

ENHANCING CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT: A CASE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL  
RESEARCHERS' SPOUSES IN FINLAND

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>This thesis explores the perceived organizational support of the Hidden Gems programme in enhancing cross-cultural adjustment and employability of international researchers' spouses experiencing career interruption in Finland. One third of Tampere University researchers are of foreign background and 40 percent of today's researchers relocate with their spouse or partner. Previous research provides evidence that the spouses of international researchers and other university employees have, on average, higher qualification levels than other immigrant groups. Despite their qualifications, they may have to stay home for years before finding employment. Improving spousal adjustment and employment in the host country has the potential to reduce the risk of premature return of the international researchers and their spouses. Hidden Gems is a new programme offered for the Tampere University researchers' spouses to promote the utilization of immigrant professionals' expertise and human capital to meet the needs of industry and business, so that the participants find employment that corresponds to their qualifications and ensures them fair compensation.</p> <p>The objective of this study is to explore the effectiveness of the Hidden Gems project by examining the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the support they received. This study uses quantitative and qualitative approach with survey questionnaire, semi-structure individual interviews and social mapping as data collection instruments. A sample of 17 expatriate spouses from a broad range of nationalities, were surveyed and interviewed. The analysis indicates that the Hidden Gems support leads to an increase in spouses' satisfaction, spousal adjustment as well as employability into Finland. However, the findings suggest that the organizational spousal support will not have the same outcome if the participants do not use simultaneously proactive tactics, such as seeking for information, relationship building and positive framing.</p>	
<p>Asiasanat – Keywords Dual-career, International talents, Spouse adjustment theory, Cross-cultural adjustment theory, Networks</p>	
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*Cheers!*

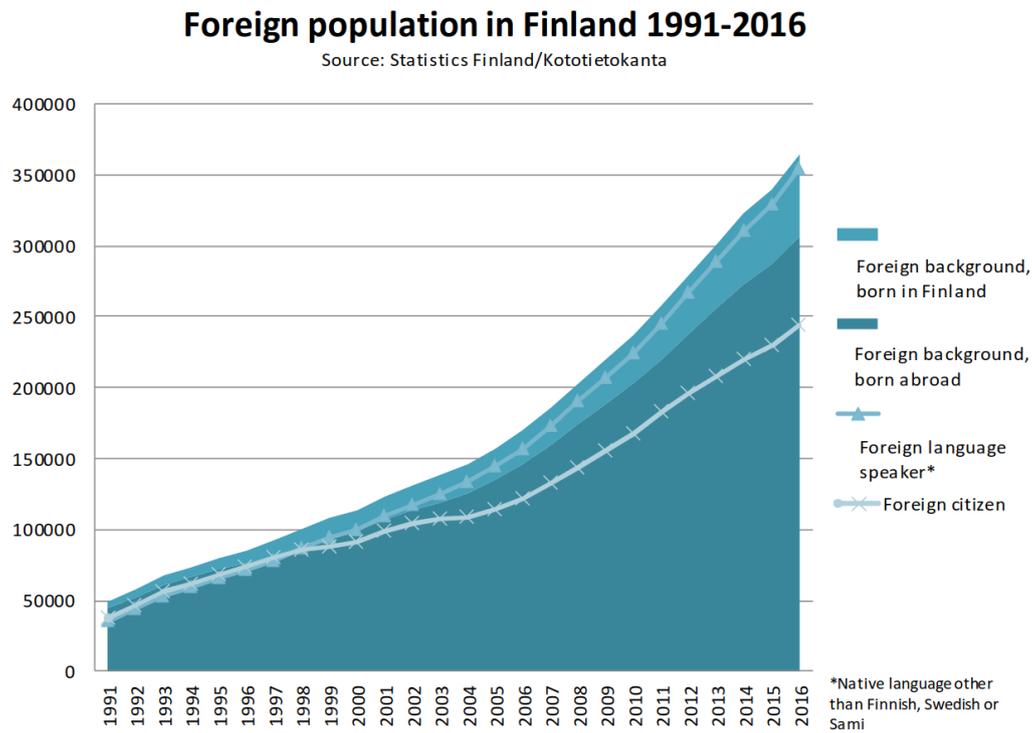
# **1 Introduction**

This section introduces the background information on the topic of spouse integration and spousal support programme. First, the war of talent attraction and retention in the Finnish context are outlined, followed by the research gap and the author's motivation to address this theme are clarified. Finally, the structure of the thesis is described.

## **1.1 Background information**

In today's world, migration of citizens within or outside of the geographical borders is a common reality. In order to stay competitive and answer the burgeoning foreign operations, companies need to seek for talents from abroad (Noe & al., 2008). It is even more relevant in a small country like Finland, where growth and innovation are easily threatened by talent shortage (Hunt & Gauthier-Loiselle, 2010). Immigration trend in Finland has rapidly increased since 1990. Indeed, the numbers speak for themselves as the share of people with foreign background has risen from 0,8 % in 1990 to 7 % in 2017. In addition, the amount of foreign language speakers, excluding Finnish, Swedish and Sami reached 373 000 in 2017, which represents 6,8 % of the Finnish total population (Statistic Finland, 2019).

Figure 1. Foreign population in Finland 1991-2016.



A survey on work and well-being among persons of foreign background in Finland also reveals that up to 40 % of the foreigners aged between 25 to 54 years have completed a tertiary level of education (Statistic Finland, 2015). In this thesis, the terms highly skilled talents, professional, migrants and expatriate are utilized interchangeably. By employing international talents as a broad concept, I refer to highly skilled immigrants or Finnish returnees with international experience and expertise as well as networks that can generate added value for Finnish business and industry (Lindeman, 2018). These talents are often attracted from abroad to conduct a short or long-term international assignment and nowadays, 80 % of expatriates relocate with their spouse or partner (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2015). When relocating, spouses are often falling off the radar or organizational support, while they genuinely need the most psychological and career care. While many companies provide support to the foreign workers to create continuity from the home country to the host country, the

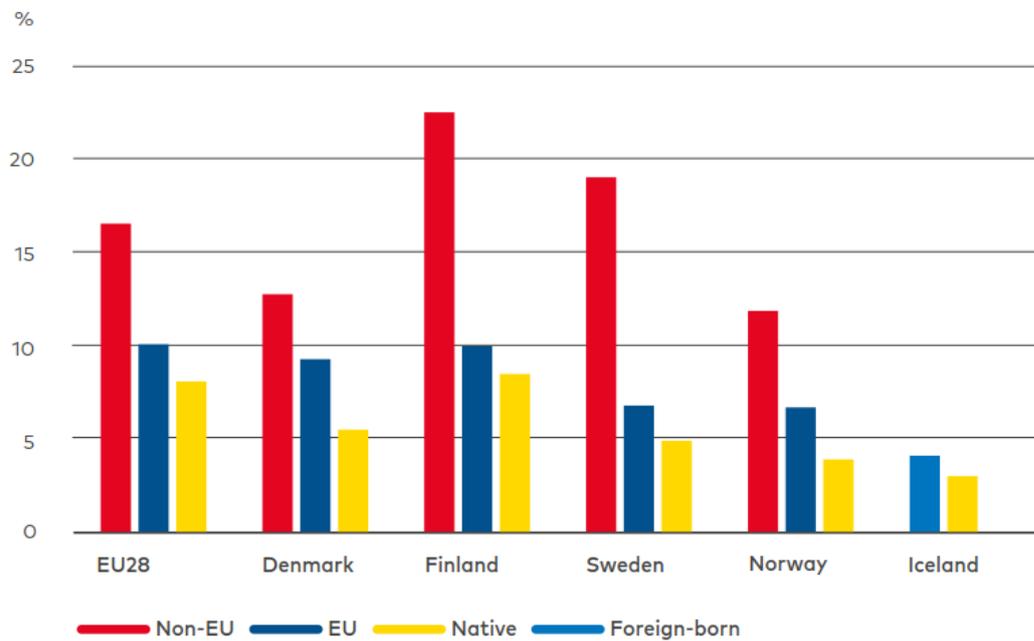
spouses receive less support and may be left in the host environment without resources (Andreason, 2008).

One of the most common causes of unsuccessful international relocation is the lack of adjustment for the spouse and family (Caligiuri & al., 1998). This is even more important with the increase of dual-career couples. As spousal support programmes have been found to increase the adjustment of both the expatriates and their spouses, the Tampere University has initiated a project called the Hidden Gems, which promotes the labor market access of the researchers' spouses. The aim of the project is to support the employment, and to facilitate the full integration of the spouses into the Finnish society. By collaborating with the local ecosystem, the Hidden Gems project engages companies in reflecting on internationalization, their benefits and the potential growth possibilities by enabling them to tap into the "hidden expertise" of international talents. Research indicates that employer spousal support has the potential to reduce the risk of premature return and of complete assignment failure. Hence, this thesis aims at evaluating the Hidden Gems spousal support programme by examining the participants' experience and perception on the support they receive. The motivation behind choosing this topic is discussed next.

## **1.2 Research gap and motivation**

When migrating, highly skilled professionals encounter a number of institutional and social obstacles that negatively affect their ability to find employment that corresponds to their qualifications and integration into the host society. Previous research provides evidence that migrants are more likely to work in short-term or part-time positions than native-born (Arbetsmarknadsekonomiska rådet, 2017). A survey about entering the Nordic labour market reveals that foreign-born outside of the European Union (EU) have the highest unemployment rates in Finland (22.6%) compared to the other Nordic countries.

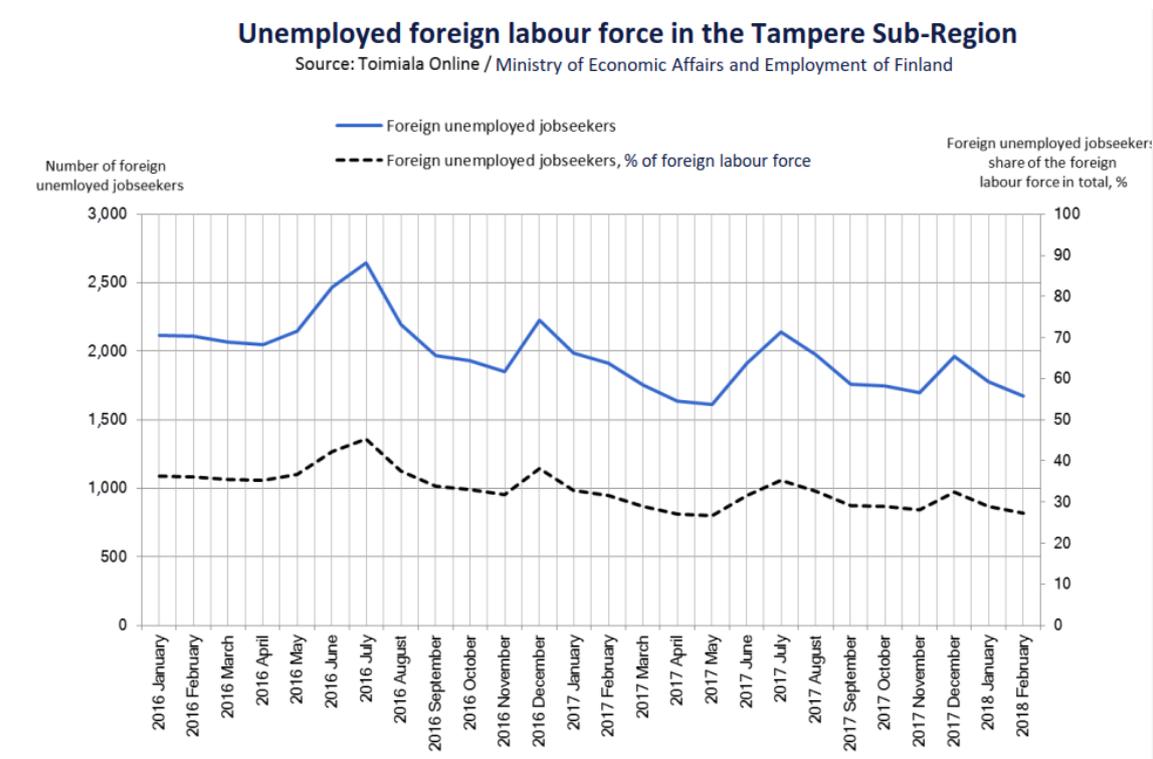
Figure 2. Unemployment rates by place of birth 2016.



Data source: Nordregio's calculations based on Eurostat.

Moreover, the existing research shows that higher education facilitates entry into the Finnish labour market; however, highly educated immigrants often end up working below their level of qualifications. Multiple reasons are behind this situation. For example, it may be that a foreign university degree is not recognized or that expatriates haven't reached a sufficient level of Finnish language. In addition, a low number of open positions in sub regions affects consequently the talents' employability. A survey made by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland reveals that in February 2018, up to 55 % of foreign labor force in the Tampere sub-region were unemployed (Statistic Finland, 2019).

Figure 3. Unemployed foreign labour force in the Tampere Sub-region.



Nowadays, expatriate talents relocating with their spouse or partner has increased in popularity. The number of couples where both partners are engaged in a work relationship has considerably increased in the recent years. Dual-career is often defined as “couples in which both partners are employed and psychologically committed to their work” (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2015 p. 95). According to Cole, 2011, “Problems associated with dual-career couples have been found to include higher refusal rates to relocate internationally, extended adjustment cycle for dual career couples and their families, disruption of family income level, discontinuity in trailing spouse’s career, heightened dysfunctional family consequences and repatriation and reengagement issues associated with the trailing spouse” (p.1506).

When relocating, spouses are often falling off the radar of organizational support, while they genuinely need the most psychological and career care. In addition to limited open positions, international talents face a wide range of challenges when entering the Finnish labor market

such as language barrier, complicated bureaucracy, lack of recognition of foreign qualifications, closed career network and preference for local hires (Cole, 2011). For expatriate spouses that have previously made a large investment in their professional education, employment interruption can significantly affect their social identity as well as reduce self-esteem and increase psychological withdrawal (Schlenker & Gutek, 1987). According to Caligiuri et al. (1998), one of the common causes of international assignment failure is the expatriate or spouse's inability to adjust to a foreign environment. In the United States of America, the financial costs related to assignment failure are estimated at 100 thousands USD per failure (Vögel et al., 2008) excluding the indirect cost such as decreased staff motivation and productivity, damaged customer relationships and loss of skill set. Improving spouse adjustment and employment in the host country has the potential to reduce the risk of premature return. Existing research shows that employer spousal support is greatly related to the overall adjustment of expatriate (Kraimer & al. 2001), reduce assignment withdrawal, and to increase spouses' willingness to accept international assignments (Konopaske & al. 2005). Hence, companies, cities and governments face an urgent need to address the spousal issues in order to facilitate expatriate adjustment, to minimize the costs related to assignment failure and to avoid company performance decline. Building on these alarming facts, the Finnish government decided to act upon and tackle the challenges mentioned above.

In recent years, the Finnish government acknowledged the need for improving the employability of foreign talents. The work in Finland-Government Migration Policy Programme alongside with the Talent Boost Programme have taken a range of measures to address these challenges and facilitate the integration of international talents into the Finnish economy. The programmes recognize the foreign researchers and the accompanying spouses as an essential resource for the growth, internationalization and innovation activities of Finnish

companies (Lindeman, 2018). Historically, mobility has always characterize academia, from the Ancient Greek network of scholars to the European medieval university system. In the twentieths centuries, mobility is still a relevant characteristic of academia, increasing prestige and credibility of scholar's work (Bauder, 2015). The academic labour market represent a great pool of mobile highly skilled talents, creativity, innovation as well as a key to economic growth (Florida, 2005). Highly skilled international talents and their family members are nowadays shaping national policies in Finland. Consequently, as part of the Talent Boost agenda of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the Hidden Gems project is aiming to reduce unemployment as well as to attract and retain talents within academia in Finland. The Hidden Gems is an initiative of the Tampere University and is the first initiative to support dual-career couples in Finland.

### **1.3 Hidden Gems, a case of Tampere University**

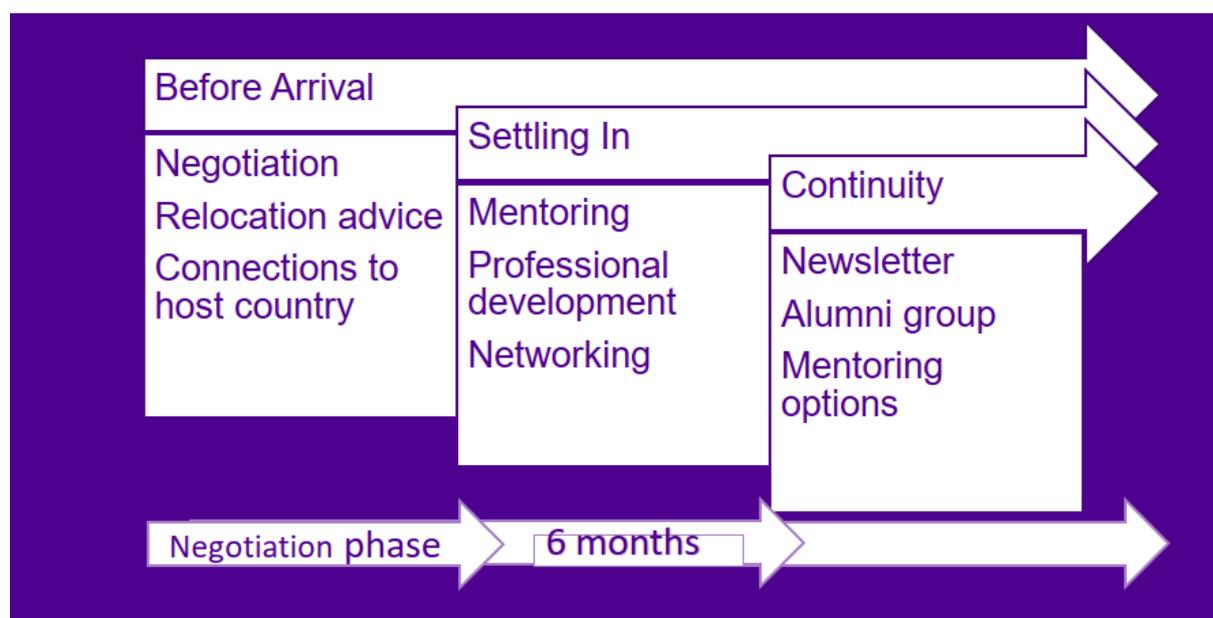
The Tampere University is one of the biggest hirers of international talents in the Pirkanmaa region. A research done at the Tampere University reveals that one third of today's researchers of the university are of foreign background with 40 percent of them relocating with their spouse or partner. Relocation in this context is defined as the process by which non-nationals move to a country for a determined period of time for employment purposes (IOM 2011). In this thesis, the spouses are referred to as international talents. Previous research provides evidence that the spouses of the international researchers and other university employees have, on average, higher qualification levels than other immigrant groups. Despite their qualifications, they may have to stay home for years before finding employment. Research tells us that successful expatriate assignments has been found highly correlated to the way the spouse adjusts into their new setting, and that there is a spillover effect of the spouse's adjustment on the expatriate and vice versa (Takeuchi, Yun & Tesluk, 2002). More specifically, couples become interdependent and their attitudes and behaviors influence each other. A survey done at the Tampere University

reveals that 90.9 % of the international staff members agree that the dissatisfaction of their spouse influences negatively their research work.

To avoid assignment disruption, failure and identity loss Tampere University started in 2018 to provide a set of services to ensure that spouses are able to improve language skills, build a social network and establish a social identity in Finland (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). As mentioned above, the Hidden Gems is part of the Talent Boost agenda and is partly funded by the European Social Fund. The objectives set out with the funding institution was to secure employment for five highly skilled talents within the two first years of project execution.

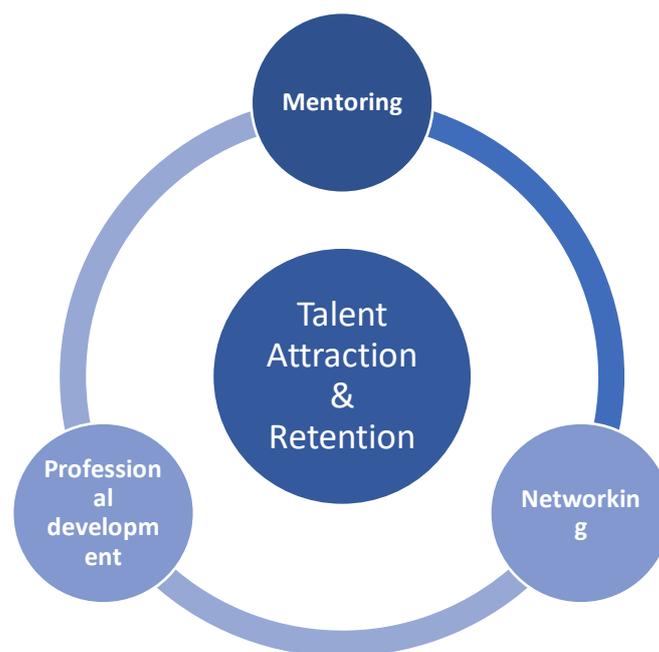
More specifically, the Hidden Gems is a new programme offered for the researchers' spouses to promote the utilization of immigrant professionals' expertise and human capital to meet the needs of industry and business, so that the participants find employment that corresponds to their qualifications and ensures them fair compensation. The services start before arrival, followed by a six months settling period as well as a continuous support after the onboarding period.

*Table 1. Hidden Gems value proposition*



During the contract negotiation phase, the Hidden Gems programme acts as a talent attraction tool. Following the idea that spouses play an important role in the decision process to accept an international assignment, the Hidden Gems supports the spouse during the process by providing relocation advice, for example visa, housing and schooling information. In addition, the Hidden Gems provide information regarding potential connections to the host country before arrival. Once the expatriate family has arrived in Finland, the spouse is enrolling into a six months settling in phase. During that period, Tampere University equip the spouses to become the actors of their own success in Finland by providing several activities related to *networking, mentoring and professional development*.

Figure 4. Hidden Gems core objectives.



The three services are respectively defined as mentoring, professional development and networking.

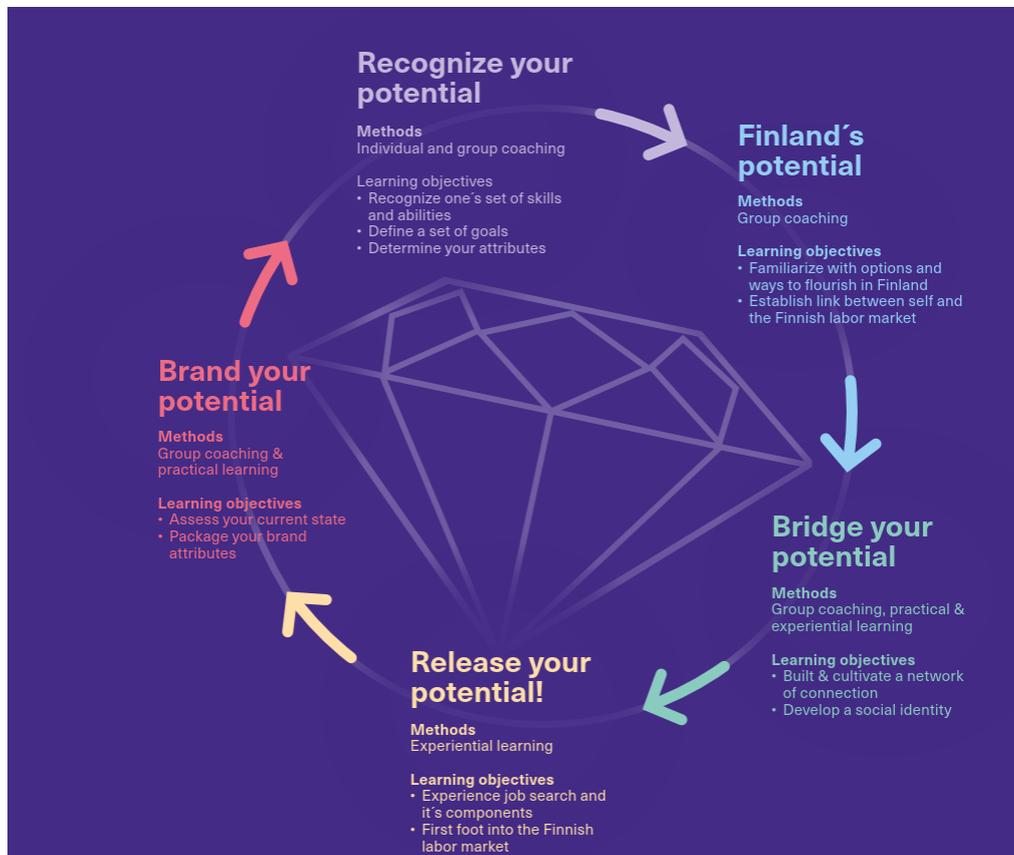
1. Mentoring: Encourage the participants to reflect on their career path options and identify their strengths, skills and abilities as well as define a set of goals in Finland.

The aim is to strengthen the participant's self-esteem and turn their expertise into an asset for the Finnish labour market.

2. Professional development: Familiarize the participants with options in Finland and new ways to flourish in the Finnish society as well as provide insights on job search and its components. The aim is to establish links between "self" and the Finnish labour market.
3. Networking: Provide a safe environment for the participants to build and cultivate a set of social and professional connections in Finland. The aim is to activate the participants in increasing diverse social networks as a valuable source of peer support, professional contacts and information on job leads.

Following the settling in phase, an informal continuous support is still available. For example, alumni activities such as monthly lunch and newsletter are organized. The spouses are always welcome to ask any questions after their participation in the programme. The Hidden Gems programme is designed based on three main learning methods; theoretical, practical and experiential. The experiential learning is the core principle of the programme with the premise that learning is a "holistic process of adaptation. It is not just the result of cognition but involves the integrated functioning of the total person- thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving" (Armstrong & Fukami, 2009, p. 43) and that "learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment" (Armstrong & Fukami, 2009, p. 44). Following this approach, the Hidden Gems programme is intentionally developed to empower spouses to become the actors of their own success in Finland. The five-step journey described below is the non-linear path, that the Hidden Gems participants are evolving through during their six months participation.

Figure 5. Hidden Gems journey



### Recognize your potential!

The participants are first supported to recognize their set of skills and abilities, determine their personal attributes and define a set of goals in Finland. To achieve this objective, activities such as self-discovery workshop and individual coaching are organized.

### Finland's potential

Secondly, the participants are supported to familiarize themselves with options and ways to flourish in Finland by establishing links between "self" and the Finnish society. To achieve this

objective, activities such as Finnish language course, Finnish culture workshop, unemployment possibilities, tax card workshop and working in Finland workshop are organized.

### Brand your potential!

Thirdly, the participants are supported to assess their current attributes and package them in the Finnish context. To achieve this objective, activities such as CV and CV video clinics, LinkedIn profile and Interview mocking workshops, business cards development, story building and pitching workshops are organized.

### Bridge your potential

Fourthly, the participants are supported to build and cultivate a network of connections and develop a social identity in Finland. To achieve this objective, activities such as Tampere city tour, sport classes, alumni lunch, mentoring programme, networking workshop, job-hunting session and several opportunities to meet with local companies are organized.

### Release your potential!

At last, the participants are given a safe environment to experience job search and its component as well as their first footstep into the Finnish labor market. To achieve this objective, activities such as volunteering in local and international conferences, company challenges as well as internship workshop are organized.

The first Hidden Gems pilot group was formed of 20 international spouses from 9 different nationalities, all living in Tampere region. The participants were chosen according to their availabilities, motivation and their status of international researcher's spouse.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the text is similar to the one retrieved on the [www.tut.fi](http://www.tut.fi) website as I am the author of both the Hidden Gems programme and the website content. The website has recently been transferred to [projects.tuni.fi/hiddengems](http://projects.tuni.fi/hiddengems).

During the first year, the organizing committee found that strong social and professional networks and active participation are vital to successfully integrate and find employment in Finland. Despite this, there are few studies that overview the role of these networks in helping expatriates enter the labour market. Consequently, I initiated a study to explore the perceived organizational support of the Hidden Gems programme in enhancing cross-cultural adjustment and employability in the Finnish context.

#### **1.4 Structure of the thesis**

The content of this thesis is divided into five main sections; introduction, literature review, research methodology, findings and discussion. First, the introductory section presents the research background and the purpose of this study in addition to the thesis structure. Secondly, the literature review introduce relevant literature such as the cross-cultural adaptation process followed by the spouse adjustment, social network theory, career stage, individual and environmental variables as well as spousal programme and individual predisposition. Thirdly, the methodology used for this study is described, more specifically; the sampling decision and data collection are argued, followed by the limitations and trustworthiness of the results. Fourthly, the results and findings of the interviews, survey questionnaires and networking maps are presented. Fifthly, the results are discussed and compared with existing literature. Finally, practical implications and suggestions for further research are mentioned and explained.

## **2 Literature review**

Research has demonstrated that the expatriates' spouses play a critical role in the decision process to accept, complete and extend international assignments. In 2019, most expatriate couples are referred to as dual-career couples. For expatriate spouses that have previously made a large investments in their professional education, employment interruption can significantly affect their social identity as well as reduce self-esteem and increase psychological withdrawal (Schlenker & Gutek, 1987; Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2007). Expatriate's and spouse's inability to adapt to a foreign environment has been highly correlated to international assignment failure. The next section will describe the different dimensions and the factors contributing to the adjustment process. In this thesis, the concept of adaptation, adjustment and integration are used interchangeably. They all describe the degree of psychological comfort one may feel within a host environment (Black 1988; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Nicholson, 1984).

### **2.1 Cross-cultural adjustment process**

Academic efforts to explain cross-cultural adaptation have been extensively studied across fields and disciplines and a commonality among the studies indicates that the process of adaptation is challenging and evolves over time. Generally, migrants in new settings experience stress, depression, loneliness, language barrier, complicated bureaucracy, closed career network and limited open positions (Croucher, 2008; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Vehaskari, 2010).

Indeed, globalization expands intercultural contacts and therefore creates changes regarding cultural context, consequently reforming traditions, cultural roles, norms and values. Cultural groups or individuals in new environments and circumstances tend to review and reorganize their communication and cultural practices and thereby their identity. In fact, when moving,

immigrants carry with them, at least initially, their cultural frames of reference and their own ways of understanding reality. When relocated, one must adapt by compromising internal structure of culture and external pressure of environment (Sahlins, 1964, p.136).

### **2.1.1 Cross-cultural adaptation theories**

Most of the theoretical foundation for cross-cultural adjustment research derive from the U-Curve theory introduced by Lysgaard (1955). It is probably the most commonly used theory by researchers (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Lee, 2006; Ivancevich, 2007). The theory describes four distinct stages of adjustment; the honeymoon, the culture shock, the adjustment and the mastery (Black & Mendenhall, 1990, p.226).

1. Honeymoon: fascination by the new culture, excitement about new and interesting sights and sounds;
2. Culture shock: disillusionment and frustration, life in new culture on day to day basis;
3. Adjustment: gradual adaptation, learning to behave according to cultural norms;
4. Mastery: small incremental increases in ability to function effectively in new culture.

Despite the reputation of the U-curve theory, recent research argues that the theory is not empirically backed up and that individual's experiences are neglected (Takeuchi & Chen, 2013).

Furthermore, the integrative communication theory of cross-cultural adaptation introduced by Young Yun Kim (2001) offers a portrait of the role of communication in the adaptation process. By employing adaptation as a broad concept, Kim provides definitions to draw a better understanding of the phenomena. According to the author, the adaptation process is "the entirety of the phenomenon of individuals who, upon relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment" (Kim, 2001, p. 31). At the core of this cross-cultural

adaptation process is the idea of “overall fitness” between the individual and the host environment to maximize one’s social life chances (Kim, 2001). Underlying Kim’s path model, acculturation serves as pillar of the adaptation process. According to Kim (1982), acculturation process is an interactive exchange and continuous process that develops with the communication of a foreign talent and the host sociocultural environment. The acquired communication skills therefore reflect the degree of the foreign talent’s acculturation (Kim, 1982). Kim argues that individual experience conformity as they enter a host environment and “unlearn” part of their own culture. More specifically deculturation is “the act of acquiring something new is inevitably also the act of “losing” something old...” (Kim, 2001, p. 51) such as language, customs, beliefs and values. Kim endeavored a systematic effort to provide a theoretical explanation for immigrant’s and sojourner’s communication compartments in a host environment. In her structural model, Kim suggested several dimensions essential of adaptation process such as individual predisposition, host communication competence, host social communication, ethnic social communication and the environment.

Kim’s integrative communication theory has evoked criticism from various perspectives. The variety of critique might partly derive from the fact that theory was originally developed to bridge various fields and disciplines resulting in a holistic theory of adaptation. Indeed, one of the most common critiques found in the literature is that the theory is self-contradictory. Kim argues that individual’s try to grow into being like the majority and reach the “overall fitness”, but at the same time she argues that the ultimate transformation should result in a unified identity by collapsing parameters of single culture and redefining intercultural identity. Moreover, Croucher and Kramer critique Kim’s integrative communication theory of adaptation by arguing that complete assimilation is theoretically impossible. As many researchers have stressed (Croucher, 2008, 2009; De La Garza & Ono, 2015) newcomers

entering into a new culture may not be accepted by the prevailing culture, may not be able to entirely assimilate, and/or may not want to completely assimilate (Oh, Koeske, & Sales, 2002; Smolicz & Secombe, 2003). Adapting to a host culture is challenging and requires time, open mind and growth. Being aware and conscious of the intercultural sensitivity and competence is already a step forward to understand different cultures. The U-curve and Kim's theory do not take into consideration the consciousness of individual's and I believe it is a lack of understanding the power of one's willingness to learn. In my opinion the process of adaptation and integration is always ongoing in the sense that in contact with different cultures the adaptation and integration is always to start over and I agree with Croucher and Kramer that a sojourner also impact the host culture and it is important to take it into consideration. Indeed, every culture is different and requires a different approach, I do not believe that, in our field of study, it is possible to create such a generalized model to understand and act consequently with all the cultures. Although, some other models like the ones presented below offer a broader perspective on the concept of adaptation.

Cross-cultural adaptation is commonly divided into three to five dimensions in the literature. The dimensions of adaptation are vindicated from the individuals' roles and where they stand in their life cycle (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008). Individuals can use the expatriation as an opportunity for a new career orientation or a time to start a family. The stage of expatriate life cycle has the ability to temperate the effectiveness of the adaptation (Harvey & Buckley, 1998). The cross-cultural literature has been largely influenced by Black and Stephen's (1989) three-dimensional model and repetitively validated (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Mendenhall & al., 2002). Adjusting to a host country is considered to be a multidimensional construct of three dimensions (Black 1988), respectively divided in *work adjustment*, *interaction adjustment* and *general adjustment*. The interaction dimension refers to socializing and creating ties with the

host country nationals. The general adjustment dimension refers to the living conditions, such as norms, customs, values and culture. The work adjustment dimension refers to the adjustment into new job roles and requirements and will not be utilized in this research, as the target focus is on foreign spouses experiencing career interruption.

Cerny and Smith (2007) proposed a five-dimensional model of cross-cultural adjustment comprises of five main dimensions: organizational, cultural, relational, psychological and personal (ref. in Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). The adapted model proposed by Shaffer and Harrison (2001) is utilized as fundamental base for this thesis, more specifically the interactional adjustment dimension. Scholars have addressed a variety of research on expatriate's success and adaptation (Black & Stephens, 1989; Black & Gregersen, 1991). However, very little research has focus on the adaptation of expatriate spouses, the "Invisible sojourners" (De Verthelyi, 1995; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001, Lei & al., 2015). Spouse adjustment is vital to a successful international assignment (Andreason, 2008; Vainikka, 2016; Caligiuri & all, 1998). Regardless of the motivations behind individuals and organization, both wish to achieve the same goal of successfully adjusting into the host environment. In this thesis, successful cross-cultural adjustment refers to the degree of psychological comfort and familiarity the expatriate feels towards the host environment ( Black 1990, ref. in Vainikka, 2016).

## **2.2 Spouse adjustment**

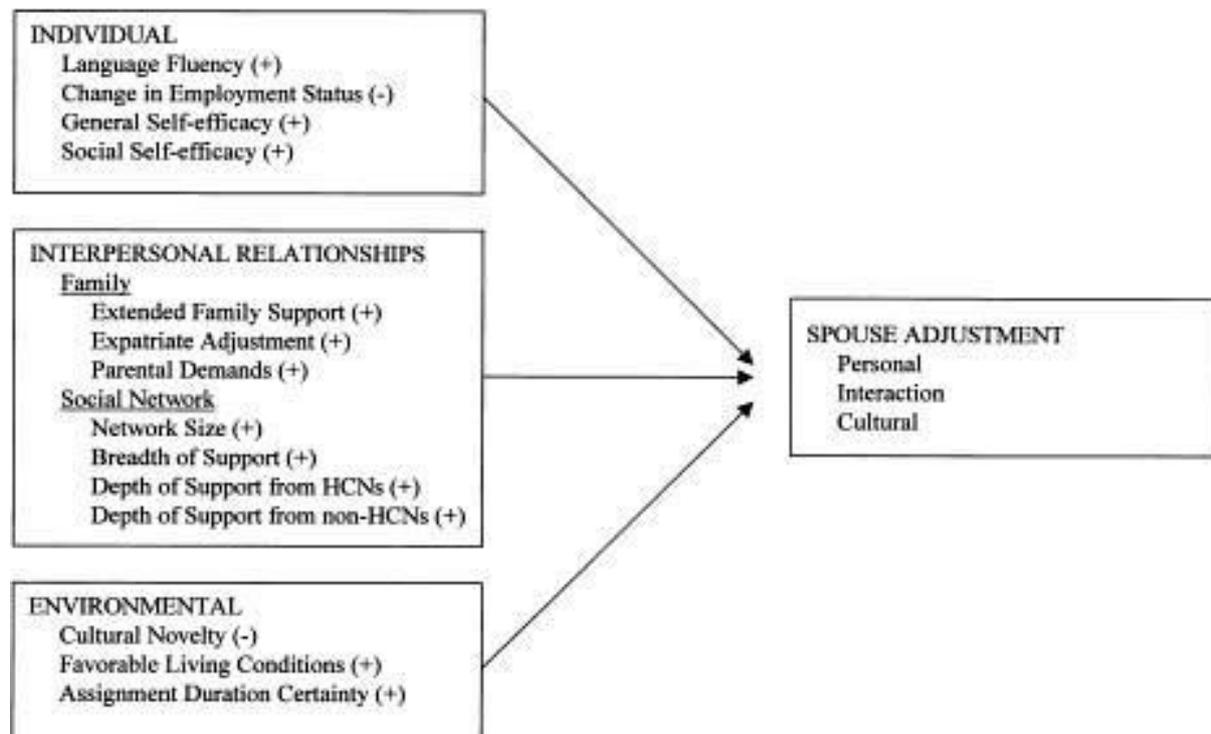
More recent research indicates that spouses have greater adjustment challenges, especially if they interrupt their career and commonly receive less support. Only limited studies (Black & al., 1991; Caligiuri & al., 1998; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001) have examined the predecessors and identify the critical success factors of adaptation (Kraimer & all, 2001). When highly skilled professionals migrate, they encounter a number of institutional and social barriers that

negatively affect their ability to find employment that corresponds to their qualifications and to integrate into the host society.

### 2.2.1 Spouse adjustment theory

Drawing on Harvey and Buckley's (1998) model of cross-cultural adaptation, Shaffer and Harrison (2001) proposed a model of spouse adjustment (Figure 5). The model positions the expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment into three dimensions: personal, interactional and cultural. *Personal adjustment* is defined as the sense of belonging to or feeling at home in a foreign environment. *Interactional adjustment* refers to the perceived comfort of interacting and establishing relationships within the host country. *Cultural adjustment* refers to adaptation to several environmental and situational features, such as local customs, transportation, and health systems within the foreign environment.

Figure 6. A model of spouse adjustment to international assignments. (HCN = host-country nationals)(Shaffer & Harrison, 2001, p. 245).



The model set to test the spouse adjustment through three sub categories, known as Individual, Interpersonal relationships and Environmental. These three categories of adjustment are described next.

### **Individual**

Individual dimension refers to the characteristics influencing the sense of belonging one can perceive and sets out to test the spouse's personal adjustment in a host environment. These characteristics include the language fluency, the change in employment status, the general and social self-efficacy. These features are defined as indicators to affect the personal adjustment.

### **Interpersonal relationships**

Interpersonal relationships dimension refers to the characteristics influencing the sense of comfort in interacting and building relationship within the host environment. These characteristics include the family support, parental demands and social networks features such as size and depth. These features are defined as indicators to affect the interactional adjustment.

### **Environmental**

Environmental dimension refers to the characteristics influencing the familiarity with the common characteristics of the host environment (Takeuchi & al. 2002). These characteristics include the culture novelty, the living conditions and the assignment duration uncertainty. These features are defined as indicators to affect the cultural adjustment.

In this study, I will draw on the spouse adjustment model proposed by Shaffer and Harrison (2001). Relocation comes along with critical changes and the expatriates have the chance to explore opportunities for personal and professional growth. However, the lack of organizational support and connections to host nationals often fallouts in isolation, frustration and diminution of self-esteem (Briody & Chrisman, 1991; Loomis, 1992; Shaffer & Harrison,

2001). Research on expatriate adjustment reveals that spouses have greater challenges in integrating than other migrant groups. As employed workforce stem part of their identity through their social interaction in and outside workplace, expatriate spouses experiencing career interruption lose an important facet of their social identity.

### **2.3 Social network theory**

Social networks research in expatriation is largely rooted from Granovetter's (1973) studies on networks. Professional migrants may have limited professional networks that are essential in finding employment as well as adjusting to a new environment. Establishing social ties with the host country nationals have proven to improve psychological well-being, career success and expatriates' cross-cultural adaptation. A social network is defined as "a set of actors connected by work and social connections with other individuals" (Bruning, Sonpar & Wang, 2012, p. 445). In the literature, the networks' characteristics such as size, frequency, density and closeness and the strength of network ties are expected to provide positive relationships with expatriate adjustment (Wang & Kanungo, 2004). Larger and diversified networks as well as increased frequency of contacts should provide expatriates with informational and emotional support resources, thus influencing a greater adjustment (Liu & Shaffer, 2005). According to previous research, (De Graaf & Flap, 1988) access to differing levels of social capital also increases labour market outcomes. More specifically, network ties have proven to provide expatriates "with 'informational support' - information assisting expatriates' functioning and problem solving in the host country - and 'emotional support' - emotional resources helping expatriates feel better about themselves and their situation when adjustment difficulties become overwhelming" (Farh & al., 2010, p. 434). It is proven that newcomers in a host environment will seek information and emotional support from people they perceive knowledgeable or sharing the same stressors (Nebus, 2006, Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000). In

expatriation context, the actors sharing the same stressors known as difficulties, are likely to reassure others and help each other make sense of the new environment (Marsden, 1988). Building on these findings, emerging literature on the social network perspective has evoked criticism from various authors (Harrison & al., 2004; Takeuchi & al., 2009). Most studies have disregarded the role of host country nationals in the success of international assignment. Additional authors (Takeuchi & al., 2009) argue that previous research does not differentiate the type of ties, for example distinguish work from non-work ties and the possible impacts on adjustment. One important addition to the literature from Caligiuri (2000) is that not all individuals benefit equally from interactions with people from different cultures. Hence, the individual's predisposition and personality should act as a predictor of adjustment in expatriation context. Research tells us that successful expatriate assignments have been found to be highly correlated to the way the spouse adjusts into their new setting. Other researchers argue that the individuals may have predisposition such as self-efficacy and growth needs that influence the outcomes of spousal support on the adjustment.

#### **2.4 Individuals' predisposition**

The literature on dual-career relocation has consistently found the gender roles influencing the ability to adjust in a host environment. It is anticipated that there is a difference in the way female or male trailing spouses will overcome the expatriation challenges and consequently the overall adjustment (Bauer & Taylor, 2001). Andreason (2003), argues that perceptions of genders influence one's behavior during the expatriation. Although this variable seems to be recurrent in the cross-cultural studies, this research does not consider the gender in the findings and discussions. However, research suggests that the individual's motivation and career life cycle have the ability to moderate the efficiency of adjustment and spousal support (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Harvey & Buckley, 1998). Study also suggests that participants who are more active with their efforts and the host environment reduce uncertainty and enhance

adaptation (Ashford & Black, 1996). The socialization literature defines the ways in which companies shape behaviors during relocation period (Reichers, 1987). Studies also suggest that behaviors such as self-efficacy and growth needs moderate the impact of adjustment (Ashford & Taylor, 1990). More specifically, Ashford and Black (1996) introduced the concept of proactive tactics such as *information seeking*, which allows newcomers to better understand the new environment, *relationship building* that allows to relate to host nationals, and *positive framing* that aims to search for psychological self-control by framing situations as opportunities instead of failures. Those tactics help newcomers to cope with stress and reduce uncertainty, allowing a smoother adaptation in a host environment (Black and Mendenhall 1990; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou 1991). In addition to individual's behaviors, the career life cycle provide evidence to moderate organizational adjustment support.

### **2.5 Career stage**

Harvey and Buckley (1998) proposed a model for development of a supporting programme for dual-career couples. The findings indicate four career stages that may influence the adjustment outcome. The *initial career stage* suggests that the expatriation can provide an opportunity to pursue or further one's education and utilize the credentials to his or her advantage when returning home. Spouses in the *growth/establishment stage* attempt to prove themselves and demonstrate their potential, thus an interruption of employment could be seen as a lack of commitment to their career. In the *maintenance stage*, spouses are in a senior position or at the climax of their career and may be difficult to relocate at all. Lastly, for partners in the *declining stage*, expatriation may provide opportunities for sabbatical leave or early retirement. Although, the career stage seems to have a strong influence on the expatriates' motivation to seek for adequate support in one's adjustment to the new environment, this thesis does not consider the career stage in the data set. I believe this might be missing out on an important factor influencing the results of one's adaptation.

The career theory literature largely highlights the individuals' predisposition, however, the lack of environmental variables for instance, ethnicity and gender have been criticized (Hartung, 2011). The cultural context also plays a major role in one's adaptation into a foreign environment.

## **2.6 Environmental variables**

Spouses are commonly more involved with the host environment due to their change in employment status, therefore, cultural novelty and features of the new environment can act as an accelerator or decelerator of adjustment. According to Shaffer and Harrison (2001), *cultural novelty* "refers to differences between various and commonplace features of everyday customs of the host and home cultures" (p.244). In addition, the *living conditions* referring to "how well one's current accommodations match the living standards to which one is accustomed" (p.244) have also been found to be a variable that influences the successfulness of adaptation. Indeed, the food, the weather, the housing, the healthcare, the customs and traditions are influencing the actions and behaviors the expatriates adopt in the host culture (Takeuchi & al. 2002). The greater the differences between the cultures and the conditions, the more stress and insecurity one can experience, resulting in more difficult adjustment. Another situational factor was identified as critical in the literature is the certainty of assignment duration. The knowledge of the duration of a stay overseas has been found correlating to positive adjustment (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Spouses experiencing a fix-term assignment establish a feeling of control over their situation, resulting in reducing uncertainty and enhancing adaptation (Ashford & Black, 1996).

According to Caligiuri & al (1998), one of the prevalent causes of international assignment failure is the expatriate or spouse' inability to adjust to a foreign environment. Improving spouse adjustment and employment in the host country has the potential to reduce the risk of

premature return. Existing research shows that employer spousal support is greatly related to the overall adjustment of the expatriate (Kraimer & al. 2001), reducing assignment withdrawal, and increasing spousal willingness to accept international assignments (Konopaske & al. 2005).

### **2.7 Employer support for expatriate spouses**

Already in the beginning of the 2000s, it became evident that organizations had slowly begun to take responsibility for the difficulties spouses may be facing during the relocation process (Cartus, 2007; Martens & Grant, 2008). Previous research provides insight on the type of support that should be offered to enhance the spouses' adjustment. In the literature, organizational forms of support are often divided in formal and informal (Andreason, 2003; Harvey, 1995; Ivancevich, 2007). The formal support refers to practical information, such as career assistance and professional development, while the informal support refers to psychological support and health and wellness related issues, resulting in creating social ties to the host environment

Before offering in country settling support, companies should take into consideration the pre-departure aid that prepare the expatriates in anticipatory adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Prior knowledge on the new environment and clear expectations have the potential to ease the adaptation. Building on the uncertainty reduction theories, theoreticians (Black and Mendenhall 1990; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou 1991; Oberg 1960) have argued that anticipatory expectations can potentially moderate one's adjustment. According to Ivancevich (2007), companies should include the spouses in the selection process in order to take part in the expatriation decision-making process. Similarly, cultural training prior to the departure helps to reduce stress and diminish uncertainty (Halsberger & Brewster, 2008). If spouses are made aware of the probable difficulties and the type of assistance they will receive, both career related and others, it sets realistic expectations and thereby facilitates the spouses' subsequent

adjustment (Cole, 2011). Other direct form of support includes assistance in relocation services, such as information on housing, schooling, as well as contextual formalities like permits and visa (Andreason, 2003; Harvey, 1995). Additional crucial direct support is enabling opportunities for personal growth (Harvey, 1995), language courses and career assistance in case of career minded spouses (McNulty, 2012).

Indirect support may include assistance in the creation of social network. An essential facet in adapting and for search of employment in a host country is the creation and maintenance of network ties (Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003). Scholars have recently deepened the knowledge on the relationship between the networks the expatriates build with the host culture and the role of those ties to experience greater adjustment (Liu & Shaffer 2005; Wang & Kanungo, 2004). "These networks have been found to have a significant effect on psychological well-being, defined as self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth" (Wang & Kanungo 2004, p.777). Yong Yun Kim (1986, 1987) describes network as the strength of native ties, and valuable to reach a greater fitness in the individualistic and collectivist host environment. Research also stress the importance of peer-support for spouses in adjusting to their new life, this may include getting involved in hobbies, volunteering, local clubs and international gathering (Andreason, 2003).

Regarding spousal support, organizations might be wasting money on well-intentioned efforts while less expensive assistance has much greater impact on the adjustment. Support such as professional, career, and social support have been found to positively influence the spouses' adjustment (McNulty, 2012). Although the individual and environmental predisposition has been proven to influence the adjustment, organizational support demonstrates to reduce the stress factors and enhance the successful adjustment in a host environment. However, we know very little on whether the support provided is positively affecting the adaptation or not. In sum,

the lack of knowledge on whether spousal programme is effective or not from the spouse perspective is the core reason for this thesis. This study makes a distinctive contribution by focusing on evaluating the effectiveness of the Hidden Gems project by examining the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the support they received. The next section will introduce the theoretical framework utilized for this thesis.

### **2.8 Theoretical framework and research questions**

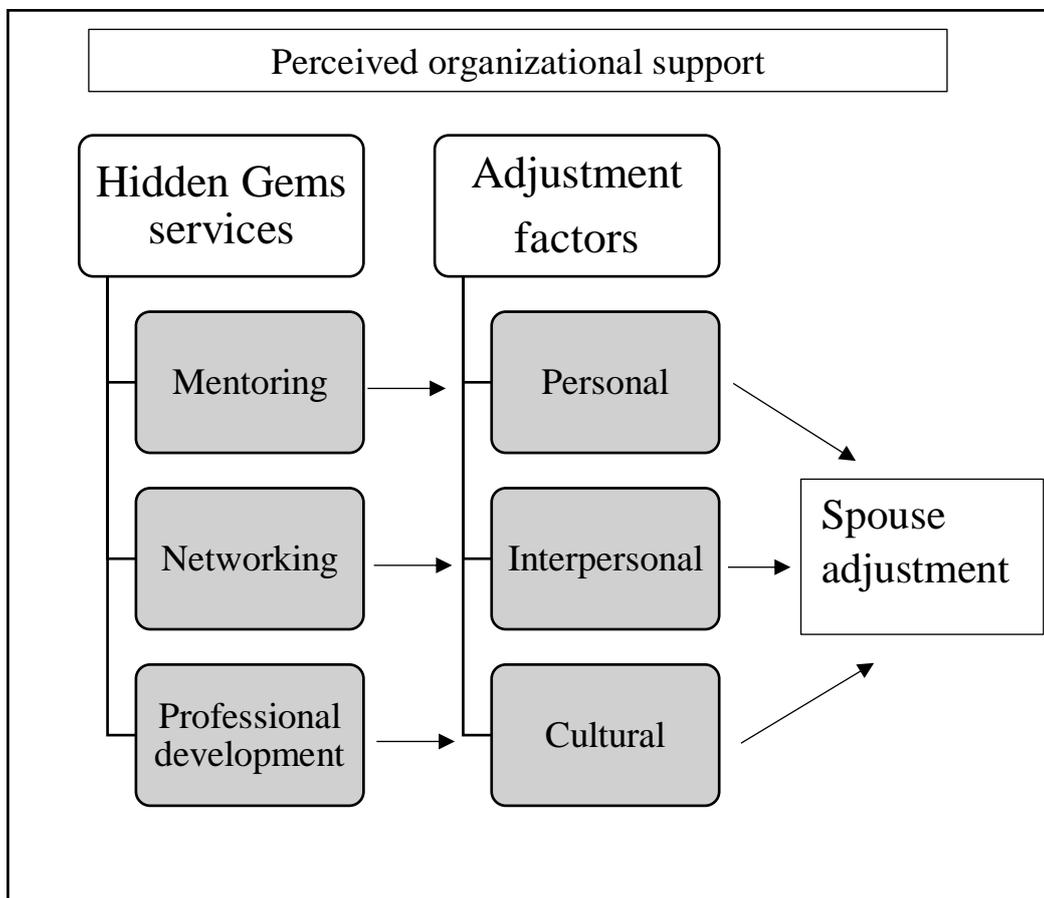
The objective of this study is to investigate the role of the Hidden Gems programme in enhancing spousal adjustment in the Finnish context. Specifically, by examining the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the support they received during the six months participation in the Hidden Gems settling in phase of the spousal programme. Furthermore, the role of the creation and maintenance of social networks is an important aspect of this analysis. Based on the literature review, I attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How do the Hidden Gems participants perceive the support they received?
2. How do the Hidden Gems participants evaluate the programme's impact in helping them to adjust in Finland?
3. How do the Hidden Gems participants evaluate the programme's impact in helping them to find employment in Finland?
4. What kind of social networks do the participants recognize influencing their overall adjustment?

The two first research questions draw on the literature on the spousal adjustment, more specifically, the spouse adjustment model proposed by Shaffer and Harrison (2001). The main reason behind this choice is that the theoretical foundation for the creation of Hidden Gems services was built around the spouse adjustment model introduced by Shaffer and Harrison (2001). The mentoring supporting service draws its purpose from the personal adjustment,

where the activities are meant to create a sense of belonging in Finland. The networking supporting service draws its purpose from the interactional adjustment, where the activities are meant to build network ties within the host country. The professional development supporting service draws its purpose from the cultural adjustment, where the activities meant to build a situational and cultural understanding of the Finnish society. The third and fourth question utilize the social network on expatriation theory based on Granovetter's work (1973) to identify the social networks that influence the participants in their adjustment and search for employment in Finland. There is lingering interest on identifying of the strategic networks to eventually utilize them in enhancing adjustment of international talents in Tampere region. The core of this research is focused on the spouse adjustment and the theoretical framework for this thesis is presented in the figure 7.

Figure 7. Theoretical framework.



The theoretical framework is built on the theories presented in the literature review. The framework is conceived of two main elements; the organizational support services and the adjustment factors, resulting in enhancing spousal adjustment. The objective is to build on existing research by interviewing the international researchers' spouses at the Tampere University and analyze their perception on the organizational support they receive to evaluate the effectiveness of the spousal support services. To attempt answering the research questions, I collected two waves of data via social mapping, survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The next section describes the methodology, data collection and analysis as well as the research methods.

### **3 Methodology**

This section presents the research methods and the reasoning behind the author's choice followed by the data collection and sampling methods. In addition, the limitations of this study are discussed. Qualitative and quantitative approach were chosen to collect and analyze the data, more specifically, semi-structured interviews, survey questionnaire and mapping methods were used. The analysis was done following the principles of thematic analysis.

#### **3.1 Data collection and research methods**

For the purpose of assessing, understanding and measuring the impact of perceived organizational support of the Hidden Gems project in enhancing spousal adjustment, this study uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches with semi-structured individual interview, social mapping and survey questionnaire as data collection instruments. The survey questionnaires were utilized during the project to quantify the satisfaction level as well as measure the overall project success for funding purposes. Although, quantitative approach is not the main method used for collecting and analyzing the data, some parts of the survey results will be utilized in this study. These methods were selected to explore the multiple dimensions of the participants' perception on their experience in Finland and to allow non-native English speakers to communicate via different channels such as visual, written and oral. The interviews were conducted in English, since the sample of participants comes from 9 different countries with high education background.

For initial testing of the Hidden Gems programme, the researcher undertook a two-part study to understand the role of the Hidden Gems spousal programme as part of the spouse adjustment process. I collected two waves of data via social mapping, in-depth interviews and Web-based survey using Webropol. The first wave took place before the Hidden Gems project started on

September 10, 2018, and the second wave took place after the Hidden Gems project ends on February 22, 2019.

Prior to the in-depth interviews, the participants were asked to answer a short survey in addition to draw a map of their social network in Finland according to three factors: friends, acquaintances and people that may help them find employment. Through mapping, I sought for insights on the participants' social connections and their relationship to the host country nationals. The social network maps can be found in Appendix D. Following, the participants took part in semi-structured individual interviews. The same methods and order were used during the second wave of data collection to evaluate whether a change was experienced.

In order to set the interview meetings and collect survey results, I contacted the participants that have applied to the Hidden Gems programme through email before the pilot group started the activities. Interviews took place in the Tampere University of Technology premises at a time of each participants' convenience. Prior to the interview, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the benefits, the possible risks and the confidentiality. To confirm their knowledge, they signed a consent form that can be found in Appendix E. For consistency, the same interviewer conducted all interviews. The interviewer used a semi-structural question guide. The main reason of this approach is to produce exhaustive information that might increase and clarify the limited existing knowledge about spousal adjustment. This method is in accordance with Searle & Ward (1990) stating that cross-cultural adjustment is an internal, psychological and emotional state that should be measured from the perspective of an individual experiencing living and working in a foreign environment. A consistent set of questions was used as guideline, but the interviewer allowed freedom to modify the structure in order to investigate deeper into unique answers. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

### **3.2 Sample**

Although a larger population took part in the activities offered during the Hidden Gems first pilot group, a total of 17 respondents undertook the two waves of survey, interview and social mapping. The sample of this research included 17 international researchers' spouses (13 women, 4 men) experiencing career interruption in Tampere region, Finland. All the participants were taking part in the Hidden Gems project. The sample hailed from 9 different countries representing the following major world regions: Asia (47%), Europe (35%) and North America (18%). In this sample, 76% were female, 24% were male and 100% are partners or spouses of a researcher working at the Tampere University. All participants were highly educated, with 65 % having a master's degree, 29 % having a bachelor's degree and 6 % having a vocational degree. All the participants were employed prior to the expatriation and 94 % of them were unemployed after entering Finland. These and other characteristics are shown in Table 2.

*Table 2. The participants' backgrounds.*

Previous profession	Educational attainment	Status (Before Hidden Gems)
Designer	Master's	Unemployed
Business developer	Master's	Unemployed
Secretary receptionist	Bachelor	Unemployed
International Business	ongoing Bachelor	Student
Tourism specialist	Vocational degree	Unemployed
Senior Business Analyst	Master's	Unemployed
IT engineer/ Software developer	Master's	Unemployed
Urban planner	Master's	Unemployed
Physics Teacher	Master's	Unemployed
Software developer	Master's	Unemployed
Event coordinator	Master's	Unemployed
Early childhood teacher	Master's	Unemployed
Financial & Credit Analyst	Bachelor	Unemployed
Creative being	Master's	Unemployed
Communications coordinator	Master's	Unemployed
Visual Artist	Bachelor	Unemployed
Marketing & communications	Bachelor	Unemployed

### 3.3 Data analysis

This research mostly uses qualitative methods due to the nature of the research questions that attempt to analyze the participants' perceptions. The in-depth interviews were used as the fundamental dataset for the thematic analysis and the survey questionnaires and mapping were used as a complement to validate the themes and add subsequent information to the results. After recording and transcribing the interviews, the author studied the data. Thematic analysis was the method I chose to analyze the data. The method aims to identify and describe direct and indirect ideas within the emergent themes (Guest & al., 2012). This method was chosen in accordance to the themes related to the spouse adjustment model proposed by Shaffer and

Harrison (2001). The analysis started by reading the interview transcripts and the survey answers. Repetition and emergent topics were then coded into themes by recognizing and grouping repetitions. The themes were then summarized, finalized and analyzed. This study used quantitative methods with survey questionnaires. The results of the survey were used to validate the themes and support the analysis. The mapping was used to identify the emergent networks considered crucial by the spouses in integrating to the Finnish society. Network analysis was used to explore the social structure of the participants (Gretzel, 2001). Repetition of networks were identified and the number of repetitions were used as an indicator of the relevancy in the Finnish ecosystem. Building on previous studies, the author also attempted to increase the knowledge on existing spouse support programme and to suggest good practices relevant in the Finnish context.

### **3.4 Limitations**

This study has limitations. Firstly, the author of this thesis was interviewing the participants as well as following them in their journey and supporting them throughout the six months Hidden Gems assistance. Therefore, interviewee had a higher risk of giving socially acceptable answers which may affect the reliability of the interviews (Hirsjärvi & al., 2009). At the same time, as the researcher was an observer during the whole period, it gave in-depth insight on the participants' behaviors. Consequently, the interpretive validities of the researchers may have been tainted by the "meaning of the objects, events and behaviors of the people engaged and involved in the study's phenomenon" (Hayashi & al., 2019, p.100). Secondly, although most of the spouses spoke good English, some exceptions required extra effort to explain some of the concept with different words. This might have tainted the answers and therefore the results. Thirdly, all the participants were spouses of the Tampere University employees and therefore, the sample did not include private company spouses or self-initiated expatriates. Consequently, the findings are not necessarily generalizable to these types of expatriates. In addition, the

current study took place in the Finnish context, which may not be applicable to other countries.

Despite these limitations, this study enhance the limited literature investigating the spousal adjustment in expatriation context.

## **4 Findings**

A total of 17 spouses of the 20 participants undertook the two-parts study. First in this section, the benefits experienced by the Hidden Gems participants are presented, followed to their connection to the employment and integration assistance. The data collected with the semi-structured interviews were analyzed via thematic analysis. The results suggest that four categories of benefits experienced by the Hidden Gems participants emerged (Table 3).

*Table 3. Categories of benefits from the Hidden Gems.*

<b><i>Networking</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>It helped me meet new people, both in social and professional networks</i></li><li>- <i>Hidden Gems helped me networking better with people in my field</i></li><li>- <i>It opened doors to mostly English-speaking population and provided contacts</i></li><li>- <i>Meet new people and people who may be useful in finding a job</i></li><li>- <i>It connected me to many people and opportunities</i></li><li>- <i>It helped me to meet like-minded people</i></li></ul>
<b><i>Self-confidence</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>Boost my self-confidence</i></li><li>- <i>Get me out of my comfort zone</i></li><li>- <i>Opened my eyes of what my skills are and what I can do with it</i></li></ul>
<b><i>Peer support</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>It helped me feel that I am not the only one suffering searching for jobs</i></li><li>- <i>I found many people who would look similar to me</i></li></ul>
<b><i>Career support</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>Hidden Gems helped me restarting my career</i></li><li>- <i>It helped me to find the right channels for finding the job</i></li><li>- <i>It helped me to understand the Finnish society and job market</i></li><li>- <i>It prepared myself for possible opportunities</i></li><li>- <i>It helped me to integrate professionally in the Finnish society</i></li></ul>

Networking was the most common, closely followed by self-confidence, career support and peer support. Networking and career support have been found related to finding employment in Finland, whereas self-confidence and peer support to integrating into the Finnish society. The benefits are explained in details in the discussion section, respectively, to their connection to the employment assistance and the integration/adjustment assistance.

#### 4.1 Employment assistance

The career and networking support have been found benefits related to the employment assistance offered by the Hidden Gems. The responses of the interviews were categorized via thematic analysis and resolving differences. Table 4 shows if the participants have found employment and their job status after the Hidden Gems assistance. A total of 53 % of the participants have secured employment, 23 % are pursuing further studies, 18 % are unemployed and 6 % are on maternity leave. The three unemployed participants declared to have started active job search in Finland.

*Table 4. Job status after the Hidden Gems assistance.*

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Employed (7)

- Permanent (3)
- Fixed-term (4)

Entrepreneur (2)

- Freelance (2)

In training (4)

- Ongoing Bachelor (1)
- Full-time Finnish language course (3)

Unemployed (3)

Maternity leave (1)

---

Moreover, the three services offered by the Hidden Gems assistance in helping to find employment was measured using a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = completely disagree; 5 = completely agree) which was created for the purpose of this study. Networking was by average the most valued service, followed by mentoring and professional development (see Table 6). To the question, “can you describe what has led to your employment?” the answers were unanimous, “networking through the Hidden Gems”. More specifically, participants answered,

“I give the credits to Hidden Gems if you ask me”; “Hidden Gems has done something I could never have done on my own. It provided me with professional development, a mentor and a network. Hidden Gems gave me exactly what I needed; “If it had not been from the Hidden Gems, I never would have met my customers”.

The social mapping results show seven strong networks that are related to people that can help find employment (see Table 5). The comparison of social mapping before and after the Hidden Gems involvement provide evidence that in addition to career connections, the results show a drastic increase of social connections. Most of the participants mentioned feeling much better as regard to their social life after the Hidden Gems.

*Table 5. Perceived social networks related to finding employment in Tampere*

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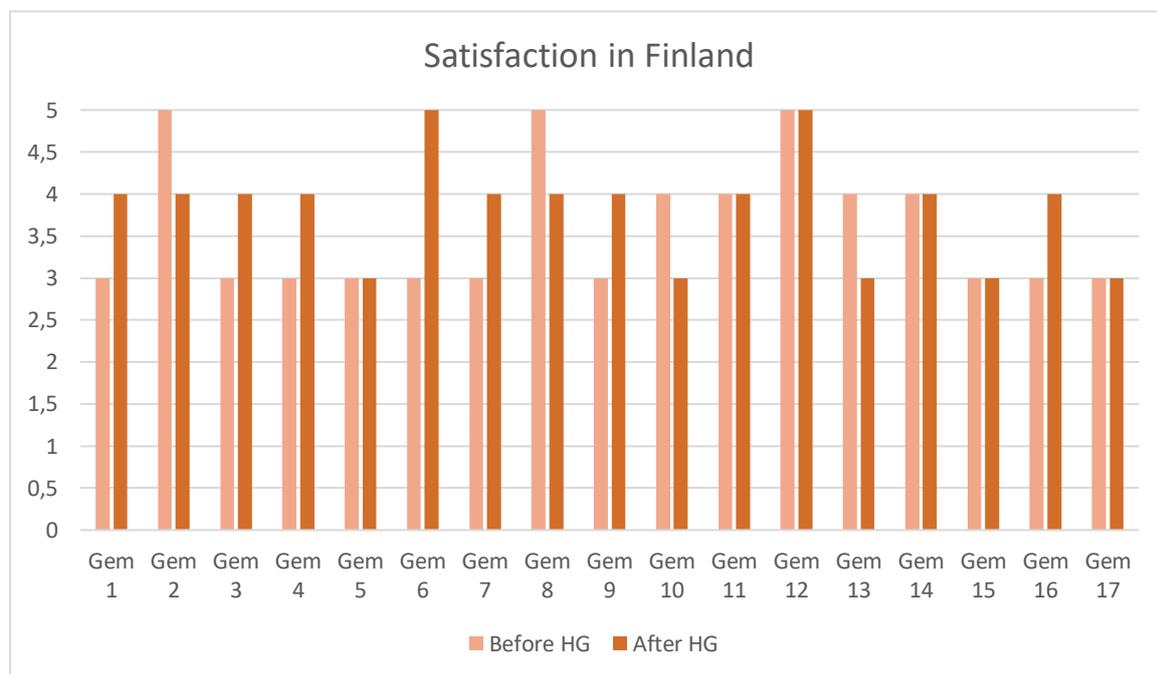
Hidden Gems (17)	- 100% of respondents
Crazy Town (10)	- 63% of respondents
Mentoring programme (7)	- 41% of respondents
Tribe Tampere (5)	- 29% of respondents
Mindtrek conference (3)	- 18% of respondents
Company challenges (2)	- 12% of respondents
Business Tampere (2)	- 12% of respondents
JCI United (1)	- 6% of respondents
Workboost Tampere (1)	- 6% of respondents
Slush (1)	- 6% of respondents

This description of networks is not extensive of one’s integration into Tampere region, but the one of a Hidden Gems participant. This result cannot be extended outside of the programme, mostly because most of these networks were provided as part of the official programme. It would be very interesting to map the networks of international talents that does not have access to the Hidden Gems and compare the results.

#### 4.2 Integration/Adjustment assistance

The satisfaction level in Finland was measured using a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = completely unsatisfied; 5 = completely satisfied) which was created for the purpose of this study. The overall satisfaction of respondents has increased of 6,56 %. More specifically, 41 % of satisfaction level increased, 24 % decreased and 35 % remained the same (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Satisfaction in Finland.



In addition, the overall expectations of the participants' experiences in Finland were measured during the interview, using a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = much worse; 5 = much better) which was created for the purpose of this study. The results are presented in Figure 8 with the participants' status after the Hidden Gems involvement. Although this thesis did not focus on the employment outcome, but adjustment in Finland, the author was expecting to find a relationship between their employment status and their overall experience in Finland. The results show that 18% have had somewhat worse experience, 35 % mentioned having about

expected, and 23% somewhat better and 24% mentioned having a much better experience in Finland (Table 6). The results demonstrate a surprising element among the unemployed and in training participants. All the unemployed participants mention having an “about expected” overall experience in Finland, whereas 2/3 of the participants involved in language training offered as part of the integration plan describe their experience as “somewhat worse”.

Table 6. *Perceived experience in Finland.*

Status after Hidden Gems	Experience in Finland
Employed Part-time Freelance	Somewhat better
Unemployed	About expected
Unemployed	About expected
Student	Much better
Employed Part-time Permanent	Somewhat better
Employed Full-time Permanent	Much better
Employed Full-time Fix term	Much better
Entrepreneur Part-time Freelance	Somewhat better
In training (language)	Somewhat worse
Unemployed	About expected
Entrepreneur Part-time Freelance	About expected
In training (language)	Much better
Maternity leave	About expected
Employed Part-time Fix term	Somewhat better
Employed Full-time Fix-term	Somewhat worse
Employed Full-time Permanent	About expected
In training (language)	Somewhat worse

Furthermore, as the research states the certainty of length of stay in a host environment as an indicator of adjustment, the author collected the information on the projected length of stay before and after the participation of the participants in the Hidden Gems spousal programme.

The results demonstrate a coherent stability in the answers of the participants (Table 7). More specifically, three participants mentioned intending to extend their stay if possible, while two of the participants mentioned returning prematurely in their home country if their employment status remain unemployed. Additionally, two participants mentioned not knowing anymore how long they will remain in Finland. The reasons behind the uncertainty are respectively cited from the interviews, first “my husband’s PhD largely depends on funding and he is waiting for an additional fund” and second “my husband’s work always gets extended, it depends on funding opportunities”.

*Table 7. Projected length of stay in Finland.*

Projected length of stay before Hidden Gems	Projected length of stay after Hidden Gems
4 Months	1.5 years
Permanently	Permanently
Unknown	3 years minimum
Permanently	Permanently
3 years	3 years
2.5 years	Unknown
1 or more	As long as possible
2 or 3 years	3 years and more
4 years	6 months
Permanently	Permanently
3 years	Permanently
4 years	4 years
3.5 years	3.5 years
1 year	1 year
Permanently	Permanently
2 years	Unknown
4 years	3 years

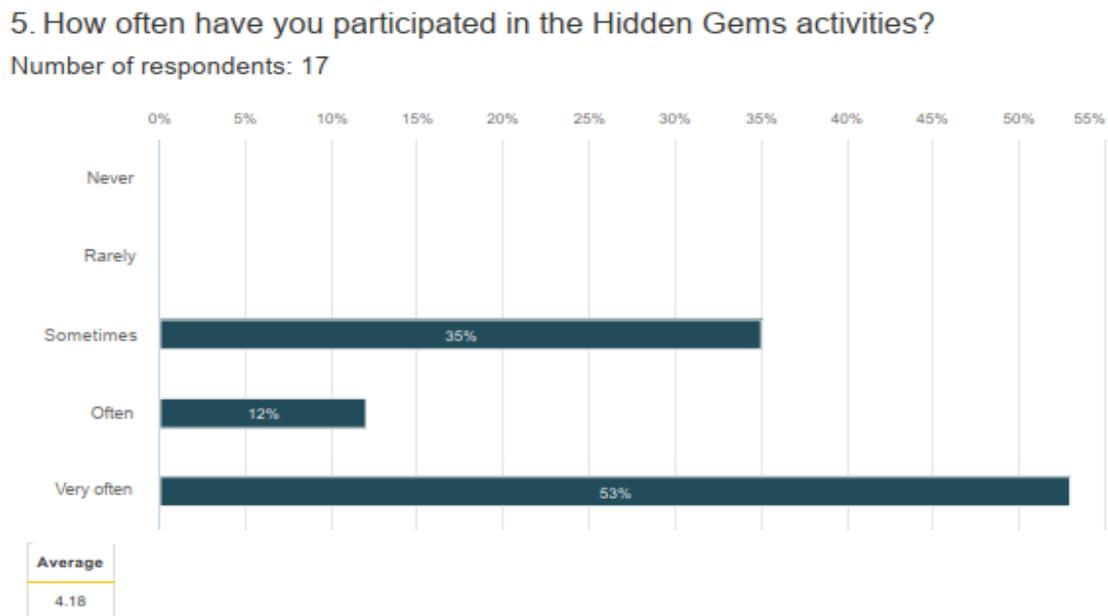
The results of the projected length of stay may be related to various reasons that have not been researched in this study, such as quality of life, values, and children’s satisfaction. Therefore, this study does not provide an extensive set of data to connect the two elements and argue that

the prolonged length of stay is related to the Hidden Gems support. However, the knowledge of length of stay may influence the mindset of the spouse, as it reduces uncertainty. This argument will be discussed further in the discussion section.

The semi-structured interviews included a question asking the participants to rate their perceived integration into the Finnish society before and after the Hidden Gems on a scale from 1 to 100. Four of the responses were not included as some of the data was missing. Therefore, 13 respondents answered this question. The overall perceived integration to the Finnish society had increased of 69 %. The main missing factor mentioned in the interviews was the knowledge of the Finnish language. Participants mentioned the role of the Finnish language as a central key to feel more integrated to the Finnish society, however, none of the participants found the local language as a critical element of low adjustment. Moreover, in order to assess the spousal services in accordance with overall adjustment, the participants were asked the question “which service have you found beneficial in your integration into Finland?”. Networking was by average the most valued service, followed by mentoring and professional development.

At last, the participants were asked to rate verbally their participation in the Hidden Gems on a scale using a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = Never; 5 = very often) which was created for the purpose of this study. The results show that 53 % of participants participated very often, 12% often and 35% sometimes to the Hidden Gems activities. The amount of involvement of each participant is disparate.

Figure 9. Participation in the Hidden Gems activities.



This study found a great relation between the amount of involvement and the perceived integration of participants. The involvement in the official activities presented an overview of the amount of involvement outside of the programme. With this regard, the more the participants were active inside and outside of the programme, for example in creating and maintaining networks, applying for position or simply searching for positions, the better the participants perceived their integration. Although, a relation was observed, it is not absolute, as some participants that were very active in and out the programme, were found unemployed at the end and did not perceive to have a satisfying integration. The relation between the involvement and the perceived integration will be discussed further in the discussion section below.

## 5 Discussion

In this final section, the results will be linked to the research questions and the theoretical framework introduced in the literature section. This study was an initial attempt to evaluate the Hidden Gems project by examining the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the support they received during their six months involvement. This study yields several conclusions that contribute to the formulation of spousal services at the Tampere Universities, the attractiveness of the University as well as the Pirkanmaa region. First, to answer the question "*How do the Hidden Gems participants evaluate the programme's impact in helping them to find employment in Finland?*", the results show that the Hidden Gems programme has achieved the goal of securing employment for five highly skilled talents set with the funding institution. More specifically, nine participants found employment and the goal was achieved in six months, while the initial length was set to be two years. To answer the first and second questions: "*How did the Hidden Gems participants perceive the support they receive and relate to adjusting in Finland?*" the dimensions related to spouse adjustment were divided into three themes: personal, interpersonal and environmental. From the perspective of the spouses, the results indicate that the Hidden Gems programme provides valuable benefits as regard to both spousal adjustment and employability in Finland. To begin with, the overall satisfaction of respondents has considerably increased. More specifically, 41 % of satisfaction level increased, 24 % decreased and 35 % remained the same (Figure 8), which presents evidence of positive adjustment. In addition, the overall perceived adjustment of the spouses has increased of 69 %, which represents a drastic increase for a short period of six months. The findings of the qualitative interviews reveal four types of benefits; Self-confidence, networking, peer-support and career support, experienced by the participants. The four themes are respectively related to the three-dimensional model introduced by Shaffer and Harrison (2001).

### **5.1 Personal adjustment**

According to this research, the individuals' predisposition has shown to influence the expatriates' spouses' adjustment. Firstly, research states that insufficient language skills can cause misunderstandings, resulting in negatively affecting the adaptation (Rosenbush & Cseh, 2012), however the findings of this research don't confirm that statement. Although the opinions were disparate, for example, participants have mentioned that "*Finnish citizens speak very well English and are ready to help at any moment*" others mentioned that "*I think Finnish is a barrier in finding a job, but integrating is easy*" the participants did not emphasize the role of local language in the adjustment process. Even though participants did not verbalized the connection between their adjustment and their level of Finnish language, the use of certain elements in their speech, such as "*I can't understand what's going on around me*" or "*My neighbors don't even look at me because they can't speak English*" lead to believe a relation is existing. I believe the participants were not able to self-evaluate the relation between the two elements because host nationals change rapidly to English, which makes the start of one's integration much easier. Although, I believe that time is an important addition to this equation, as this research only evaluate a six months integration time, it would be interesting to evaluate if the language has a stronger impact on a longer period of time.

The findings of this study show that the Hidden Gems is a voluntary-based programme and the volunteers' motivation has to be nurtured in different ways than paid work. In this case, even if the benefits were clearly career and well-being oriented, the Hidden Gems project aims to facilitate the employment and full integration of the spouses into the Finnish society, the amount of involvement of each participants were disparate. This is consistent with the research that suggesting that individual's motivation and career life cycle has the ability to moderate the efficiency of spousal support (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Harvey & Buckley, 1998). Although, this study did not examine the relationship between these concerns and employability and

spousal adjustment, the results have pointed out a relation between the amount of involvement and the individual's successful adjustment. Studies suggest that the participants who are more active with their efforts and the host environment reduce uncertainty and enhance adaptation (Ashford & Black, 1996). Specifically, certain behaviours (e.g., information seeking, relationship building and positive framing) predispose individuals to improve adaptation outcomes (Ashford & Black, 1996). The three tactics are highly related to the spouse adaptation model previously utilized in this research. The positive framing tactic referring to framing situations as opportunities instead of failures relates to the personal adaptation in terms of psychological and emotional self-control that essentially seeks to create a sense of belonging to the host environment. Participants need to be able to frame their situation positively, otherwise the expatriate can easily fallout in isolation, frustration and diminution of self-esteem (Loomis, 1992; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). The relationship-building tactic referring to creating opportunities to interact with the host nationals relates to the interpersonal adaptation as it essentially supports seeking for social comfort with the locals. Lastly, the information seeking tactic referring to better understand the host environment relates to the environmental adjustment as it seeks to adapt to the cultural novelty and situational culture specific conditions. Therefore, organizational spousal support like the Hidden Gems seeks to enhance overall adjustment, however, if the participants' motivation is low and does not involve actively in the activities offered by their spouses' employer, it might as well moderate the efficiency of the spousal assistance. Consequently, I suggests that the effective adaptation of international talents is a synergy of proactive tactics such as information seeking, relationship building and positive framing, as well as receiving organizational support in networking, mentoring and professional development. Due to the low number of spouses interviewed, it may be premature to assess the personal moderators of the adjustments; however, future research could

investigate the role of proactive tactics in the success of spousal assistance programme aiming to enhance interactional adjustment and employment.

As employed workforce stem part of their identity through their social interaction in and outside workplace, the expatriate spouses experiencing career interruption lose an important facet of their social identity. The results show that the Hidden Gems programme supported the participants in improving their self-confidence in Finland. The mentoring service offered revealed to provide benefits as regard to e.g. *“Boost my self-confidence”* and *“Open my eyes of what my skills are and what can I do with it”*. The self-confidence benefit was described as helping on opening the participants' eyes on their own competence as well as pushing them out of their comfort zone. This is consistent with the social identity theory stating that changes in the self-concept and self-confidence, part of the second stage of social identification is an attribute indicating that individuals are in terms with who they are and the group to which they belong (Tajfel, & Turner, 1979). This stage of identification also refers to increasing contact with host country nationals. Thus, we could agree that the mentoring service provides support that softens boundaries, consequently driving cross-cultural adjustment. Contact with host nationals is a central element in the cross-cultural adaptation literature and the results overwhelmingly identify the assistance in networking as the most valuable type of assistance.

## **5.2 Interpersonal adjustment**

This section answer the third question *“What kind of social networks do the participants recognize influencing their interactional adjustment?”*. According to this research, the networking service offered by the Hidden Gems was perceived as being beneficial in terms of creating social ties to the Finnish labour market and with peers. The creation and maintenance of social network has been found significantly crucial in the search for employment and integration into Finland for all of the respondents. This result is consistent with the findings of previous research acknowledging that a large, active and diverse network including locals is

more likely to enhance successful international assignment (Cole, 2011). Many of the spouses stressed the importance of both social and professional networks in adjusting to the new environment as well as find employment. "*Networking is foremost the main reason I found employment*" mentioned a participant after securing a permanent position in the Tampere region. The company that hired the participant mentioned not calling any of the references during the recruitment process, as being part of the Hidden Gems supporting programme is "a reference in itself"; this information was collected during the interview with the respective participants, stating the company representative. This result is consistent with the networking literature stating that abundant social connection is a key facet of employability (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Another participant mentioned that the Hidden Gems programme "*Connected me to many people and opportunities*". This is consistent with the research highlighting that engagement in job search networking leads to increase job offers and shorten the length in finding employment (Van Hove & al., 2009).

More specifically the results provide deeper information on what type of networks support employability in Tampere region. The *Hidden Gems* network, *Crazy Town*, *Talent Tampere mentoring programme* and the *Tribe Tampere* appear to provide strong link to different level of social capital, increasing their employability in Tampere region. This is consistent with previous studies (De Graaf & Flap, 1988, Gayen & al., 2010) that access to differing levels of social capital increase labour market outcomes.

In addition, the results show that social connections increase the spouses' satisfaction and well-being. The peer support benefit was described as being the foundation to fighting isolation and identifying themselves as a like-minded group. The participants mentioned receiving information on open positions from their peers and getting indirect mental support only by sharing the same challenges. This is consistent with the research that stress the importance of

peer-support for spouses in adjusting to their new life (Andreason, 2003). Additionally, this finding also relays on the work from Farh & al. (2010) indicating that the expatriates will seek for emotional support, from others experiencing the same stressors, consequently helping the expatriates feel better about themselves and their situation when adjustment challenges become overwhelming.

An interesting finding in this research is the interconnection between the active participation of the participants and the informational and relational support they tend to seek during their overseas assignment. Indeed, the three behaviors (information seeking, relationship building and positive framing) mentioned in the personal adjustment clearly relate to the networking theory, indicating that with whom the expatriates form ties, impacts the amount of informational and emotional support they receive (Johnson & al., 2003). Although, this study did not examine the relationship between these concerns and employability and spousal adjustment, the results have pointed out a relation between the proactive behaviors and the type of network ties the participants have built during the programme. The results show a tendency that the participants engaged in proactive behaviors have better found the relevant informational and emotional ties to promote their adaptation into the Finnish society.

Overall, this form of indirect support (Vainikka, 2016) is perceived as the most valuable by the expatriates' spouses and refers to the perceived degree of comfort of interacting and establishing relationships within the host country (Shaffer and Harrison, 2001). The role of those networks in enhancing interactional adjustment could be investigated in future research.

### **5.3 Environmental adjustment**

According to this research, the professional development service offered by the Hidden Gems was perceived as being beneficial in terms of career support in Finland. More specifically, the career-support was described as a skill discovery channel and support on understanding the

Finnish labour market. Many of the spouses stressed the importance of understanding the Finnish culture and labour market in adjusting into Finland. For example, the participants mentioned that *“Hidden Gems helped me understand the Finnish society and the labour market”* and *“It prepared myself for possible opportunities”*. This form of direct support (Vainikka, 2016) was perceived the third most valuable by the participants and refers to the environmental adjustment characteristics introduced in the spouse adjustment model by Shaffer & Harrison (2001).

This theme closely relates to the environmental adjustment because it provided the participants with support resources to cope with the novelty and uncertainty of the Finnish society. More specifically, as the literature indicates that, the duration of a stay overseas has been found correlated to positive adjustment (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001); the results show that all the participants had some kind of understanding of the length of their stay in Finland. This is consistent with the research that spouses experiencing a fix-term assignment establish a feeling of control over their situation, resulting in reducing uncertainty and enhancing adaptation (Ashford & Black, 1996). However, the results do not present a clear correlation between the employment status and an extended length of stay after the participation in the Hidden Gems spousal programme. Although, this research did not seek to find a relationship between expectation and adjustment, the results support the studies indicating that anticipatory expectation can potentially moderate one's adjustment (Black & Mendenhall 1990; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou 1991; Oberg 1960). This thesis supports Ivancevich's (2007) research, stating that companies should include the spouses in the selection process in order to take part in the expatriation decision-making process. Further studies could evaluate the relationship between the organizational support programme and the retention of international talents within the host country.

## 6 Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis enhances the literature on cross-cultural adjustment as well as contributing on societal improvement into the Finnish context. The Finnish population is facing a decline, research says that attracting the best, and the brightest into the country is a permanent solution to reduce the gap as well as stay competitive worldwide. While companies and countries are fighting to become the most attractive places to work and live, the *people* are forgotten in the process. The talents themselves and the spouses have been found to play a critical role in the decision process to accept, complete and extend international assignments. The number of couples where both partners are engaged in work relationship has drastically increased in the past years, hence companies must embrace new approaches to attract and retain those talents. In fact, employer spousal support has the potential to reduce the risk of premature return and of complete assignment failure.

Hidden Gems is a new service innovation at Tampere University supporting dual-career spouses in their adjustment into the Finnish society. After securing funding from the European social fund institution in March 2018, the Hidden Gems programme was born. The programme aims to support the employment and to facilitate the full integration of the spouses in the Finnish society. By collaborating with the local ecosystem, the Hidden Gems engages companies in reflecting on internationalization, their benefits and the potential growth possibilities by enabling them to tap into the “hidden expertise” of international talents. This study was set to explore the effectiveness of the Hidden Gems project by examining the participants’ experiences and perceptions regarding the support they received. This study uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches with semi-structured individual interviews, social mapping and survey questionnaire as data collection instruments. A total of 17 spouses taking part in the Hidden Gems spousal programme undertook this two-waves study.

Overall, the findings of this study present evidence that the three services offered in the Hidden Gems spousal support programme are perceived as tools that facilitate the employment and adjustment of spouses. To begin with, the results suggests that the participants have experienced four categories of benefits such as networking, self-confidence, peer support and career support. The latter categories have been found to relate to the three-dimensional model introduced by Shaffer and Harrison (2001). This study provided insight on the type of services that are perceived effective in facilitating spouse adjustment into the Finnish context. Consequently, we can argue that the Hidden Gems programme can contribute to the formulation of spousal services at the Tampere University.

In addition, this study confirms the role of organizational support in the spouse adjustment, however, I suggest that the effective adaptation of international talents is a synergy of proactive tactics such as information seeking, relationship building and positive framing, as well as receiving organizational support in networking, mentoring and professional development (Asford & Black, 1996). Moreover, this study also confirms the role of network ties with host country nationals as well as non-natives in order to seek informational and emotional support resources (Johnson & al., 2003).

Moreover, the Hidden Gems programme has attracted eight employees at the Tampere University because of the Hidden Gems services provided for spouses. Since the beginning of the development of the Hidden Gems activities, national and international exposure created a interest within Europe. For example, the Hidden Gems was nominated one of the fifth best family support programme in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) countries by the Forum for Expatriate Management (FEM) in September 2019 and is now nominated in the European countries as well. In addition, the Hidden Gems programme won in September 2019 the societal impact award of the year at the Tampere University. Different cities in Finland such as Helsinki, Espo

and Turku have presented the need of acquiring the Hidden Gems service support for their talents, therefore the current government is looking into a way to make the Hidden Gems a national spousal support programme. Evidence is provided here to acknowledge the need of the Hidden Gems to enhance the adjustment of international highly skilled talents into the Finnish society.

In conclusion, according to the spouse's perspectives, the Hidden Gems provide services that aims at securing employment and integrating its participants into the Finnish labour market. Two services, the networking and the mentoring, were found the most valuable to the expatriate spouses. The Hidden Gems programme has the potential to scale up within Tampere and Finland. Further studies could evaluate the scalability of the Hidden Gems program in terms of talent attraction and retention tool within Finland.

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## Appendices

### 5. Appendix A. Individual interview questions (Wave 1)

#### *Background information*

##### *Name:*

Q1. What motivated you to move to Finland?

Q2. Tell me how were you involved in the decision process to move to Finland?

Q3. Were you employed before the expatriation to Finland? If not, please mention what were you doing.

Q4. Please describe how satisfied you were in the previous country you lived in?

Q5. What do you wish to do in Finland? (Pursue your career, further education, childcare)

Q6. What is your level of Finnish language?

Q7. Before arrival to Finland, tell me about your expectations regarding

- Finding employment
- Finding hobbies
- Creating a social network (Friends)
- Language difference

Q8. Please describe if your expectations were or were not met after your move to Tampere?

#### *Integration/adaptation*

##### **Social**

##### **Individual**

Q9. How big of a role the language differences have affected your integration so far?

Q10. Tell me how do you feel as regards to the change in your employment status.

##### **Interpersonal relationship**

##### *Network*

Q11. Looking at the map you draw. Tell me how would you describe your circle of connections in Finland?

Q12. Tell me about your day-to-day life in Tampere.

Q13. Tell me about the ways you socialize in Tampere.

##### **Cultural**

##### **Environmental**

Q14. What type of challenges have you faced in your integration to Tampere? How did you overcome them?

Q15. Please tell me about the cultural differences you have encountered.

Q16. How integrated to the Finnish society do you feel?

Q17. Do you know the duration of your stay in Finland? How does this knowledge affect your attitude to integrate the Finnish society?

**Economical**

Q18. Tell me about your experience in finding employment in Finland (channels, actions, failure)?

## 6. Appendix B. The social network map activity (Wave 1)

### Instructions

Write your name and your surname

Draw a map of your connections in Finland. You can group elements if they are part of the same network.

1. Draw yourself as a central element. (Orange)
2. Add your connections one by one by drawing the closest people to you. (Green)
3. Add acquaintances (Blue)
4. Add potential connections that could help you find employment (Purple)

## **7. Appendix C. Individual interview (Wave 2)**

### *Background information*

*Name:*

*Integration/adaptation*

### **Social**

#### **Individual**

**Could you describe how satisfied you are with your life in Tampere at the moment?**

Q9. How big of a role the language differences have affected your integration so far?

**How do you feel as regard to your employment status now?**

**1. Do you see yourself in this position for**

**How does it affect your satisfaction ?**

**What are your future plans as regard to**

**Are you planning on going back to India**

#### **Interpersonal relationship**

*Network*

Q11. Looking at the map you draw. Tell me how would you describe your circle of connections in Finland now?

How do you feel as regard to your social life?

How do you perceive the importance of Networking to find employment in Finland?

How do you perceive the Hidden Gems efforts in networking activities?

### **Cultural**

#### **Environmental**

Q14. What type of challenges have you faced in your integration to Tampere? How did you overcome them?

Q16. How integrated to the Finnish society do you feel?

Q17. Do you know the duration of your stay in Finland? How does this knowledge affect your attitude to integrate the Finnish society?

### **Economical**

Based on your experience, please describe what led you to find employment?

Describe how active where you in

- seeking for information on open position

- Can you describe how the Hidden Gems helped you in finding the position you are in at the moment?

## **8. Appendix D. The social network map activity (Wave 2)**

### Instructions

Write your name and your surname

Draw a map of your connections in Finland. You can group elements if they are part of the same network.

5. Draw yourself as a central element. (Orange)
6. Add your connections one by one by drawing the closest people to you. (Green)
7. Add acquaintances (Blue)
8. Add potential connections that could help you find employment (Purple)
9. (If applicable) Add the connections that have led to your employment/ work related activity (Pink)

## 9. Appendix E. The informed consent form

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ/TAMPERE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

***TITLE: SOCIAL NETWORKS AND INTERACTIONAL ADJUSTMENT: A CASE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHERS' SPOUSES IN FINLAND***

Principal Investigator: Karelle Bélanger

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

We invite you to take part in a research study regarding the *social networks and interactional adjustment: A case study of international researchers' spouses in Finland at University of Jyväskylä which seeks to identify the impact of perceived organizational support of Hidden Gems project in enhancing interactional adjustment for international researchers' spouses experiencing career interruption in Finland.*

Taking part in this study is voluntary. Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you must sign this form to show that you want to take part.

#### Section 1. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

You are being offered the opportunity to take part in this research study because *you have been selected to participate in the Hidden Gems project.* This research study is trying to evaluate the effectiveness of the Hidden Gems project by examining the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the support they receive.

#### Section 2. PROCEDURES

What you will be asked to do in the study:

First, during a group interview, you will be asked to answer a **short survey** and **draw a map of your social network** in Finland. Following the group interview, you will be asked to take part in a **two-wave individual interview**. The first wave take place before the Hidden Gems project starts and the second wave take place after the Hidden Gems project ends. During the first individual interview, you will

answer to the best of your knowledge **20 open questions**. During the second interview, you will answer a short survey, draw a map of your social network and answer 20 open questions.

### Section 3. TIME DURATON OF THE PROCEDURES AND STUDY

If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last approximately *6 months*. You will be asked to take part in one group interview and two individual interviews. Each interviews will approximately last one hour. It is your right to withdraw from the study at any point in time, should you wish to do so.

### Section 4. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This study is anonymous. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be stored in locked facilities and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. When reporting the results of the study, care will be taken to ensure the anonymity or participants.

### Section 5. AUDIO RECORDING

Interviews will be audio recorded. The recordings will be transcribed into text form, at which stage they will also be anonymized. The original recordings will be kept only as long as the project is ongoing, after which they will be destroyed.

### Section 6. CONSENT

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

Participant's Name (print):

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Participant's Signature:

Date:

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Investigator's Signature:

Date:

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