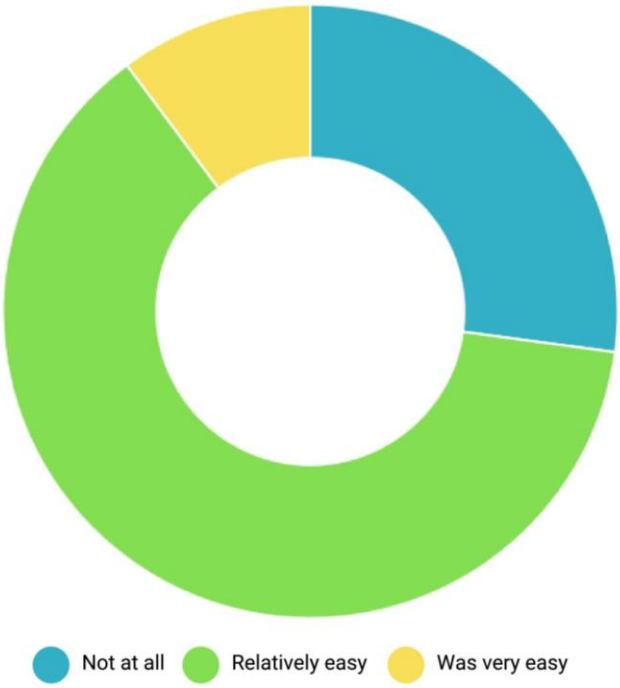
Was it easy to sort out your administrative formalities e.g. permits, taxes, insurances, utility payments, banks, health?

	Not at all	Relatively easy	Was very easy	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	27 (46%)	**28 (47%)**	4 (7%)	11.09	59



Was it easy to find out entertainment/recreation facilities and opportunities?

	Not at all	Relatively easy	Was very easy	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	16 (27%)	**37 (63%)**	6 (10%)	12.92	59



What digital services (e.g. Facebook, Expats websites, others) do you use for providing information or networking in your host country, Albania?

Text Responses

Expats Albania, Google
Facebook
Facebook
Expats websites
Expats in Albania on Facebook
Facebook
Facebook
Facebook
Facebook, Expats groups, Google
Facebook
Blogs
Facebook, Ins
Facebook
Facebook
Facebook
Facebook

Internations, Google
Facebook

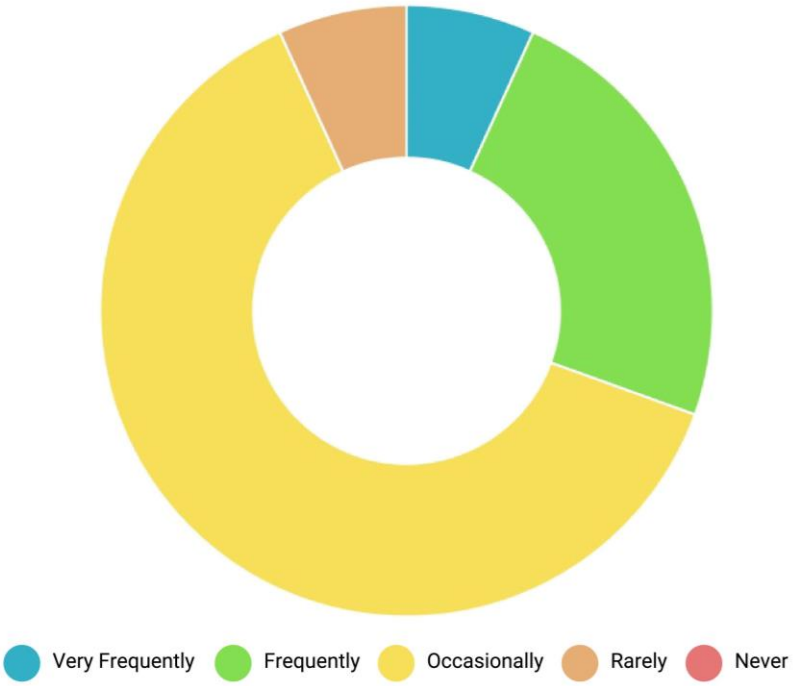
Are there others???

NO expat services - to self centered, not realy adepted to the Albanian live
Facebook
fb
Facebook
Facebook
Facebook
Expats website
Inter Nations
Facebook

Facebook
Facebook
Facebook
Faceb
Facebook
Facebook
Dace
FB and other ex-pat sites
Facebook Expat Groups
Facebook
Expat
Facebook
Expat Forums
Couchsurfing, expats
Facebook. Internationa
Facebook
Facebook
Facebook
Expats in Albania FB group
Facebook, expat websites.
Facebook
as much as poosible
Facebook, inter-nation, linkedin.
Facebook Instagram expats group
Facebook
Facebook
Facebook
Facebook
Facebook
Facebook, expat groups, WhatsApp group,
Facebook
Fb
Facebook and Expat websites

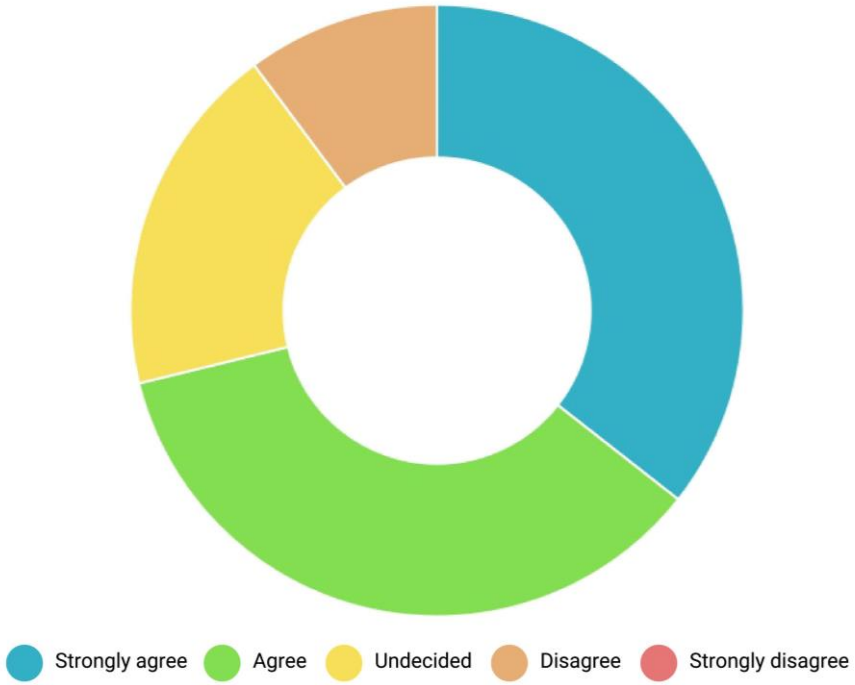
Are these digital services sufficient and useful sources of information and networking for you?

	Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	4 (7%)	14 (24%)	**37 (63%)**	4 (7%)	0 (0%)	13.42	59



Please state your opinion about the following statement: "The existence of a digital service as a reliable source of all general information about Albania (culture and values, behavior models, systems, economy, politics, and more) and all facilitating information about "the where and the how get something done" (how to involve children in after school activities, where to find a physiotherapist, where to find a plumber, how to hire a cleaning lady, etc.) would have made my settling in Albania faster, easier and more pleasant."

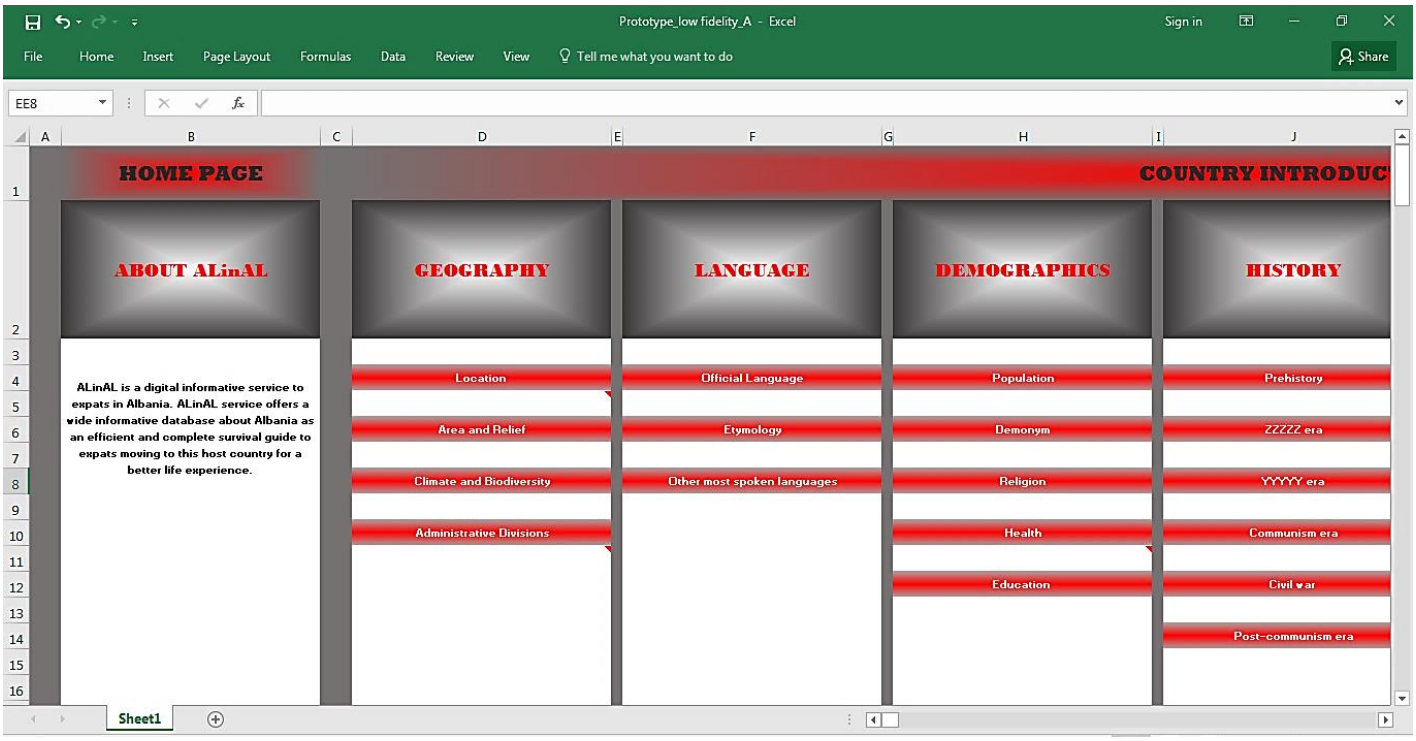
	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	**21 (36%)**	21 (36%)	11 (19%)	6 (10%)	0 (0%)	8.28	59

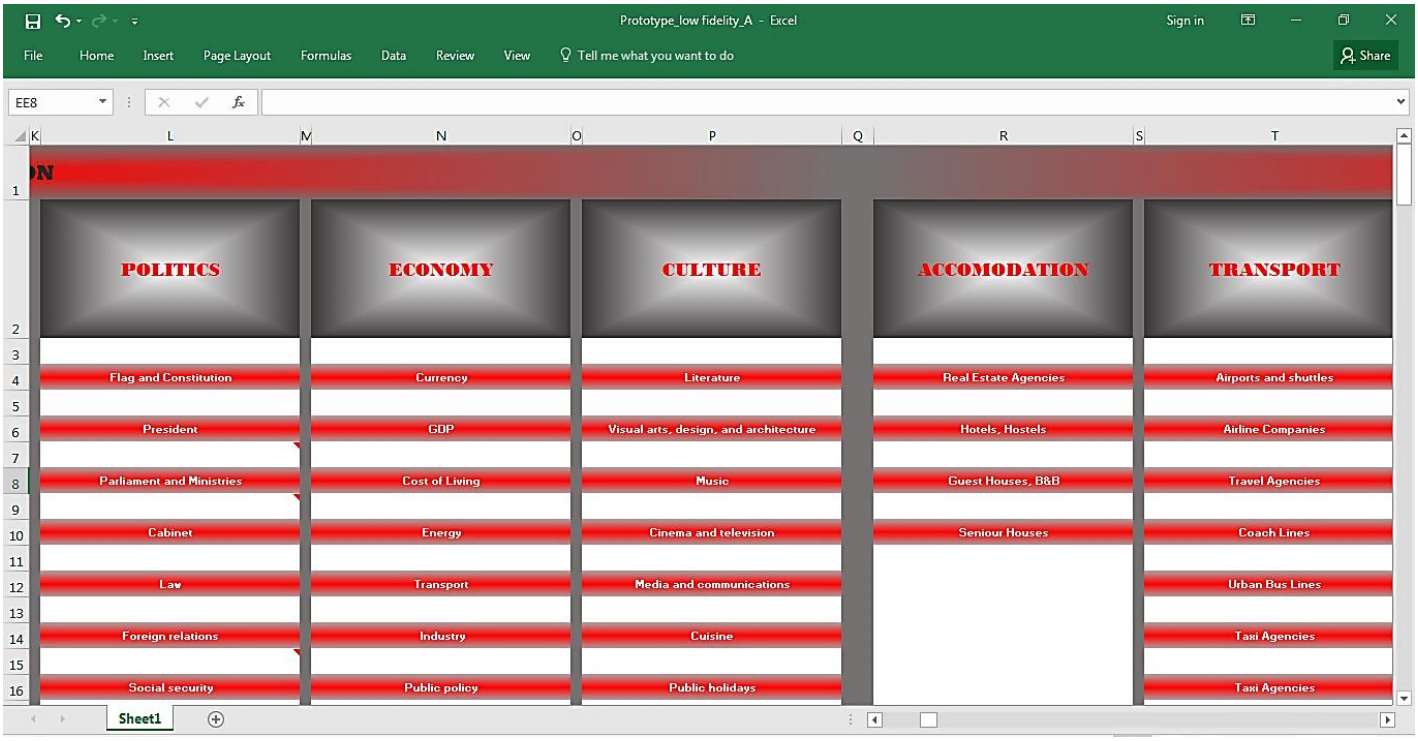


Source: www.kwiksurveys.com

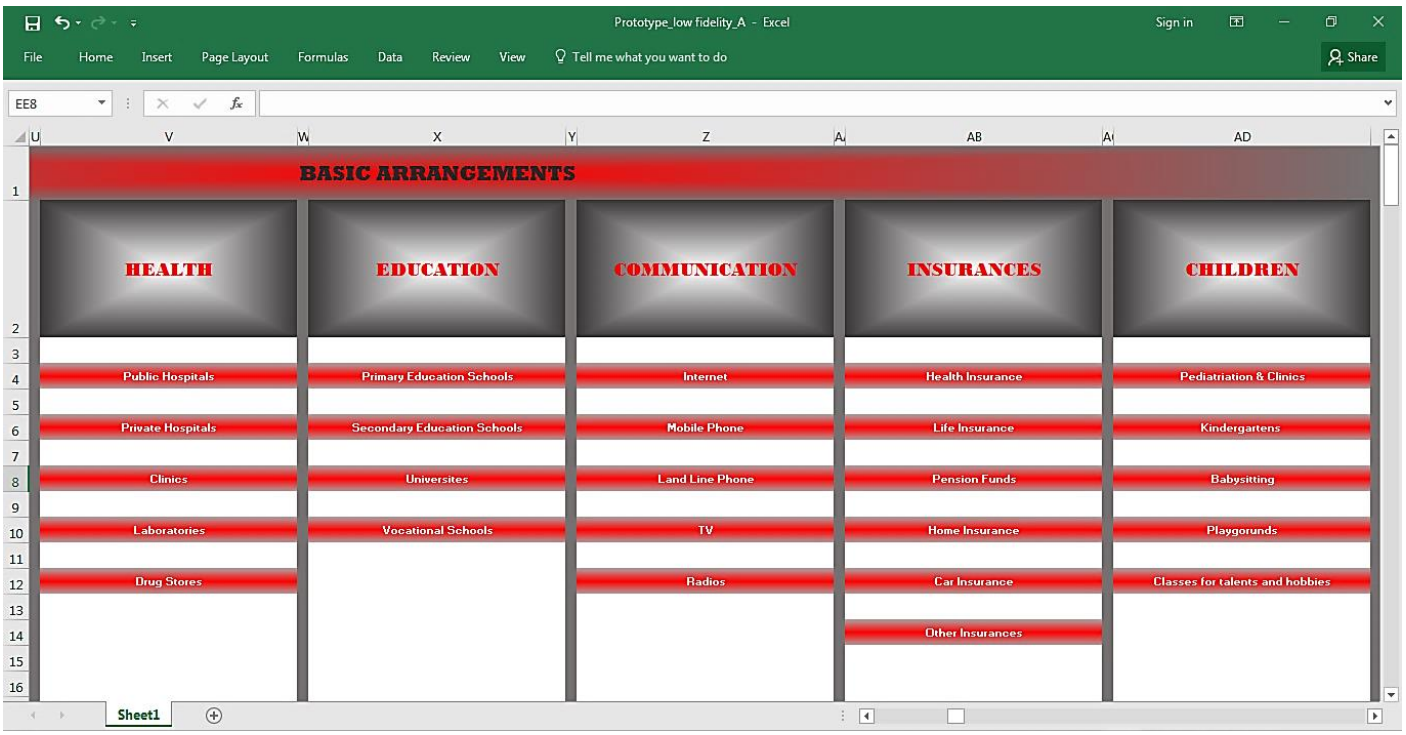
Appendix III - Low-Fidelity Prototypes

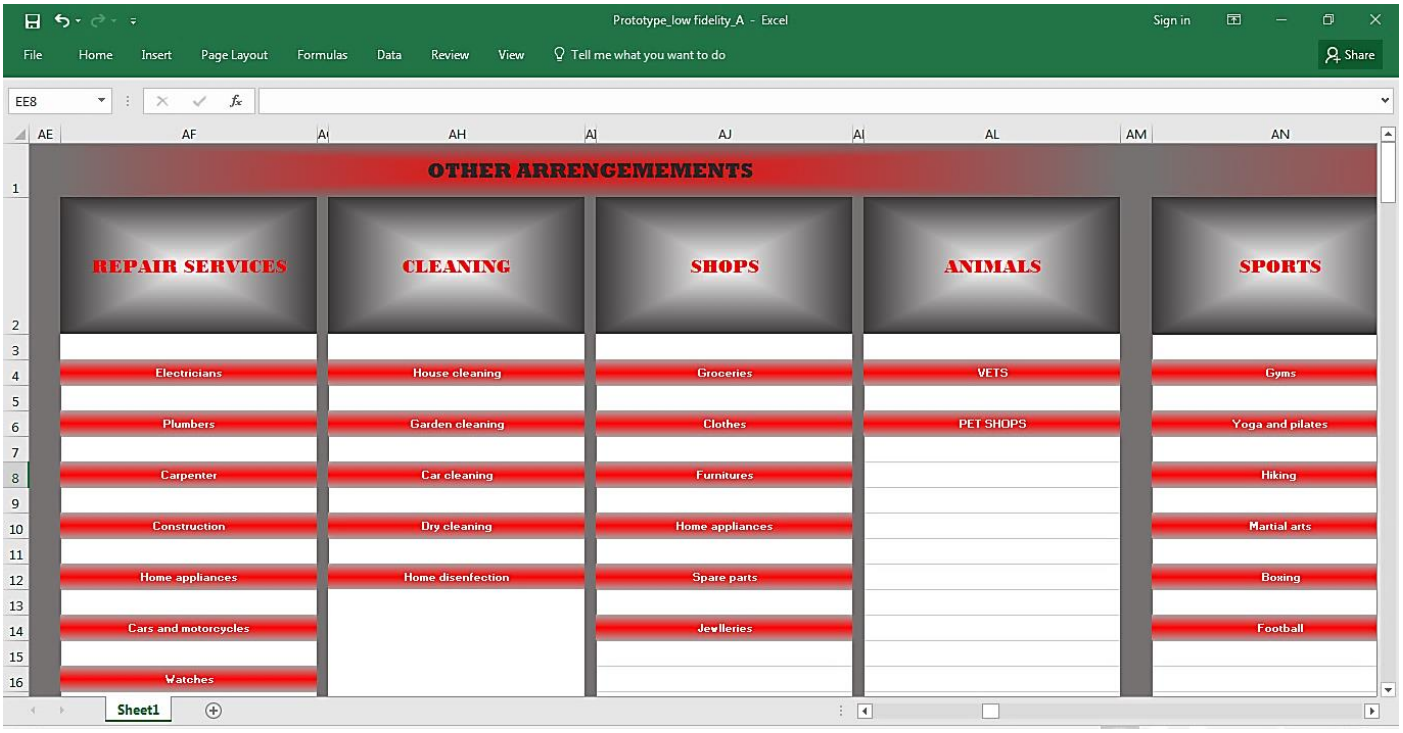
Low-Fidelity Prototype A:

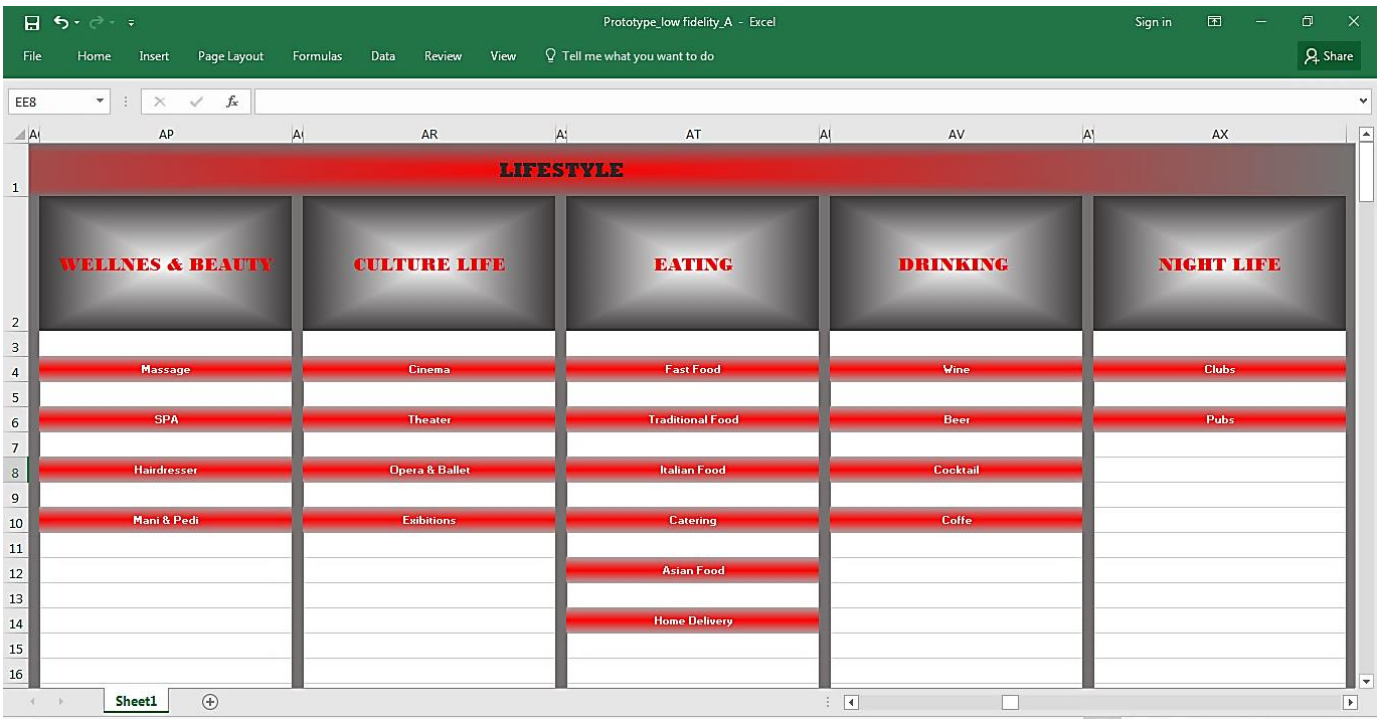




Appendix III







Low-Fidelity Prototype B:

PRE-DEPARTURE SERVICES

- Information and advice on the country, town, its surroundings, way of life, and cost of living.
- Understanding your individual needs and preferences.
- Pre-relocation tour.
- Presenting real estate market and job market.
- Organization of temporary accommodation.
- Advice about travelling options to your new home.
- Advice about the transfer of your stuff and your car.

SETTELING-IN SERVICES

- Research and selection of accommodation (temporary, rental, purchase).
- Assistance for Utility connections and bills payments (water, gas, electricity).
- Assistance for communication and media services (mobile phone, internet, tv, radios).
- Arranging all necessary insurances (health insurance, home insurance, car insurance, etc.).
- In case of emergency (emergency numbers, nearby hospitals and veterinaries, nearby drug stores).
- Explaining the city map and showing crucial locations for easy orentation.
- Opening of bank accounts.
- Administrative formalities (driving license, residence permits, etc.).
- Help for the first purchases (furniture & fixture, clothes, groceries).
- Public and private transportation, driving, traffic , parking and some unwritten street rules.

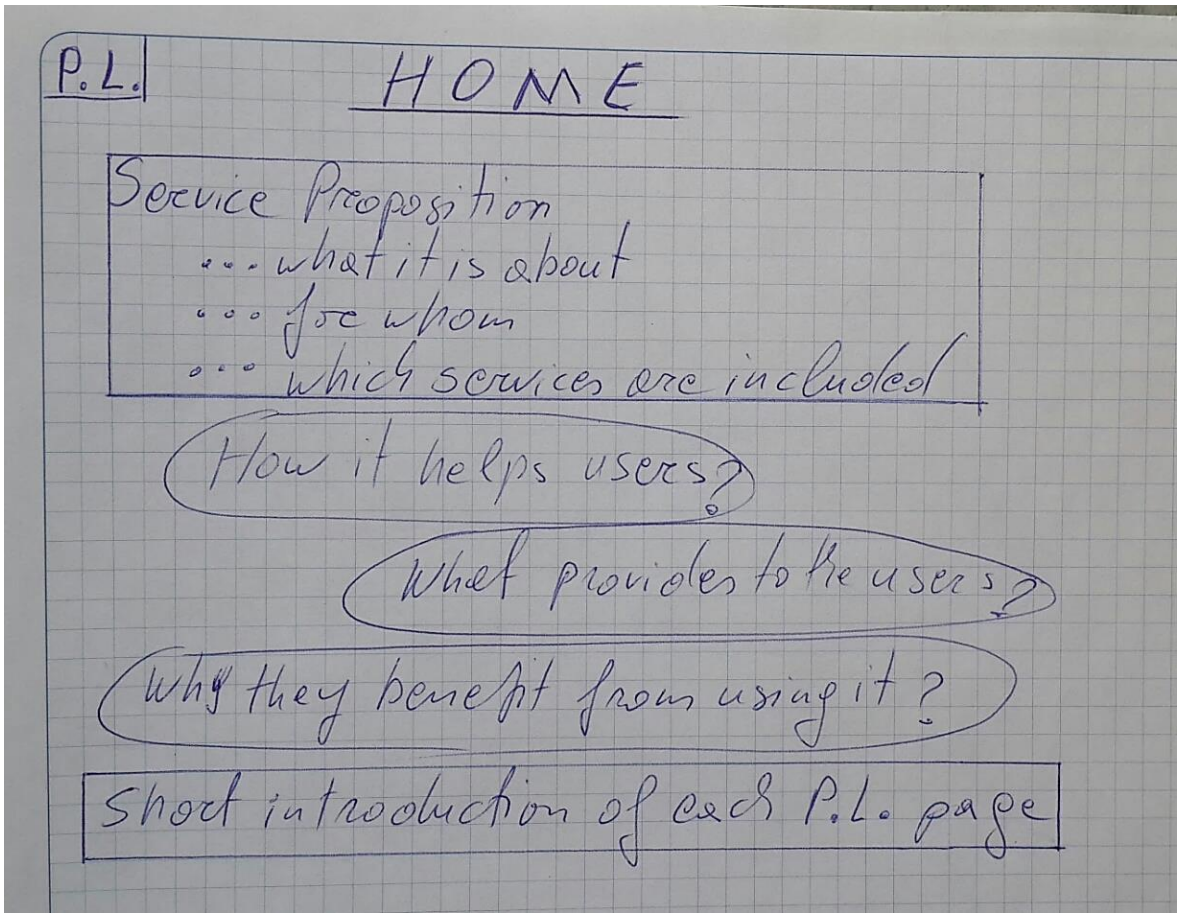
INTEGRATION SERVICES

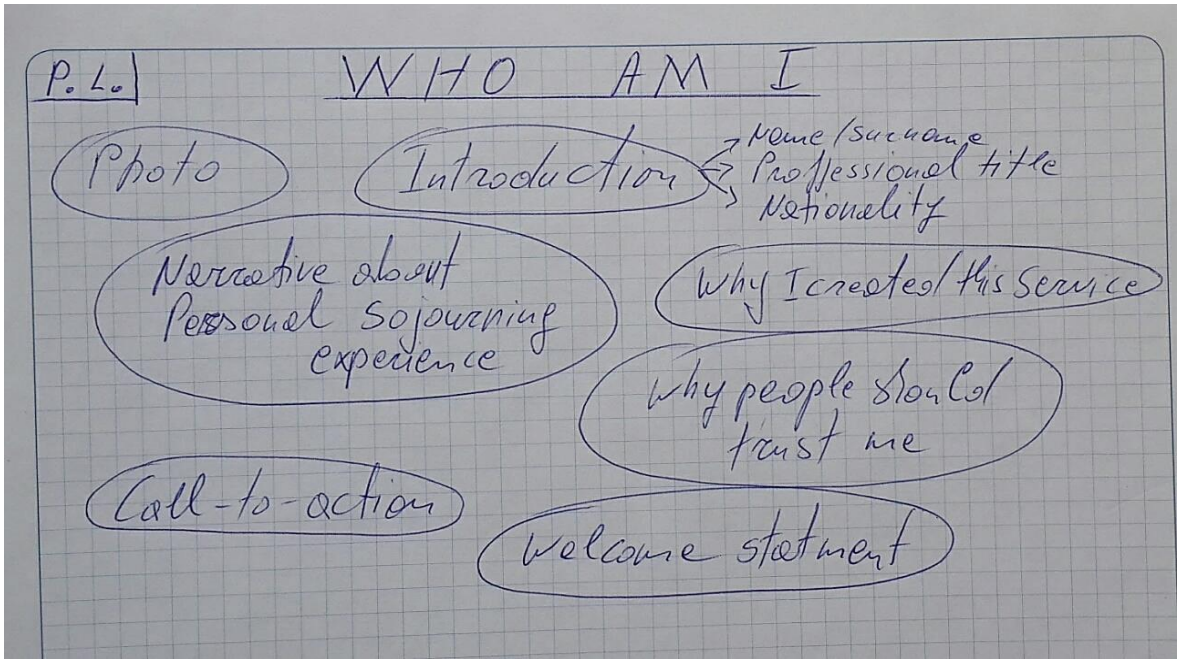
- Let`s talk about Culture Shock.
- What you must know about local people, their customs, norms and behavior.
- How to network with locals and other expats.
- Basic information about the country systems (economical, financial, political, law, tax, education, and transportation).
- Introduction to local social life (hobbies, entertainment, culture life, sports, restaurants, etc.).
- Search of classes, clubs and associations for your free time and passions (book clubs, humanitarian associations, yoga classes, etc.).
- All you need about your children.

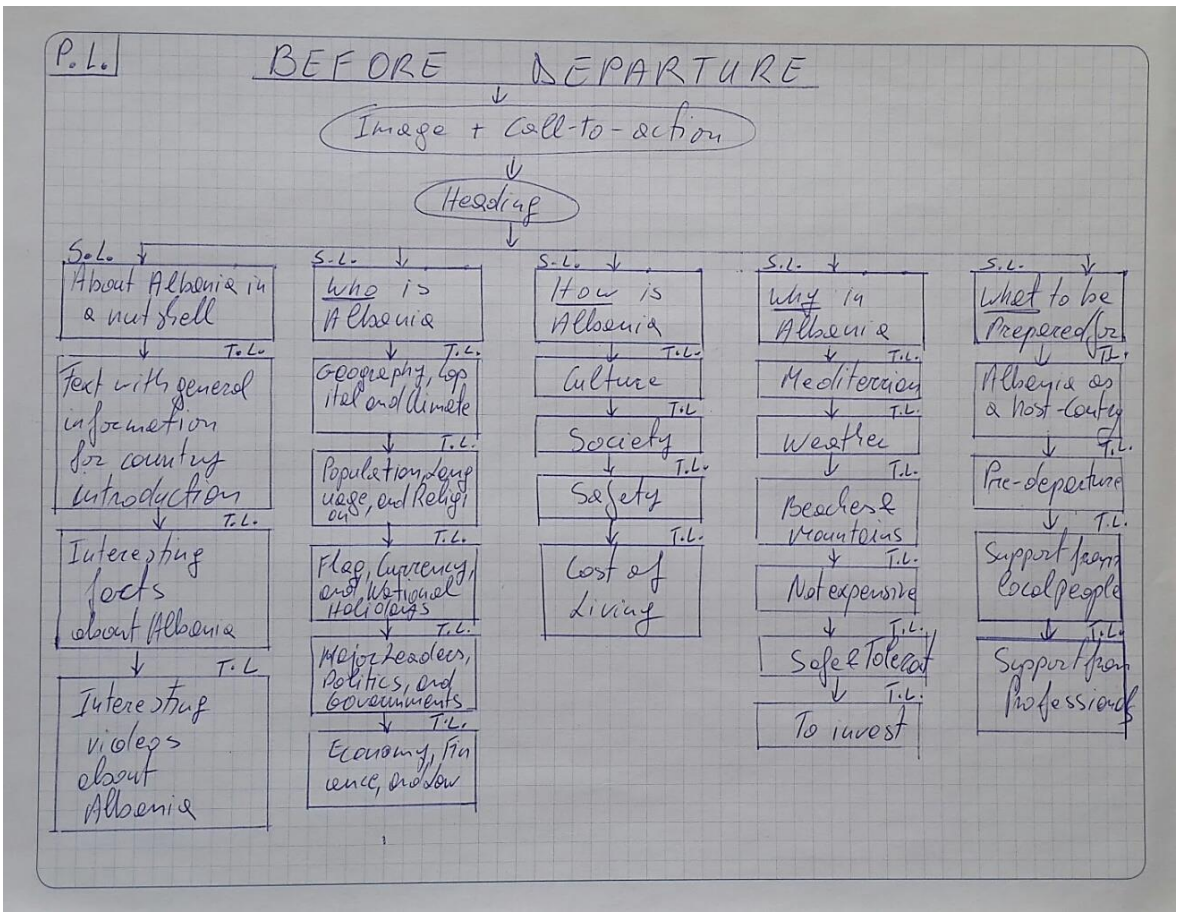
«IT`S TIME TO LEAVE» SERVICES

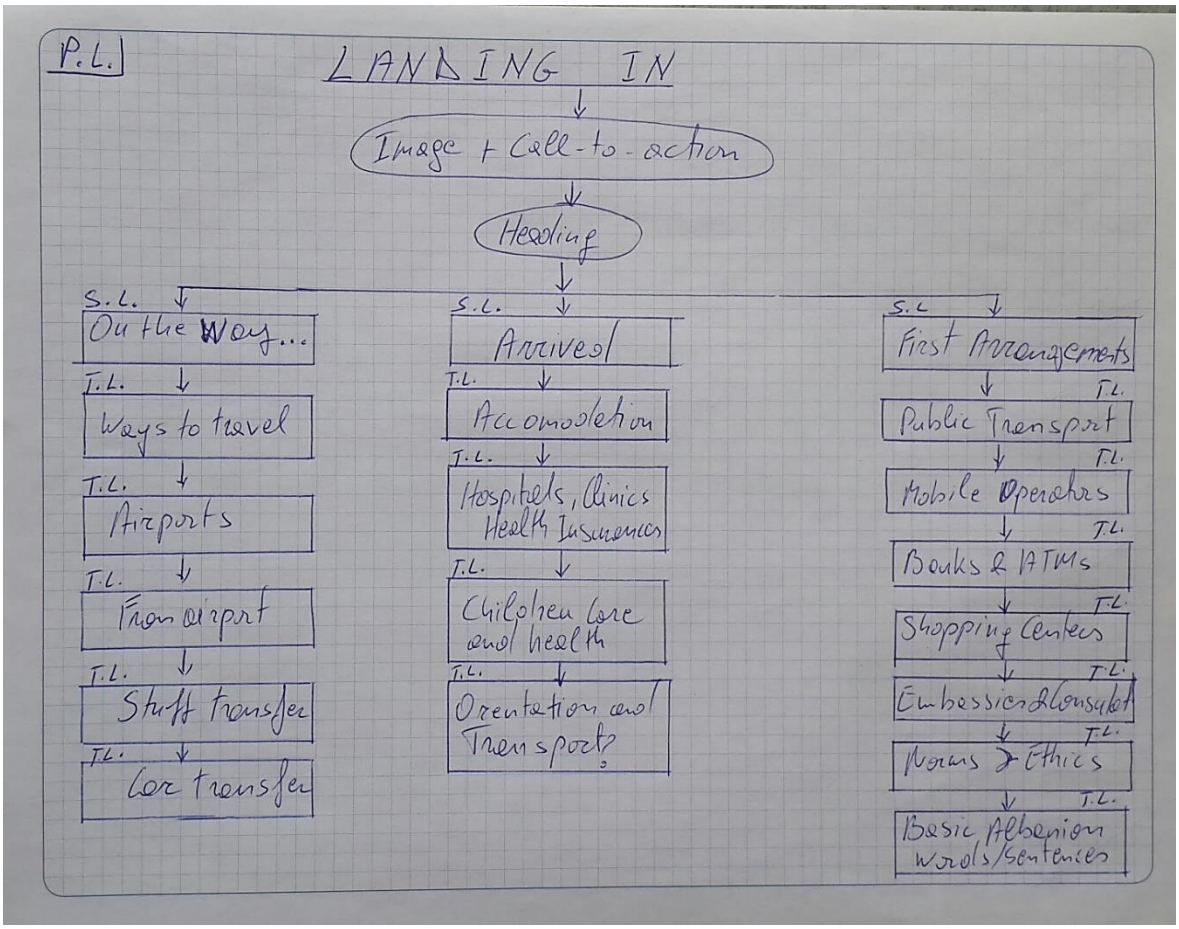
- Let`s talk about Reverse Culture Shock
- Cancellation of the lease, services and subscriptions.
- Advice about the transfer of your stuff and your car.
- Deregistration (from home address, tax system, etc.).
- Closing of bank accounts and other financial obligations.

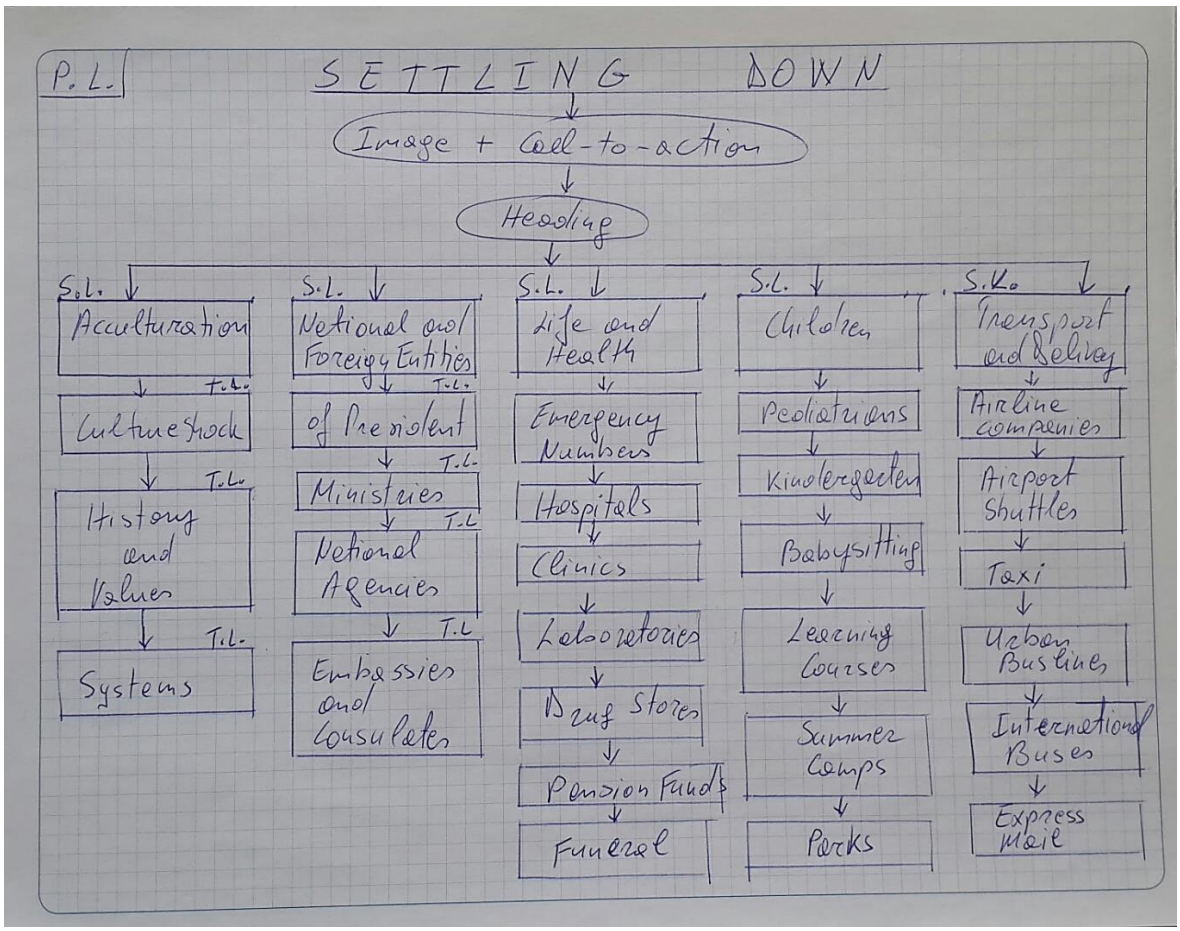
Appendix IV - Tree Model of Website Anatomy

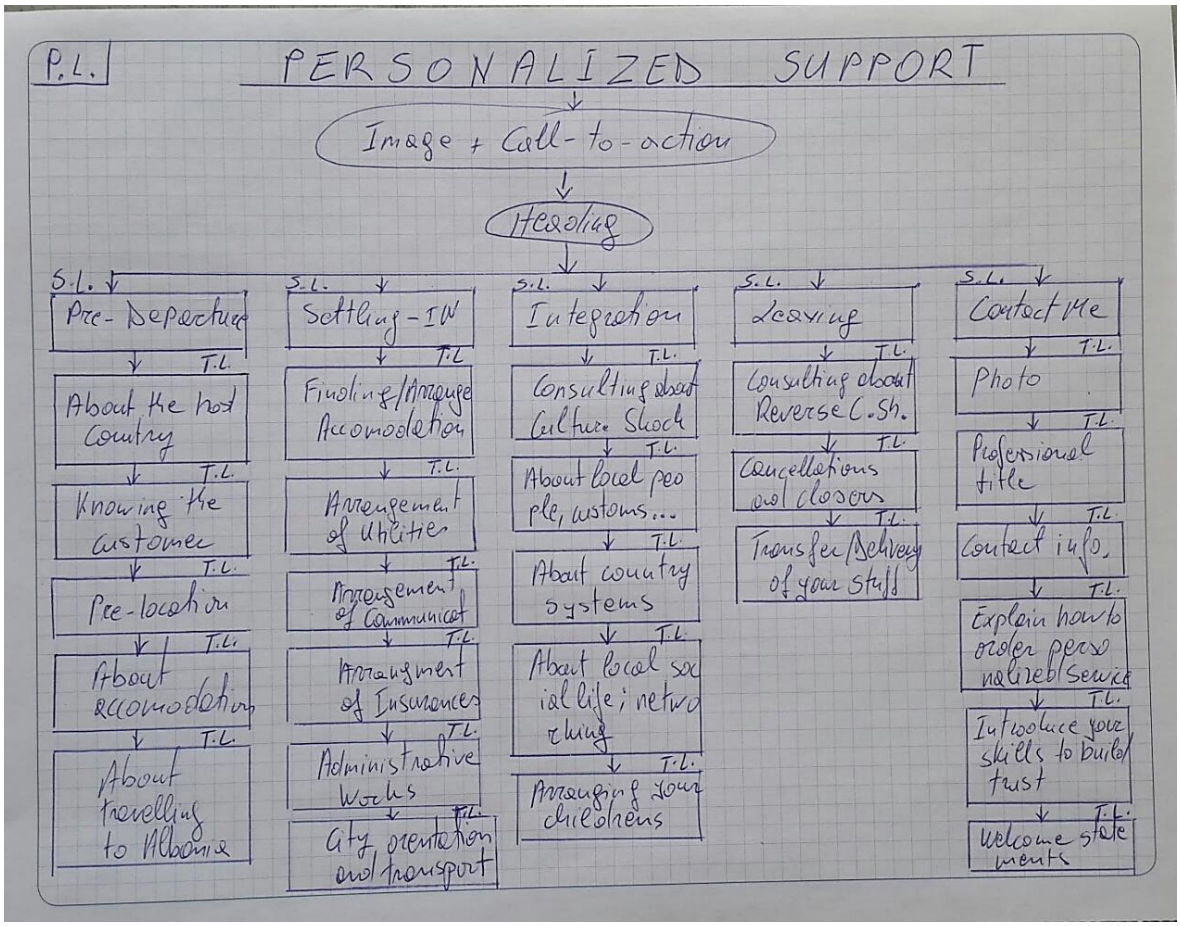


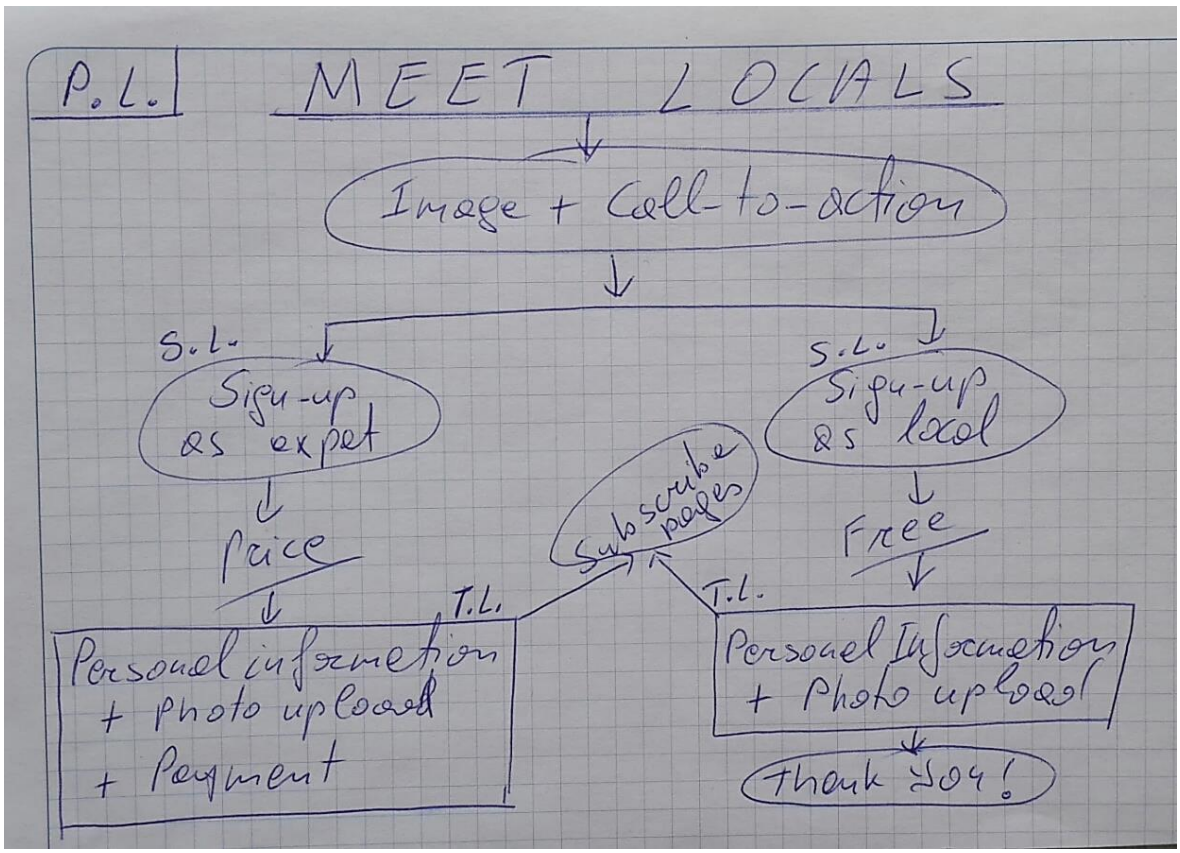



P.L.
BEFORE DEPARTURE
Image + Call-to-action
Heading
S.L.
About Albania in a nutshell
T.L.
Fact with general information for country introduction
T.L.
Interesting facts about Albania
T.L.
Interesting videos about Albania
S.L.
Who is Albania
T.L.
Geography, Capital and climate
T.L.
Population, language, and Religion
T.L.
Flag, Currency, and National Holidays
T.L.
Major leaders, Politics, and Governments
T.L.
Economy, Finance, and law
S.L.
How is Albania
T.L.
Culture
T.L.
Society
T.L.
Safety
T.L.
Cost of Living
S.L.
Why in Albania
T.L.
Mediterranean
T.L.
Weather
T.L.
Beaches & Mountains
T.L.
Not expensive
T.L.
Safe & Tolerant
T.L.
To invest
S.L.
What to be Prepared for
T.L.
Albania as a host-country
T.L.
Pre-departure
T.L.
Support from local people
T.L.
Support from Professionals


P.L.
LANDING IN
Image + Call-to-action
Heading
S.L.
On the Way...
T.L.
Ways to travel
T.L.
Airports
T.L.
From airport
T.L.
Stuff transfer
T.L.
Car transfer
S.L.
Arrival
T.L.
Accomodation
T.L.
Hospitals, Clinics Health Insurances
T.L.
Children care and health
T.L.
Orientation and Transport?
S.L.
First Arrangements
T.L.
Public Transport
T.L.
Mobile Operators
T.L.
Banks & ATMs
T.L.
Shopping Centers
T.L.
Embassies & Consulates
T.L.
Norms & Ethics
T.L.
Basic Albanian words/Sentences


P.L.
SETTLING DOWN
Image + Call-to-action
Heading
S.L.
Acculturation
T.L.
Culture Shock
T.L.
History and Values
T.L.
Systems
S.L.
National and Foreign Entities
T.L.
of Prezident
T.L.
Ministries
T.L.
National Agencies
T.L.
Embassies and Consulates
S.L.
Life and Health
Emergency Numbers
Hospitals
Clinics
Laboratories
Drug Stores
Pension Funds
Funeral
S.L.
Children
Pediatricians
Kindergarten
Babysitting
Learning Courses
Summer Camps
Parks
S.L.
Transport and Delivery
Airline companies
Airport Shuttles
Taxi
Urban Bus lines
International Buses
Express Mail


P.L.
PERSONALIZED SUPPORT
Image + Call-to-action
Heading
S.L.
Pre-Departure
T.L.
About the host Country
T.L.
Knowing the customer
T.L.
Pre-location
T.L.
About accomodation
T.L.
About travelling to Albania
S.L.
Settling-IN
T.L.
Finding/Arrange Accomodation
T.L.
Arrangement of Utilities
T.L.
Arrangement of Communicat
T.L.
Arrangment of Insurances
T.L.
Administrative Works
T.L.
City orientation and transport
S.L.
Integration
T.L.
Consulting about Culture Shock
T.L.
About local people, customs...
T.L.
About country systems
T.L.
About local social life; networking
T.L.
Arranging your childrens
S.L.
Leaving
T.L.
Consulting about Reverse C.Sh.
T.L.
Cancellations and closures
T.L.
Transfer/Delivery of your stuff
S.L.
Contact Me
T.L.
Photo
T.L.
Professional title
T.L.
Contact info.
T.L.
Explain how to order personalized service
T.L.
Introduce your skills to build trust
T.L.
Welcome statements


P.L.
MEET LOCALS
Image + Call-to-action
S.L.
Sign-up as expert
Price
T.L.
Personal information + Photo upload + Payment
Subscribe pages
S.L.
Sign-up as local
Free
T.L.
Personal Information + Photo upload
Thank you!

Appendix V - High-Fidelity Prototype

Interactive Prototype Link:

http://www.urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2018053011114

Description of Design with Microsoft Excel:

"The Complete Idiots Guide to Creating a Website" written by McFedries (2008), "Your Google Game Plan for Success" written by Teixeira (2010), and "Creating a Website – The Missing Manual" written by MacDonald (2011).

Step 1 Creating a logo. A logo is the element which should present the service as much as possible. The two first letters *AL* of the main words of the service name *Alien in Albania* to were used to attach the two words *Alien* and *Albania* to abbreviate the name by making it easier to fit in a logo. Afterwards an alien graphic was combined with this abbreviation. In Figure 32 is shown the final design of the service logo. In addition, it was created an abbreviation of the service name *Alien in Albania* into *ALinAL* to be mentioned in the content of the website with the purpose to make the reading for the user more comfortable, as abbreviation are faster to read and make the reading easy going.

Step 2 *Logical structure*: organizing the general anatomy by dividing the overall planned website content into individual pages (web pages) which represent the primary level pages, and then within each page.

Step 2.1 Creating individual spreadsheets into the excel document for each page.

Step 2.2 Building Blocks: the basic tags. Creating title tags for each individual primary level pages (e.g. *Settling Down* page tag).

Step 2.3 Designing the anatomy of a site page by using *the table design technique*. McFedries (2008, 33-62) suggests using this technique is especially helpful when starting to design a website from scratch. He explains that the skeleton of a site should be thought as a table made of rows and columns. Typically, the site skeleton is a table made of three columns and three rows. The first row is the site header, and the third row is the site footer, and both of them spans all the columns. The second row contains three columns. The middle column in the second row is where the main/regular text and graphics are placed. The left and the right columns in the second row, is where sidebar content and margins are placed. With the use of excel spreadsheets this technique was very easy apply and pages were designed using different tables, such as four-rows-one-column (e.g. Home page), three-rows-three-columns (e.g. About page, where left and right columns are used to design a frame for the main content).

Step 2.4 Completing the site header with a main menu by including all the primary level pages title tags (the tags created in step 2.2) and also inserting the logo (the logo created in step 1) in the left corner of the header. Next, adding this header in each individual primary level page with the function copy-and-insert-rows.

Step 2.5 *Accessorizing* with pictures and photos. Inserting a picture in the second row of the site right under the header in each individual primary level page, to identify and

represent the content and/or purpose of the page. Some of the inserted pictures are related to Albania (e.g. Tirana International Airport, Skanderbeg Square, Albanian currency bill). For most of the pictures is used the free source of stock photos named PEXELS (www.pexels.com). In *About* and *Personalized Support* pages I have added my own photo for showing the person behind the service to the site visitors/users.

Step 3 *Logical structure*: building the *information architecture* within each of the individual primary level pages. Mostly using the vertical (scroll-up-and-down) architecture.

Step 3.1 Writing *title tags* for each separate piece of content in separate rows from the top down in the spreadsheet. This work has started with the secondary level content as it was the part of the content which was clearer and more elaborated in this stage of design, for instance title tags such as *Travelling to Albania*, *Airports and transport from/to airports*, and so on.

Step 3.2 *Grouping* these *secondary level content* title tags by using cut-and-insert row excel functions and creating title tags for each group by using add-row function. For instance, in *Settling Down* page has been created a group titled *About Your Home* which is a primary level content including considerable amount of secondary level content which was title tagged in the previous step.

Step 3.3 Adding *tertiary level content* title tags below secondary level content title tags where necessary by using add-row excel function. For instance, tertiary level title tags are added underneath the secondary level title tag *Furniture*, which is located underneath the primary level title tag *About Your Home* in *Settling Down* page. In some of the tertiary level content, instead of title tags it was added *text* by using add-row, merge-cells, and wrap-text excel functions. For instance, the text added under secondary level content title tag *Geography, Capital, and Climate* which is located underneath the primary level content title tag *"Who" Is Albania* in *Before Departure* page.

Step 4 Avoiding overloaded content within a page. To avoid the display of too much title tags (primary, secondary, tertiary levels) it was used the *outline* excel function in each level to *expand and de-escalate* those levels display. This function in excel spreadsheet is under Data menu, and it was applied by selecting rows containing information of the same level and then using *group* function. For instance, title tags of tertiary level were grouped together under the belonging secondary title tag, and title tags of secondary level were grouped together under the belonging primary title tag. To the user it is displayed at first the primary level title tags only when he opens the site page. Afterwards, if the user shows interest for navigating further, going deeper into a specific primary level content, then he could click on the (+) *expand* button located beside that primary level title tag, and all the belonging secondary title tags would appear. If he gets interested to continue navigating further a specific secondary level content, then he could click on the + *(expand)* button located beside that secondary level title tag, and all the belonging tertiary title tags or *tertiary text content* would appear. The reverse action, reducing the displayed content, is possible for the user by clicking on the (–) *de-escalate* button. Regarding the tertiary text content, in order to avoid the display of too much text content within one page, it was created the *Read more* >> button to transfer the full content in a new page, by creating a new excel spreadsheet which was linked with this button. Thus, on the parent page are displayed only few initial sentences of the full text and underneath is located the *Read more* >> button. To create the visual of an interrupted text it was used the adjusting-row-

height excel function to build a certain row height which brings the bottom frame-line of the row to strikethrough the last appearing sentence of the text.

Step 5 Creating secondary level pages for some of primary level pages (e.g. BD_1). Creating individual spreadsheet for each secondary level page and sorting them right after their parent primary page for finding them easily. Adding the content in these pages.

Step 6 *Physical formatting* but also about logical structure. The right way to go when building a website is first creating the logical structure of its content (dividing its content into discrete components like headings, paragraphs, lists, and so on) and then taking care of physical formatting to make its content look pretty (playing with text size and styles, colors, and so on). While creating the final prototype, the physical formatting was used not only to create an attractive visual but also to enhance its logical structure. To give a better structural view to the content of each page, were used several excel functions such as font-style, font-size, format-cells-fill-background-colors, insert-row and insert-columns, adjust-row-height and adjust-column-width. For instance, to create margins, header and footer in a site it was applied a background-color different from the page`s background color. All these functions were used in different ways for different logical structure purposes, such as for separating paragraphs, creating site margins, highlighting site header, making less visible site footer, framing a content text, underlining a title tag, designing bulleted lists, make more visible *relative URLs* and <---*Go Back* anchor tabs, and more. To focus the reader in the content, the background colors of these areas were changed into a stronger/deeper color then the overall page background color. This technique was applied also for creating margins in some of the pages to highlight some important content of reference, for instance showing the path where to check for more information.
All these details are supposed to make the logical structure more clear and easy to perceive for the user, thus making his navigation experience more pleasant.

Step 7 *Consistency*. To diminish the confusion of the user and sparing him the trouble of getting familiar with the site structure in every page he navigates, is important the feature of consistency. This consist in using as much as possible similar organization from one page to another, similar headings, similar graphics and links, a single navigation bar, and so on. In this step, my work was about using the same and/or similar colors, the same font size and styles especially for title tags, the same row heights used for separating paragraphs, the same bullets design in bulleted lists, and so on.

Step 8 Linking pages by creating the so-called *anchor element*. Wiring several pages together so that the user can easily jump from one page to another is important navigation element. To create this element was used the insert-hyperlink excel function. In this website, it was needed to apply both kinds of page links, the internal and the external links. *Internal links* point to other pages within the site, while *external links* point to pages (or resources) on other websites.

Step 8.1 For creating internal links, were created hyperlinks between corresponding spreadsheets within the excel document of prototyping.

Step 8.1.1 First step was about linking the primary pages with each other, such as *Home*, *About*, etc. by inserting hyperlinks in each main menu tab (within each cell) located in the header of every primary page to link them with the page (excel spreadsheet) which they were representing.

Step 8.1.2 Next step was about linking each primary page with their secondary page/s. This work involves a two-ways link: the *moving-down-into link* which makes possible to jump from a primary page to a belonging secondary page, and the *moving-up-from link* which is the reverse direction by jumping back into the parent primary page. The moving-up-from link was enabled by creating the <---*Go back* button which was placed right on the center-top of the secondary page, to make it easy to find from the user. When the sub-page belonged to a specific section content located in the parent page, then the "moving-up-from" hyperlink was created within a specific excel cell beside that section in the parent page. This element would bring back the user right where he was before jumping to the sub-page, and this would save him time and efforts as he does not need to scroll again the parent page to find where he was before. For instance, if the user wants to read more about the section *Flag, Currency, and National Holidays* located in the primary page *Before Departure*, he could click the *Read more* > > anchor tab which is displayed beneath this section to enable him jump into the corresponding secondary page. If he would prefer going back, then he could click the <---*Go back* anchor tab which is displayed on the center-top of the secondary page to enable him jump back into the parent primary page and bring him back exactly at the same place he was in the beginning. Once again, this touchpoint has been designed for easier and more convenient use of the website service from the visitors/users. Besides, on header of those linked secondary pages, it is displayed a text showing the *relative URL*, the connection path from where the secondary page is deriving from. The relative URL is an important element to have when internal links are created, to make the user navigation less confusing.

Step 8.1.3 Using an image as a *submit button*. Beside creating hyperlinks on title tags (title tag buttons), with excel is possible to create them also on a picture which is inserted in the spreadsheet (image buttons). The process is the same as explained above for the title tag buttons. For instance, in the page *Meet Locals* the user could click one of the pictures to jump into the corresponding sub-page (e.g. by clicking the picture representing *Show-around*, it will open the *Show-around* page).

Step 8.2 For creating external links, were created hyperlinks in the excel document of prototyping with existing (other) websites and resources.

Step 8.3 Performing visual design of *anchor tabs*. Through the insert-hyperlink excel function was created the anchor tab title (e.g. *Read more* > >*)* and the screen tip text (e.g. *Click for more information*). Several font functions were used to create the desired visual effect, for instance the *Read more* >> and <---*Go back* anchor tabs were designed to look as buttons where the user could click over.

Step 8.4 Creating *text boxes*. Using physical formatting can be useful also to create the visual of a field required to be completed by the user (for example, writing users name, email address, card number, etc.) by using contrast colors between page background and a specific cell where we need the user to write down some information about himself (for instance, the fields displayed in the *Sign-up as expat* secondary page where are required the users' credentials). Another way is to simply frame the cell (for instance, the fields displayed in the *Payment* secondary page where are required the payment card details). The choice among these techniques depends on the preferred visual effect on the page.

Step 8.5 Creating *radio buttons*. Radio buttons are check boxes (e.g. check *Yes* or *No* boxes) where the user get more than two options and they can pick one of them. This is another element which can make the use of the site more convenient because for the user is much easier to check a box than it is to type in the required data. To design this element in

excel it came useful the *data validation* function of inserting a *drop-down list* within the cell where the box is located. For instance, the fields *Nationality* and *Gender* displayed in the *Sign-up as expat* secondary page, require the users to pick up one of the options created with the radio buttons instead of them writing down this information by themselves. The downside of applying radio buttons is that check boxes options are already predetermined from the web designer and this might cause some inconveniences to the user. Thus, it is important that the options list and language is carefully created; options should be clear, understandable, and including all the possible alternatives in order that every user can find the one which to fits him. The designer task is to make sure that no user will be felt left out, as this might cause negative experience and make him abandon the site service. This requires a deep know-how of the targeted customers from the designer.

Step 9 The last but not the least: adding important text into the individual primary level pages such as service proposition description, purpose description, call-for-action statements, and quotes. As McFedries (2008, 113) says, "polishing the prose" is an important task in website design, to make it unique and give that certain impact to the visitors/users. Thus, revising the content of every page and adding the main features of having a good content (using my own voice, writing with passion, and more), was the other task performed in this step.

Step 10 Using some tricks to make it more perfect.

Step 10.1 Adding a column in the left side outer of the site page borders, creating the hyperlinks of this page (of the page itself and also different sections into this page) in the cells of this column, and then make this column invisible with cell-format-visibility-hide-column excel function. This trick enables wiring the pages while hiding the hyperlink action of an excel format; in excel spreadsheets, when jumping into a page (spreadsheet) the hyperlinked cell is visibly framed by the selection function. Thus, hiding this action makes the navigation in the excel prototype look more as a real website.

Step 10.2 In Step 2.4, the site header is completed with a main menu by including all the primary level pages title tags. At this stage, the main menu looks the same at each page, thus it is not possible for the user to know in which page he is currently located. To avoid this confusion, there were applied formatting elements to identify the current page the user finds himself while navigating. By working with font-borders excel functions, such as line-styles and line-colors, it was created the effect of an activated title tag in the main menu. For instance, when the user is located in the primary page *About*, at the main menu only the title tag *About* is framed as an activated button, and this distinguish it from the other title tags in the main menu.

Step 10.3 Using the freeze pan function to keep unmovable the main menu into primary pages and the *relative URL* together with the <--- *Go back* button into the secondary pages, in order to always display them on the top of the page even when the user is scrolling down the page.

Step 10.4 Using *insert comment* function and then *show/hide comment* function to create a pop-up message in a particular content. For instance, to create pop-up message in *Read more* >> buttons at *Before Departure* page for saying to a visitor that he has no access as he needs to subscribe first. To show visitors in which content they have free access to navigate and explore the website, was used *insert shapes* function for creating visible tags.

Step 10.5 While working with the layout by using excel function such as insert shapes, insert text box, using *format-group* function comes handy to attach several elements all together. That way, the created pattern can be shifted through the background easily as a group instead of shifting each element one by one and arrange the pattern each time.

Step 10.6 The last step on this process was hiding all the spreadsheets of the excel document, with exception to the spreadsheet of *Home* page. This will create a closer effect of a website prototype to the user as he has to navigate through anchor tabs instead of opening the excel spreadsheets manually.

All the above described process steps were the efforts of designing a prototype which is close to a website as much as possible; creating a visual and interactive excel document which resembles to a multi-page website that the user can navigate. Of course, this prototype could have been elaborated further into more details, but the main purpose of prototype design in this study was accomplished by showing how Microsoft Excel can be a simple, effective, and artistic design tool that every service designer should consider and master.

Appendix VI - Customer Journey

Customer Journey Link:

http://www.urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2018053011119

Description of Customer Journey:

Service Awareness

At first, moving to Albania was just an idea she was considering thus she just need some general information about the country and not in the mood to invest a lot of time on that. When visiting ALinAL website she was satisfied that she could find concise country profile and facts about Albania. Some important topics to her such as country safety and cost of living where also included in the webpage offering to go deeper reading about them. After few days of thinking about possibly starting a new life in Albania, she wanted to do some deep research about the country. She noticed already when visiting webpage Before Departure that it contained other sections which were providing more details about the country. Thus, she decided to go back to this webpage and she got satisfied while navigating and reading. She again was happy that she did not need to waste time searching for all these information through different sources. Afterwards, she was wondering if all this information was reliable; if she could trust the source. She decides to investigate by discovering more about the service. While reading the Homepage, was easy to understand that this website service was exactly what she needed in case she decides to move to Albania. What this service was providing seemed to be valuable and helpful. She felt empathy in its statements and welcomed. She continues investigating further by reading Who Am I webpage. The whole person profile behind the service introduced in this page with photo, background, and sharing a story from her life, was so complete and definitely trustworthy. After reading the expatriating story she could understand where the service empathy is coming from. The professional background gave more credits in perceiving this service quite professional and worthy to use. She got curios to read the Be Aware of Culture Shock link which catch her eye as soon as she opened the Home page. She started reading What is Culture Shock and Change and Transition Process, which was quite eye-opening and made her perceive the seriousness of this phenomenon. As she does not have any previous expatriating experience, she was not aware of this severe “side effect” of starting life allover away from home, in a strange country. She thinks to read more about it as soon as she starts this change of her own.

Joining the Service

Vanessa gave a lot of thinking about the destination where she should start her new life, and finally she decides moving to Albania. She received very good vibes and positive feeling about this country while reading information about it in the ALinAL website. Even though its history and culture makes Albania quite a different environment from her home country, and this might make the leaving there somehow challenging. Thus, she is well prepared to be there with an open mind and consider the mindset differences she might have with the locals. Also, she is taking into account that Albania is a developing country, so certain things will not be as efficient and easy to deal with as she is used to in her home

country. Thanks to the ALinAL website she feels that she is equipped with adequate mindfulness to handle the difficult parts of this life journey in Albania, which will spare her disappointment and the risk to go back home after just few months. Now, she has to start packing, arranging important things before leaving, such as renting her apartment, dealing with her taxes, deregistration of address, from gym and some other clubs where she is member, and so on. Furthermore, she has to arrange so many matters about her departure to Albania, such as searching for flight connections, transferring all her stuff, transferring her car, providing an accommodation to have at least temporary so she has a place where to stay when she arrives there. And most importantly, she needs to make time saying good bye to family and friends, and they are not just a few people. As all these things pile up in her mind, she starts panicking more and more, as available time is not enough to her. In addition, some of the matters seems so complicated to deal with, such as the transfer of her staff and especially her car, about how does this work get through the Albanian border. Also finding and negotiating for an accommodation in Tirana from so far away, and having no clue of the city, makes it stressful. She feels the need of a helping hand. While navigating the ALinAL website, she noticed this *Personalized Support* which offers customized support services for people moving to Albania. She opens the website and starts reading through the services under *Pre-departure* section. It did not take long to find what she could make use of to lighten her burden. Service prices are not cheap, but at this moment she feels that investing some money to delegate some of the work she has to do is definitely worth it. She sends an email to the address under *Contact Me* to order two services that she needed the most to take out of her plate: *Organization of temporary accommodation* and *Advice about the transfer of your stuff and your car*. She feels relieved and happy to have the chance spending some quality time with her family and friends, and why not organizing a good-bye party. Most of all, she is not going to be exhausted from all this process.

Using the Service

It is time for Vanessa to travel to Albania. She noticed that *Landing In* page of the ALinAL website was offering useful information about all the possible matters related to the trip. But only few sections have free access into that webpage. Thus, she subscribes for having full access in *Landing In* and *Settling Down* webpages and now she is able to benefit from their service. To book her flight to Albania she used the information about flight companies operating in Albania. To arrange her trip from the airport to her new apartment, she used the information about alternatives of transport from the airport and through that she could book a taxi for herself. She registered in her phone the emergency numbers listed in the webpage to feel safer after landing just in case something wrong might happen.

After landing in Rinas airport she took the taxi which was waiting for her and she was on her way to the new apartment in Tirana, the one that was provided by using the relocation consultant services. The apartment was very cozy, and there she found all her stuff she transferred weeks ago, all arranged by the relocation consultant (by dealing with delivery companies, insurance companies, and customs clearance agencies). Her car has arrived (thanks again to the relocation consultant services), and she just has to pick it up at the customs clearance tomorrow; the relocation consultant will take her there and guide her through the process. Beside the tiredness from the long journey, Vanessa was feeling great and excited about being in Albania. She was so satisfied that she had chosen to use the ALinAL relocation consultant services because it saved her a lot of time, worries and stress, and everything seemed to have been arrange perfectly for her. She was convinced

that paying for these services was well spent money. For now, she can worry only for unpacking.

The first week, while unpacking she was spending a lot of time using the ALinAL website service by going through *Landing In* page to get some necessary information for urgent arrangement, such as where to provide a health insurance, what are the best options (hospitals) for getting health care if needed, which mobile companies are operating in Albania, how she can get oriented in the city. Later on, she used the ALinAL service to deal with some more urgent matters, such as choosing in which bank to open an account, how to use public transport, which was the nearest shopping center (under section *Basic Arrangements* in *Landing In* webpage, which leads to database information in *Settling Down* webpage). She also gave some time reading through must-know local norm and ethics and also learned some Albanian words (under section *Basic Arrangements* in *Landing In* webpage, which leads to database information in *Settling Down* webpage).

Developing the Service

Before her departure, when she visited for the first time the Home page of the ALinAL website, she followed the displayed link Be Aware of Culture Shock in the right-top of the page. This link leaded her into further reading about culture shock phenomenon and transition process under section *Acculturation*. Since then, she planned to come back again to read the other related content as she got aware of the negative aspects of having a new life in a host country. As she wanted to be proactive about this, she returns in this section of the ALinAL website and reads the related information by following the link displayed in the homepage *Being Aware of Culture Shock*. She decides to follow advices given in the content: in order to have an easy and fast process of acculturation she needs to learn about host country history, values, and systems. The section *Acculturation* was providing all this information so she did not need to do any search for other sources. She founds all these very convenient and she continue navigation through sections History and Values and Systems. It the end, she feels her mindfulness has developed as thanks to the ALinAL service she knows most of the unknowns about her host country.

Soon, she had to deal with matters related to her car, such as getting a car insurance, having a car service, sorting out driving license validity, and also learn about driving local rules. For sure with time she will need to deal some other car matters. All these seemed another burden to deal with, thus she was very happy to discover in the ALinAL website a section which was providing information about all the current matters and the others to come about her car. She gets the needed information on the database under Cars, Bicycles, Driving and More.

After arranging the most urgent matters, now she can focus on finding the perfect job for her. She again searches for support in the ALinAL service, which did provide a separate section with name Jobs. As she wants to have a job as English teacher in an international school, she expands her search by using the digital information database under Education and Self-development section.

Vanessa used to have a very active life back home (as described in her profile in Personas section). So was time for her to take action about building that from scratch in her new life in Albania. To arrange this big project, she used the ALinAL services. The ALinAL website section Art and Culture provided the information about where she could see a movie, a play or listen to a concert. The ALinAL website section Fitness and Sports

provided the information about where she could register for yoga classes and which club to join for hiking activities during weekends. In her first visit in the ALinAL homepage she noticed this service named *Meet Locals* providing network facilities with local people. She subscribes to this service and starts the process of making new friends. After using all these services offered in the ALinAL website, she succeeded to create already an agenda for the coming week, watching a nice movie in cinema, having her first yoga session, meeting a local friend for a drink in one of the trendiest club in the downtown (only locals know best). She is very satisfied to make such a big development of this personal project in such less time, little efforts, and from the comfortable couch of her home.

Leaving the Service

After some year of living in Albania, she decides to take a new adventure and move in another new host country where she have received an amazing job opportunity. The time to arrange things before moving is very short. Once, again she decides to get a helping hand form the Personalized Support service of the ALinAL. She delegates some arrangements to the relocation consultant, such as subscriptions cancelation of land phone, internet and Tv channels, deregistration of home address, and finalize her tax obligations by using services under section *It`s Time to Leave* in *Personalized Support* webpage.

Before unsubscribing from the ALinAL website, she wants to provide her feedback about her own experience of using its services. She sends a long email reflecting her positive experience and giving her thoughts about few things which might improve and she is happy to see her opinion posted into the Testimonials subpage of the ALinAL website. She wants others expats to benefit from the great support of the ALinAL service during their expatriating process, as she did. She shares the ALinAL website in her Facebook. Now it`s time for Vanessa to leave Albania caring with her more beautiful memories then stressful ones.