



INTERMUNDO

# IMPACT COMPENDIUM ON YOUTH EXCHANGE

An overview of scientific research results on the impact of intercultural exchanges.





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## FOREWORD LEARNING THROUGH EXCHANGE

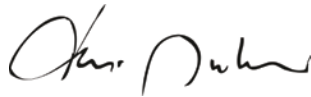
Exchanges of every kind between the different groups play a central role in a country such as Switzerland, which is distinguished by its great cultural and linguistic variety. Without exchange there would be no common communication basis, essential to the interaction of the different cultures.

Whether across national language barriers or country boundaries, whether with different schools or professional groups, or other ways of life – intercultural exchange benefits everyone involved. It is a form of personal learning that promotes the development of key competencies. People who take part in an exchange gain personal and social skills such as openness towards others and flexibility in new situations. And they train their communicative and methodological abilities at the same time. These intercultural skills are extremely important, above all today, in these times of increasing globalisation. Training young people to be adaptable, creative and socially competent is crucial to Switzerland's social and economic success.

Youth exchange in Switzerland is characterised by a wide variety of offers from both public and private organisations. This is a direct expression of the Swiss education system with its federalist, open and diverse culture. The Confederation promotes the exchange and mobility of students and teachers both in Switzerland and abroad. The support offered covers all areas of education and is intended as a complement to the existing offers. As a result, young people in Switzerland also have access to a diverse and attractive range of extracurricular exchange opportunities.

For this I have to thank the Intermundo association, which provides an important contribution to the intercultural education of young people in this area, together with all the other parties that support exchange and its continued development.

**Mauro Dell'Ambrogio**  
Swiss State Secretary for Education,  
Research and Innovation



## FOREWORD ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

In the past, international youth encounters and exchanges were seen as simply one more pleasant, but in no way important or necessary, opportunity among all the experiences and leisure activities available to the upcoming generation in the context of informal education. This perspective has changed radically with the internationalisation and globalisation of practically all areas of society in European countries. International youth encounters offer opportunities for experience, learning and action that foster what is seen as the central key qualification for both specialist and managerial staff in modern companies: intercultural competence. Over the past two decades, the increase in the number and variety of international youth encounter programmes has kept pace with the growing interest of young people in building up from an early age their own experiences with people from other cultures. The increased social acceptance of international youth encounters, together with the growing range of opportunities offered by different host organisations, raises the question as to what effect international youth encounters have on the personality development and biography of the children and young people who take part in them. As a rule, the results of impact studies of this type confirm the experience of practitioners, but also allow a glimpse into new impacts that have remained undetected until now. These particularly concern the biographical development of the young individuals, together with the supra-individual, generalisable effects that international youth encounters demonstrably offer as a field of experience, learning and action.

For the first time, this compendium offers a condensed but simultaneously differentiated overview of the existing social, psychological and pedagogical research, and looks at the fields of impact that apply across all the programme formats. The “summary of results” for the relevant impact studies gives a quick, reliable overview of the effects that can be achieved through international youth encounters. At the same time, the detailed, structured body of the compendium offers a differential study of the effects both of short-term and long-term programme formats and of formats that vary in terms of content and method.








This overview is important because it is the first to describe all the currently known, scientifically well-founded findings about the remarkably diverse and enduringly effective impacts that exchange programmes have on the lives of their young participants. At the same time, however, the fact that it is still just a minuscule percentage of the upcoming generation that takes – or can take – advantage of these offers of informal study means that further development is absolutely essential. Significantly more girls than boys take up the offers, although the reasons for this have still not been satisfactorily clarified. The overwhelming majority of the participating youths (some 90%) attend secondary school, and come from the well-educated social classes. Parents and young people alike feel and know that they can gain competencies here that are significant for their future lives, and make the most of this opportunity. Less privileged young people know nothing about these chances, are not encouraged to take part and also experience no social support. International encounter programmes aimed at young people during their vocational training show how these discrepancies can be overcome. These programmes are discussed in detail in this compendium. When examining the lasting effects of international youth encounters on personality development, it is also necessary to determine to what extent these experiences and learning opportunities can provide new impulses for taking control of their own lives to young people with a problematic biographical development. The global media network, which the upcoming generation is growing up with, also requires attention. It produces new communication opportunities and interaction processes with corresponding effects that have yet to be explored. In addition, future encounter groups will have a stronger pluricultural mix, which will also have an effect on the sojourners’ experience of foreign culture and above all on the intercultural learning opportunities.

The value of this compendium does not end with the documentation and comparative analyses of existing impact studies. It also offers an exceptional knowledge base for the further development and differentiation of the various formats offered for international youth encounters.









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# 1

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS



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<b>ACT</b>	Affective Communication Test
<b>AFS</b>	AFS (American Field Service) Intercultural Programs
<b>CBYX</b>	Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange
<b>CCAI</b>	Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory
<b>CQS</b>	Cultural Intelligence Scale
<b>CV</b>	Curriculum Vitae
<b>DMIS</b>	Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity
<b>DSSI</b>	Delusions-Symptoms-States Inventory
<b>EIS</b>	ERASMUS Impact Study
<b>GHQ</b>	General Health Questionnaire
<b>ICYE</b>	International Cultural Youth Exchange
<b>IDI</b>	Intercultural Development Inventory
<b>ISI</b>	Global Competency and Intercultural Sensitivity Index
<b>IVIS</b>	International Volunteering Impact Survey
<b>LifE</b>	<i>Lebensverläufe von der späten Kindheit ins frühe Erwachsenenalter</i> (Pathways from Late Childhood to Adulthood)
<b>LOLIPOP</b>	Language On Line Portfolio Project
<b>MGUDS</b>	Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale
<b>SAGE</b>	Study Abroad for Global Engagement
<b>SERU</b>	Student Experience in the Research University
<b>SME</b>	Small and medium enterprise
<b>SOEP</b>	Socio-Economic Panel
<b>SOS</b>	Significant other Scale
<b>VOSESA</b>	Volunteer and Service Enquiry of South Africa
<b>YFU</b>	Youth for Understanding (intercultural youth exchange)

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# 2

## INTRODUCTION



Experiences abroad when young can change a person. That is known both to former participants in exchanges and to teachers and practitioners in this field. Even many years after an exchange, people often remember life-changing experiences, “Aha!” moments and difficulties overcome. Exchanges work. The participants usually have no doubt about that. But in what way and in which areas does a youth exchange affect the life of a young person? Are there structures of impact that span different exchange formats? And who derives the greatest benefit from which impacts?

This compendium offers answers to these questions and attempts to present a comprehensive picture of the known effects of international youth exchange. The picture is drawn exclusively from existing literature, which in turn is overwhelmingly composed of results from social, psychological and pedagogical research. The work has therefore taken into account a great abundance of research results and other publications that deal with all the different aspects of cross-boundary youth activity. Given the scope of the available literature, it has been essential to structure the information in order to provide readers with a clear overview and allow them to assess the relevance of individual passages for their own purposes.

The structure of this compendium is essentially based on the different formats of international youth exchange. At the same time certain areas that are relevant to all formats are handled separately. The chapters thus created are self contained, and it is not necessary to read other sections in order to be able to understand a specific chapter.

As all the statements presented are based on existing literature, each chapter opens with a short review of the literature available. While this details the sources, it is not intended as an exhaustive description of the literature or as a methodological critique. The review is recommended to particularly interested readers; however, it is not essential to understanding the respective chapters.

A school exchange as the first extended sojourn away from home, a course of study at a foreign university or a work placement in a company abroad all involve taking a large step into the unknown. Time and again, young people successfully take such steps and enrich their lives in many ways as a consequence. In the same way, the compendium is intended to represent a significant step forward and a valuable aid in understanding the impact of international youth exchanges.

# 3

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS



### 3.1 Intergroup contact – the common denominator

Contact with people from hitherto unfamiliar groups reduces the prejudices held about the other group and its members. This conclusion, which is as simple as it is far reaching, is based on an immense quantity of social research whose roots reach back into the middle of the 20th century. It is a finding that points to one of the most important impacts of international youth exchanges and is extremely relevant for all forms of exchange.

Through exchange experiences, be these in the context of a school exchange, a work placement, as part of their studies, or in a completely different form, young people are given the opportunity to increase their tolerance towards foreigners and to reduce their prejudices about foreign countries and cultures. This effect of increasing tolerance is shared by all the demographic strata and can be observed to a disproportionate extent in young people who demonstrated a low tolerance towards foreigners before their exchange.

### 3.2 School exchange

#### 3.2.1 Personal competence

A school exchange is an appropriate tool for gaining skills in the language of the host country, or improving existing skills. Many participants are able to speak and write a foreign language fluently after their sojourn. Their experiences also have a long-term positive impact on their self-esteem. An above-average increase in this attribute is particularly apparent in those students who had low self-esteem before the exchange.

In addition, a school exchange strengthens students' confidence in their own problem-solving abilities. This is described as a high self-efficacy expectation. Furthermore, following an exchange, teenagers are better placed to accept previously alien perspectives and to integrate them into their thoughts and behaviour (self-decentralisation).

A further effect of school exchanges can be increased psychological and emotional maturity in the sojourners. Students also show greater self-confidence, increased independence and a stronger feeling of personal responsibility as a result of their exchange experience.

#### 3.2.2 Intercultural competence

A number of large-scale studies show that young people go through a positive intercultural development following an exchange, in which they move away from an ethnocentric attitude in their relationship to other cultures and towards an ethnorelative one. Cultural differences and foreign customs become more and more accepted and integrated into their own behaviour. This particularly applies to secondary students who showed relatively low intercultural sensitivity before the exchange: it is they who show the greatest growth in this respect. In addition to this, students establish a great number of intercultural social contacts.

Another long-term effect of a school exchange is increased openness towards other cultures, coupled with an elevated sense of security and well-being in their interaction with people of different cultural origins.

#### 3.2.3 Biographical impact

The research makes clear the lasting effect of this exchange format by analysing the further biographical development of former exchange students and showing that, for young people, a school exchange is often the first in a series of sojourns spent abroad. There is also a higher probability that former exchange students will, in turn, encourage their own children to have experiences abroad. In this way mobility reproduces itself, even over future generations.

### 3.3 Short-term programmes

#### 3.3.1 International child encounters (8- to 12-year-olds)

Children can benefit from international encounters from a very early age. They can adapt their communication strategies to intercultural situations from as young as eight years old. Knowledge about customs and traditions in other countries can also be taught successfully at this age.

#### 3.3.2 Personal competence

The literature on short-term programmes leaves little doubt that even sojourns abroad of just a few weeks significantly improve the language skills of the participants. And the greater the participants' intercultural competence before the exchange, the more this applies.

Furthermore, in short-term programmes, young people can experience key moments that stimulate personal development in

a multitude of directions. In particular, character traits such as self-confidence, independence and self-efficacy expectation can be enhanced. After taking part, the youngsters also often describe themselves as more flexible and easy-going. The same can be said in relation to important social skills.

It can be noted here that it is above all those young people who had relatively limited self-skills before taking part who experience particularly significant development.

#### 3.3.3 Intercultural competence

Even very short intercultural experiences offer the possibility of increasing young people's intercultural sensitivity and allowing them to develop a better understanding and knowledge of other cultures. They also increasingly facilitate a better understanding of the significance of global interdependencies.

## 3.4 University students' multicultural experience

### 3.4.1 Personal competence

It appears that, during sojourns abroad, university students can improve all the skills that are needed to master a foreign language. This holds true not only for the purely linguistic features but also for important socio-cultural aspects of the foreign language being studied.

In addition, in-depth research projects in the field of cognitive psychology have shown that multicultural experiences have a strong positive effect on creativity. As a result, they enhance the ability for unconventional problem solving. The deeper the people taking part in the exchange immerse themselves in a foreign culture, for example by staying with a host family, the stronger this effect is.

Other character traits relating to self-skills can also be positively influenced by exchange experiences while at university. These include openness to new experiences, reduced emotional instability, acceptance of unfamiliar ideas and a conscious reflection on their own culture.

These positive developments also give students with experience abroad better career prospects and improve their employability. There is a higher probability that they will launch an international career, and a lower probability that they will spend long periods out of work.

### 3.4.2 Intercultural competence

During sojourns abroad, university students gain key competencies in intercultural interaction. Similarly to school exchanges, student exchanges are also shown to increase young people's intercultural sensitivity. The same is true for intercultural communication skills. It also appears that it is above all students from under-represented minorities who develop these competencies most fully.

### 3.4.3 Biographical impact

Sojourns abroad during their studies contribute to increased national and global social engagement in university students. Furthermore, international professional mobility also increases, and many former exchange students follow careers that involve certain international aspects.

## 3.5 Trainee mobility and internships abroad

### 3.5.1 Personal competence

The great potential of trainee mobility and internships abroad lies above all in the acquisition of personal and social skills. It is true that there is relatively little research on this type of youth exchange, but the literature that does exist is in agreement about the positive impact on the development of personal skills, in particular self-confidence and capacity for teamwork. It also mentions the strengthening of competencies that are essential for lifelong learning, including flexibility, self-reflection and critical faculties. And there are indications that socially disadvantaged young people can also benefit greatly from professional exchange activities.

Business surveys have shown that those firms that offer their trainees internships abroad are convinced of the benefits. Companies that do not send any trainees abroad do not see any benefit in it. This is evidence of a gap in the understanding of certain companies.

### 3.5.2 Intercultural competence

The available literature does not address the acquisition of intercultural skills. However, indications can be found to suggest that professional exchanges promote competencies in this area.

### 3.5.3 Professional impact

Mobility during training and internships can have a lasting positive effect on young people's career development. Furthermore, the resulting development of personal skills also reduces probability of their becoming unemployed, because these competencies increase their willingness to engage in lifelong learning.

### 3.5.4 Obstacles

In addition to the administrative burden and the expected costs, companies' ignorance about exchange opportunities, and their benefits for the participants and for the companies themselves, is a key reason for the low number of trainee mobility programmes and internships offered.

## 3.6 Voluntary service

### 3.6.1 Personal competence

Voluntary service offers the possibility of gaining unique experiences that often contain many other elements over and above the intercultural aspects. For instance, it can stimulate personal development, leading to a more mature and considered way of dealing with people from other cultures. In addition, voluntary service provides an opportunity to take a critical look at one's own culture.

### 3.6.2 Intercultural competence

Voluntary service also gives young people the chance to develop intercultural skills. Above all, however, it presents an ideal opportunity to establish relevant international contacts for later life. Young people can network with like-minded people and (later) use these contacts for professional or activist purposes, or similar.

### 3.6.3 Biographical impact

A frequently mentioned effect of taking part in voluntary service is a changed view of one's own life. Coming face to face with hitherto unknown realities of life can lead to a greater appreciation and more realistic categorisation of one's own society.

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## 3.7 Returning home

### 3.7.1 Youth exchange as a W-curve

Literature on the subject of the return from an exchange generally sees the experience as a W-curve, in which the return home resembles the departure to some extent. Both are characterised by initial euphoria, (reverse) culture shock, adjustment and normalisation.

### 3.7.2 Challenges relating to self-skills

Research on the return home has focused almost exclusively on the challenges that young people face on their return, with only marginal references to opportunities and personal developments. The intense grieving processes that the returnee is expected to come to terms with can present such a challenge, as can social isolation and communication difficulties after the return.

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Adequate preparation for potential difficulties after the return can help returnees to face these better. In addition, proper follow-up support offers the chance to exchange experiences with other returnees and thus overcome the challenges experienced more effectively.

### 3.7.3 A new inward-looking perspective

Many young people report that, after returning home from an extended sojourn abroad, they reflected more on their own cultural environment as a result of the experiences gained while away.

## 3.8 Host family

### 3.8.1 Intercultural competence

The intensive interaction with a representative of a foreign culture, as happens when a family welcomes in a guest child, offers a unique opportunity to develop more intercultural sensitivity. Additionally, host families are shown to accept stereotypes and prejudices less readily as a result of their experiences with young people from a different culture.

### 3.8.2 Integrating effect of the host family

Host families can also contribute significantly to the social integration of young sojourners in the host country and thus make an important contribution to the young people's development of self-esteem, personal development, creativity and emotional stability.

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### 3.8.3 Sources of social friction

Social differences between the receiving family and the guest child are often misinterpreted as cultural differences, as, during the preparation, the focus is generally placed on these differences. This is a potential for conflict that can be stemmed with proper preparation on the part of the exchange organisation.

## 3.9 Opportunity in life

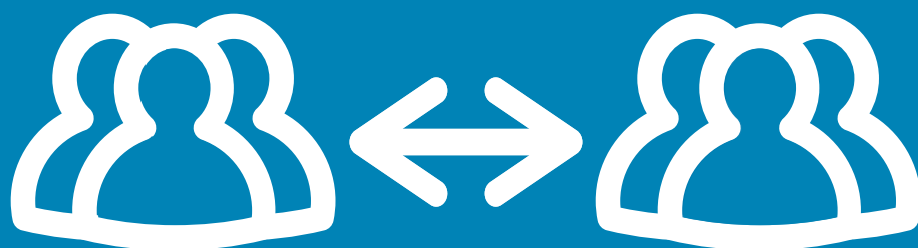
Social barriers can make it harder for young people from socio-economically disadvantaged and/or poorly educated families to access exchange experiences. Thus young people from this type of background can often find themselves faced with a barrier that prevents them from acquiring the skills associated with an exchange. And yet it is above all those young people who, prior to the experience, had relatively limited personal and/or intercultural competence who benefit most from an exchange. An exchange also offers young people from a background with no international experience a unique opportunity to lastingly enrich their lives through international mobility and intercultural openness.

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This represents an enormous potential for youth exchange, one that is currently not fully recognised and properly exploited. Easier access to exchange experiences can mean more equal opportunities and greater social mobility for young people from poorly educated and/or socio-economically disadvantaged families.

# 4

## INTERGROUP CONTACT – THE COMMON DENOMINATOR



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Contact with people from hitherto unfamiliar groups reduces prejudices about those people and encourages tolerance towards foreigners in general.

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As different as the forms of youth exchange may be, they are all based on one and the same elementary aspect: contact with people from other cultures, countries and/or languages. This contact across existing boundaries, in whatever form it may take place, has the potential to contribute to a more open and tolerant society, because it can lead to remarkable attitudinal changes.

#### 4.1 The contact hypothesis

As early as 1954, the psychologist Gordon Allport formulated a seminal theory about the effects of intergroup contacts that is still extremely relevant to the context of youth exchange today.<sup>1</sup> Allport's contact hypothesis states that frequent contact with members of other groups reduces a person's prejudices towards these groups. In intercultural exchanges, the contact hypothesis has far-reaching consequences that extend to all forms of exchange.

Allport's hypothesis plays a significant role in socio-psychological literature, and there is a correspondingly large volume of research that examines the correlation it postulates. In a meta-analysis<sup>2</sup> of the literature that exists on this subject, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) counted 515 studies, which took into consideration more than 250,000 respondents in 713 datasets. In their analysis of this immense abundance of relevant studies, the authors made some encouraging findings. Their work drew on a wide-ranging empirical basis, something that is a rare exception in the field of social research.

The above-mentioned analysis confirms the prejudice-reducing effect of intergroup contacts. This is still the case when the contact takes place under unfavourable conditions, where the effect is therefore completely unexpected on the basis of the original understanding of the theory.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as a rule, the effects of the contact are not limited just to the sojourners themselves but are extended to the entire group. Thus contact with a Spanish exchange student, for instance, has the potential to reduce the prejudices of the receiving school class not only towards this student, but also towards Spanish people in general or even towards foreigners in general.

While Allport formulated the contact hypothesis with regard to ethnic groups, the work by Pettigrew and Tropp showed that it still holds true in relation to other groups. The term "group" can therefore be understood very broadly. There is no reason to limit it to people of other nationalities. The term covers minority groups in one's own country just as much as it does social groups, people of a different sexual orientation and so on.

This is significant for international youth exchanges, as it means they can contribute substantially to the reduction of prejudices towards other people. The different forms in which young people can have cross-border experiences bring them into contact with men and women from other cultures, nationalities and linguistic regions. Youth exchanges not only encourage the overcoming of prejudices towards previously unfamiliar people, they also contribute to the breakdown of stereotypes that may exist in the other country with regard to the sojourners' own culture. After all, during an exchange, young people not only experience new facets of the world, they are also cultural ambassadors for their own culture abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> Allport, 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Meta-analysis is a common method of analysing a large quantity of scientific statements concerning a specific research question. In it, primary studies are conflated and (generally) evaluated with statistical methods. The term was coined by the psychologist Gene Glass (1976) and can be understood as an analysis of analyses.

<sup>3</sup> Allport based his hypothesis on the assumption that intergroup contact reduces prejudice when "the people in the contact situation (1) follow co-operative goals, (2) are of the same status, (3) have to work together to achieve their goals, and the contact (4) has the support of authorities" (translated from Wirtz, 2014, entry: *Kontaktthese*).

## 4.2 Tolerance towards foreigners

### Tolerance towards foreigners is positively influenced by sojourns abroad.

Three years after Pettigrew and Tropp's results were published, Bruggmann (2009) addressed the related question about the effects of sojourns abroad on young people's tolerance towards foreigners. For this, he used data from the LifE study. This is an ongoing large-scale, multi-thematic and interdisciplinary longitudinal study by three German-speaking universities that is examining the pathways and psychosocial development of 1500 people between the ages of 12 and 35 and living in Germany. One of the things it surveys at different time points is the respondents' tolerance towards foreigners. This wealth of data allowed Bruggmann to compare the attitude of adolescents and young adults towards foreigners and to analyse it with regard to its relationship to sojourns abroad.

Because of the specific formulation of the question and the size of the data set in consideration, Bruggmann's findings are highly relevant to understanding the impact of youth exchanges.

Bruggmann's work clearly showed that sojourns abroad have a positive effect on the sojourner's tolerance towards foreigners. They are an excellent way to overcome prejudices and to revise one's own attitude towards foreigners. Even when demographic factors such as education, social background and gender are taken into consideration, young people demonstrate higher tolerance values following a sojourn abroad than they did prior to it.

Bruggmann noted that the connection between tolerance and sojourns abroad is shaped by both selection and socialisation effects. Thus young people who exhibit a greater tolerance towards foreigners are more likely to spend longer periods of time abroad (selection bias). At the same time, if young people who are rated as having little tolerance take part in an exchange, they show positive changes in their tolerance towards foreigners (socialisation effect).

#### **Big impact**

While the tolerance-promoting effect of a sojourn abroad can be observed independently of demographic factors, Bruggmann's analysis still showed that it is above all men with very high xenophobia who can benefit from a period abroad. They are the only group that already produces a clearly positive shift in attitude after a short sojourn of less than three months.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, the study showed that men without school-leaving qualifications benefit more greatly in relation to openness towards foreigners than do secondary school graduates. If we take into consideration the repeatedly documented negative correlation between the level of formal education and that of xenophobia<sup>5</sup>, this finding is a significant one. It means that a sojourn abroad has the potential to produce a more friendly attitude towards strangers in a group that is not normally characterised by tolerance towards foreigners.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Enabling factors**

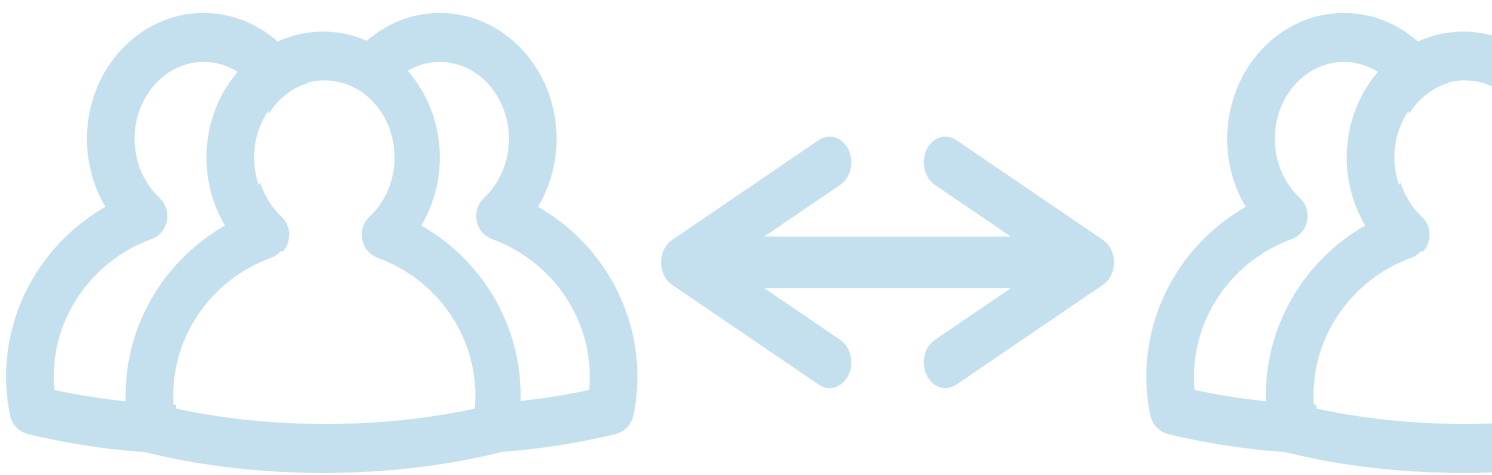
Bruggmann (2009) found that the length of the sojourn abroad has a significant bearing on how one's openness towards foreigners develops. According to the author's findings, a sojourn of at least three months is necessary in order for it to have a positive influence on a person's tolerance levels. This starts to diminish again after around nine months, however. Bruggmann attributed this to the fact that the necessary learning and adaptation steps are triggered after around two to three months, and are generally completed after a further six months, at which point a preliminary limit is reached in the possible increase in tolerance. The only exception to this, as already mentioned, is men who had a strongly negative attitude towards foreigners before their experience abroad.

<sup>4</sup> Bruggmann, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Rippl, 2006; Fritzsche, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Bruggmann, 2009.





# 5

## SCHOOL EXCHANGE



## 5.1 Chapter summary

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### ◦ Literature:

There is some very specific research, with numerous large-scale studies, that has also looked into the long-term effects. Most of the studies focused on participants in exchange programmes organised by individual exchange organisations, looking particularly at the effect of an exchange on the young sojourners' personal and intercultural skills.

### ◦ Personal competence:

- Excellent acquisition of foreign language skills (language of the host country) together with long-term positive development of motivation to learn languages.
- Long-term increase in self-efficacy expectation<sup>7</sup>, and in feelings of personal responsibility, independence and self-confidence.
- Increased self-esteem.
- Increased capacity for a differentiated view of foreign perspectives (self-decentralisation).
- Increased psychological and emotional maturity.

### ◦ Intercultural competence:

- Increased intercultural sensitivity and general intercultural competence.
- Greater number of social intercultural contacts and heightened knowledge about the host country.
- Increased openness towards foreign cultures and decreased anxiety in intercultural situations.

### ◦ Biographical impact:

- Mobility is self replicating.
- 

## 5.2 Definition

Although the concept of a school exchange is not always clearly defined in the literature, certain elements can still be identified that constitute this “classic” form of youth exchange. The majority of the studies considered here take school exchange to mean students spending at least three months abroad, living with a host family. The literature also frequently examines sojourns with a minimum duration of six months, and the young people have

also often spent a whole school year in the host country. Even where it is not necessarily explicitly mentioned, the assumption has been that the young people travelled alone to the foreign country, in other words not as a class or in a comparable group. Furthermore, during their exchange they took part in school life in their host country. The students' average age was generally around 17.

## 5.3 Literature review

The school exchange format is the subject of numerous impact studies that are characterised above all by their very specific questions, the substantial size of the data sets used and their focussing on students participating in programmes from a single exchange organisation. In the case of AFS Intercultural Programs (AFS) and Youth for Understanding (YFU), the organisation is also the initiator and/or executor of individual research projects. These studies investigate the effects of a school exchange on features of personality development in the individual participants, in particular on their intercultural skills. There is thus excellent empirical evidence for the statements made about this connection, and they can therefore be considered to be solid and well founded. There are also research results that deal with the question of the further mobility of young people and their tolerance towards foreigners.

There is much less focus in the systematic research on the people who offer the students a temporary home from home during their exchange. The work by Johanna Vollhardt (2010) forms an exception in this respect and allows certain statements to be made about the effects of a school exchange on the host family. The list of these effects can be completed by referencing the integrating effect of host families and the role of “guest child”, which is seen by the young participants as an important one.

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<sup>7</sup> The concept of “self-efficacy expectation” goes back to Albert Bandura and “is defined as the subjective certitude that one can overcome new or difficult challenges by reason of one's own competence. And these are not tasks that can be resolved through simple routine but ones whose degree of difficulty requires effort and perseverance to accomplish” (Schwarzer/Jerusalem, 2002, p. 35).

### 5.3.1 Commissioned research – AFS and YFU

AFS has a long tradition of research, in which the organisation has examined every possible aspect of youth exchange. For this compendium, the three most recent impact studies were considered.<sup>8</sup>

The two older studies focused above all on the effects of a one-year AFS exchange on the young people's intercultural skills, either directly after the exchange<sup>9</sup> or up to 25 years after the experience, to look into the long-term effects.<sup>10</sup> In these, the authors made use of existing tools for investigating intercultural skills, in particular the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), based on the work of Milton Bennett.<sup>11</sup> Using this questionnaire, a person's intercultural sensitivity can be measured and classified in a developmental stage along a continuum.

Central to the two AFS studies was, on the one hand, assessing the cultural sensitivity of a large number<sup>12</sup> of participants from different countries in a school exchange organised by the AFS; and, on the other, the comparison of this group with a control group of young people who had not taken part in an exchange. Hammer (2005) also compared the IDI values of the participants in the exchange and the control group both before and after the exchange. This allowed him to formulate statements about changes in intercultural sensitivity over a given period of time.

The *Impact of Living Abroad project* by Nicolas Geeraert (2012) followed a methodologically similar path. In this joint project carried out by researchers at the University of Essex and the AFS, data was collected over a period of 18 months from young people on their intercultural skills, language skills and strategies for coping with difficult moments. This allowed the authors to map the development of the participants in a school exchange over that time. The results were also compared with those of a previously created control group.<sup>13</sup> Geeraert did not use the IDI to measure intercultural skills; instead, he used the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) proposed by Ang et al. (2007). The goal of this tool is to measure "the ability to adjust well to new cultural environments and cope well in interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds".<sup>14</sup>

A further study in the tradition of large-scale impact research specifically focused on school exchanges is the *Students of Four Decades* project carried out by Bachner and Zeutschel (2009a). For this study, commissioned by YFU, former participants in YFU school exchanges in the years 1951–1987 were asked about the long-term impact of their exchange experiences. The study deliberately examined a period of time that encompassed almost four decades, so that long-term effects and effects that change over time could be seen. Here too, results from the German or US youngsters who took part in an exchange were compared with those of a control group.<sup>15</sup> After comprehensive results of this undertaking were published in 1990, a follow-up study was started in 2002 that used workshops and narrative interviews with 15 former exchange students from Germany to throw more light on the application of the skills learnt in the exchanges.

### 5.3.2 Independent impact research

In addition to the work started by the AFS and YFU, two further research projects explicitly dealt with the impact of a year-long school exchange. The focus of both studies was on psychological effects such as the development of heightened self-confidence<sup>16</sup> and of psychological and emotional stability.<sup>17</sup>

Hutteman et al. (2014) looked into how a one-year school exchange organised by the German exchange organisation English Foundation affected the development of self-esteem in young Germans. The number of students considered was considerable, and comparable to the numbers in the studies based on the data from the AFS and YFU. However, the response rate dropped significantly over the course of the study.<sup>18</sup> The authors used both pre-existing questionnaires and ones they devised themselves to survey self-confidence, social integration, the ability to overcome difficulties associated with the exchange and self-assessed language skills at two points in time: before the students' departure and then one year later. The two values obtained in this way were compared to each other and to a control group. The youngsters taking part in the exchange also filled out a questionnaire online once a month and were polled for a third time a year after their return.

In their research project entitled *Sending Your Teenagers Away*, Andrews et al. (1993) took what at first sight is a somewhat disconcerting approach from the point of view of exchange organisations. The authors viewed a year-long exchange of Australian secondary students through the AFS as a controlled stress factor and investigated how this affected the psychological and emotional maturity of the young participants. To do this, they polled a comparable number of young people to the other studies

8 The *Educational Results Study* (Hammer, 2005); the *AFS Long Term Impact Study* (Hansel/Chen, 2008); and Nicolas Geeraert's *Impact of Living Abroad project* (Geeraert, 2012).

9 Hammer, 2005.

10 Hansel/Chen, 2008.

11 Hammer et al., 2003.

12 Hammer's *Educational Results Study* (2005) contains the answers of some 1800 secondary students (1300 took part in an exchange; around 500 formed the control group recruited through the "best friend" method). The *AFS Long Term Impact Study* by Hansel and Chen (2008) was based on the answers of 2432 young people (1920 of these took part in an exchange; 511 formed the control group recruited through the "best friend" method).

13 The *Impact of Living Abroad project* looked at the answers from 1081 secondary students (503 took part in an exchange; 578 made up the control group). These figures are based on the published presentation of the results, as more detailed publications do not exist.

14 Geeraert, 2012, p. 2.

15 *Students of Four Decades* was based on the answers from 1045 secondary students (661 of these took part in an exchange, while 384 made up a control group constructed using the "best friend" method).

16 Hutteman et al., 2014.

17 Andrews et al., 1993.

18 Hutteman et al. examined answers from 1590 young people (876 took part in an exchange; 714 made up the control group). Answers were provided by 606 students at all the points in time (210 in the exchange group and 396 in the control group).

mentioned.<sup>19</sup> The participants in the exchange received questionnaires designed to investigate psychological and emotional criteria at six-monthly intervals: before, during and after the exchange. The data collected in this way was compared with that of a control group, who were polled at the time of the departure and the return of the exchange students.

In his dissertation, published in the form of an article, Weichbrodt (2014) examined whether taking part in a school exchange led to increased international mobility in the life of young people. For this, he conducted an online survey of around 3000 former exchange students in Germany together with 30 qualitative interviews with young people from the same group. The goal of the data collection was to measure the respondents' experience abroad and the impact of the school exchange on their international mobility. Weichbrodt's study is conspicuous for its lack of a control group, which meant that it was not possible to ascribe a definite causal effect to the exchange experience. This shortcoming was partially compensated for by a comparison with Germany's total population, but remains a significant methodological weakness.

A three-month exchange programme based on reciprocal exchange organised by the *Bayerischer Jugendring* (Bavarian Youth Council) formed the research field for a qualitative study presented by Hetzenecker and Abt (2004) and by Thomas (2005). In focused interviews, 25 former exchange students were asked about their exchange experience 10 to 13 years later. The discussions focused on the impact of the exchange on the participants' personality traits.

Heinzmann et al. (2014) provide information about the effects of language-focused exchange activities. The researchers from the University of Teacher Education Lucerne surveyed 405 secondary students before and after their language exchange on their motivation to learn languages, intercultural skills<sup>20</sup> and previous exchange situations. A group of 135 young people who had remained at home were also surveyed as a comparison.

## 5.4 Personal competence

As already mentioned, this impact research about school exchanges focused primarily on the acquisition of intercultural skills. But empirically documented statements can also be made about the acquisition of personal skills, and these point to both profound and far-reaching impacts. A long-term increase in students' self-esteem and the conviction that they will be able to rise to future challenges are the most clearly proven effects in the available literature, but there is also empirical evidence of other personal skills.

### 5.4.1 Foreign languages

#### A school exchange is an appropriate tool for successfully gaining or improving skills in the language of the host country.

Learning a foreign language is often an explicitly stated objective of school exchange programmes and in many cases definitely plays a large part in the motivation to take part in one. It is therefore no surprise that numerous studies look into potential improvements in foreign language skills following a sojourn abroad of this type – with clear results. Every study considered here that dealt with secondary students' foreign language skills came to the conclusion that a school exchange boosts this competence significantly.<sup>21</sup> The work of Hansel and Chen (2008) can serve as an ex-

ample. In the *AFS Long Term Impact Study*, the authors pointed out that the young people surveyed who had participated in an exchange were more likely to speak one or more foreign languages than their fellow students. Not only that, but they often spoke them to a very high level or were even fluent in a language that was not their mother tongue.

In addition to the fact of having learnt a foreign language, the motivation to learn one also seems to be positively influenced. This was shown in Heinzmann et al. (2014). Looking at Swiss secondary students, the authors found that even a short language immersion programme in a country or region where a foreign language is spoken increased the motivation to learn another language significantly.

The widely accepted positive effect of a school exchange on the foreign language skills of teenagers is well supported by empirical research in the relevant literature. This form of experience abroad can therefore definitely be seen as an appropriate tool for the acquisition of a foreign language, even though it is not possible to make any substantiated statements about potential differences between languages.

<sup>19</sup> Andrews et al. examined answers from 1042 teenagers, half of whom took part in the exchange and half did not.

<sup>20</sup> Heinzmann et al. used a questionnaire of their own design to investigate intercultural competence, based on the work of Fantini and Tirmizis (2006), and on that of the *Language On Line Portfolio Project* (LOLIPOP), supported by the European Union.

<sup>21</sup> Hammer, 2005; Hürter, 2008; Geeraert, 2012; Hutteman et al., 2014.

**Enabling factors**

Within the *Impact of Living Abroad project*, Geeraert (2012) looked into the factors that favour the acquisition of language skills during a school exchange. These are personality traits such as extroversion, honesty, conscientiousness and a reduced fear of unfamiliar groups. In addition to this there is the teenagers' own motivation, which is increasingly characterised by their motivation to take part in the exchange being autonomous – that is to say, prompted by themselves rather than by parents or teachers. The people who made the greatest progress in learning the language of their host country had previously achieved higher scores in the above-mentioned variables.<sup>22</sup>

Geeraert also came to the conclusion that a better quality of contact with people in the host country particularly stimulated the language skills of the young participants in the exchange. The same was true for the cultural distance they perceive between the host and native countries. Secondary students have a greater probability of making progress in the host country's language when they perceive the differences between the two countries – in people, values and beliefs, but also in everyday things such as food, pace of life and the way that friendships are made – as minor.

**5.4.2 Self-esteem**

**An exchange that is part of the school curriculum has a long-term positive effect on a young person's self-esteem.**

A year-long sojourn abroad in the context of a school exchange has a long-term positive effect on the self-esteem of the teenagers taking part, according to the key finding of Hutteman et al. (2014). After the exchange year, those teenagers who had spent this time with a host family in the other country showed a significantly greater increase in their average self-esteem than their fellow students who had stayed at home. The fact that significantly higher levels of self-esteem could still be measured one year on from the exchange shows that this is not a short-term phenomenon, induced perhaps by the euphoria of returning to their familiar social networks and being reunited with their own families.

During a school exchange, young people are faced with situations that require them to live through certain life transitions earlier than would be the case without the exchange experience. Leaving their childhood home deserves particular mention, but changing schools and integrating into a hitherto unknown family situation, and coming to terms with the changes, also rank among the transitions that students of this age generally do not yet have to go through. The authors attributed the significantly greater increase in self-esteem precisely to their successfully negotiating life transitions. The above-mentioned improvement in foreign language skills also promotes teenagers' self-esteem following an exchange.

**Big Impact**

It is worth noting that it was above all those young people whose self-esteem prior to the exchange was low in comparison to their fellow students who registered the greatest increase in this personality trait. In other words, their self-esteem developed to such an extent that they were able to close the gap with the people who had been ahead of them in this before the exchange experience. No such alignment of different levels of self-esteem could be ascertained within the group that remained at home.

The phenomenon of personality traits that before an exchange were not very pronounced growing stronger during the exchange – referred to here as “big impact” – is also observed in other areas, and these are examined more closely in the corresponding chapters. With regard to young people's self-esteem, it is enough to record here that a school exchange particularly offers people with these types of shortcomings, compared to their friends and colleagues, an enormous opportunity to improve this shortcoming or even overcome it. Even if the differences in self-esteem within the group of exchange students do not completely vanish, they will at least have decreased significantly in comparison to the self-esteem of the students who stayed at home.

<sup>22</sup> Geeraert, 2012, p. 3.



**Enabling factors**

Not all young people demonstrate an equally large increase in self-esteem as a result of an exchange. However, the variation observed cannot be explained simply with the level of this personality trait before participation in the exchange, so it raises the question as to which factors favour an increase. Hutteman et al. (2014) pointed to one factor in particular that seems to be closely associated with the development of self-esteem: social integration into the host country. Secondary students who feel socially embedded, find friends in the host country and regularly take part in social events demonstrate a particularly large increase in self-esteem. The relationship between social integration and self-esteem is not purely one way, however: the two influence each other.

Successfully overcoming the challenges associated with the exchange and experiencing increased ability in the language of the host country are other factors that have a positive effect on the development of self-esteem.

**5.4.3 Self-efficacy expectation**


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### A school exchange promotes students' confidence in their own problem-solving abilities.

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The concept of self-esteem is closely related to the notion of self-efficacy expectation. The term refers to “the subjective certitude that one can overcome new or difficult challenges by reason of one’s own competence. And these are not tasks that can be resolved through simple routine but ones whose degree of difficulty requires effort and perseverance to accomplish.”<sup>23</sup>

Studies carried out on behalf of the *Bayerischer Jugending* suggest that students can lastingly increase their self-efficacy expectation through the experiences gained during an exchange.<sup>24</sup> Even more than ten years after the exchange, former participants were still convinced that their belief in their own problem-solving abilities, together with their resilience and psychological well-being, had been positively influenced by the exchange experience. The authors also identified an increased readiness to accept risk, steadfastness and the ability to manage crises.

Thomas (2005) attributed the positive development in self-efficacy expectation to a change in the way that young people see and understand themselves and the world around them. The exchange experience leads to a change in how the young participants perceive reality and thus triggers a chain reaction in their personal development. Thomas described how a changed perception of reality as a result of the experiences gained in the exchange makes new experiences possible, raising the self-efficacy expectation and thus in turn making other new experiences possible. In this way the sojourn abroad triggers a lasting and profound development in the participants' personality.

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**“Since then I believe that nothing can go wrong in my life, that everything will work out somehow.”<sup>25</sup>**

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<sup>23</sup> Schwarzer/Jerusalem, 2002, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Hetzenecker/Abt, 2004; Thomas, 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas, 2005, p. 308.

#### 5.4.4 Self-decentralisation

As a result of exchange experiences, young people are better placed to accept previously alien perspectives and to integrate them into their way of thinking.

The research presented by Hetzenecker and Abt (2004) and Thomas (2005) on the exchange programme of the *Bayerischer Jugendring* pointed to another aspect of personal development. The authors described a development that is known as self-decentralisation. This refers to the willingness and ability to accept other, alien aspects and to change one's own perspectives, to overcome ethnocentrism and favour ethnorelative attitudes<sup>26</sup>, and to come to terms with the foreign and the unfamiliar. Some aspects of self-decentralisation fall within the definition of intercultural competence given below. However, as the concept goes beyond interaction with people from other cultures and therefore should absolutely be classified as a personal competence, the effect of a school exchange in this regard will be handled here.

**“From the social aspect, it’s helped me a lot, [...], that is to communicate with people you don’t know, to cope with other people, to have to get along with them.”<sup>27</sup>**

In in-depth interviews with former German participants in a three-month reciprocal exchange with secondary students from Australia, the authors found a significant increase in the sojourners’ self-decentralisation. They identified this increase on a cognitive and emotional level as well as on a behavioural level.

On a cognitive level, increased self-decentralisation led to greater acceptance, increased understanding and greater interest in new and alien points of view. The willingness to learn new things was positively influenced by this. On the emotional level, the effects were a reduction in the fear of the unknown and the willingness to see it as a positive challenge.

The authors also found behaviour characterised by greater interest in experiences abroad and in the international professional aspects. It also included an interest in international friendships and a less critical attitude towards people from foreign cultures in their normal surroundings, something that can lead to increased social tolerance.

All these developments, according to the conclusion of the aforementioned study, were triggered by an exchange between secondary students of as little as three months and endured over time.

#### 5.4.5 Psychological and emotional maturity

School exchanges can have a positive influence on the psychological and emotional maturity of young people.

The impact of a school exchange can be viewed more from a clinical psychological perspective, too. Andrews et al. (1993) suggested that, following the experiences gained during an exchange year, young people show a greater personal maturity than they had before the exchange, and than young people who did not take part in an exchange.

In a direct comparison with students who stayed at home, the young participants in a year-long exchange programme demonstrated more positive levels of personal psychological and emotional vulnerability and maturity.<sup>28</sup> They showed significantly less susceptibility to neurotic symptoms, such as anxiety and depression.

##### *Enabling factors*

The authors attributed the positive changes produced by the exchange to the youngsters’ stressful, but controlled, experience abroad. Integration into an unfamiliar culture and surroundings, particularly in a hitherto unknown family, was assumed to be a source of stress for the young participants. However, the fact that the responsible organisation (AFS) offered a permanent point of contact and, where necessary, could intervene in the relationship to the host family relativised the perceived stress and helped them to deal with it and turn it into a psychological and emotional strength.

<sup>26</sup> The concepts of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism are taken from the Intercultural Development Inventory. They indicate two ends of a continuum along which the intercultural sensitivity of a person can be mapped. Compare also to the explanations in sections 5.3.1 “Commissioned research – AFS and YFU” and 5.5.1 “Intercultural sensitivity”.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas, 2005, p. 313.

<sup>28</sup> The term psychological and emotional maturity has been coined in an attempt to combine the various psychological and emotional factors measured by Andrews et al. (1993). In their research, the authors collected data on personality vulnerability using the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire’s Neuroticism Subscale, the Locus of Control of Behaviour Scale and the Defence Style Questionnaire. The participants were also questioned about symptoms of depression and anxiety using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) and the anxiety and depression scales of the Delusions-Symptoms-States Inventory (DSSI).



#### 5.4.6 Further personal skills

The experiences gained during a school exchange have the potential to increase self-esteem and knowledge of the host country language, and to strengthen students' confidence in their own ability to deal with difficult challenges. Bachner and Zeutschel (2009a) also made some statements about a series of other potential effects of a school exchange on the personal skills of the young participants. Even though these were not the central statements in the cited research, they do describe important personality traits and are worth mentioning at this point.

At the level of personal changes, the young people interviewed by the authors reported greater self-confidence following the exchange experience, as well as more independence and a heightened feeling of personal responsibility. Furthermore, they attrib-

uted their increased independence to the experiences gained in the course of the exchange. This effect of school exchanges was also described by Thomas (2005), although he related it directly to the confidence the students showed in their own ability to accomplish difficult tasks.

After investigating the effects of a school exchange on young participants over several decades, Bachner and Zeutschel found that an "exchange typically resulted in personal changes that could be characterised as significant<sup>29</sup>, verifiable, positive and lasting".<sup>30</sup>

## 5.5 Intercultural competence

The acquisition of intercultural competencies as a result of a school exchange is without a doubt the best-documented impact that such an exchange experience has on the participating students. As the existing literature does not use a standard definition of the term, however, and examines both intercultural competence as a general phenomenon and specific aspects of it, a very wide definition is taken in the following, in order to include all the relevant research: intercultural competencies are taken to mean all those abilities and attributes that enable people to achieve as high as possible a degree of understanding and communication in a culture that is unfamiliar to them or with people from such a culture, and to behave accordingly.<sup>31</sup> A number of empirically well-documented effects of school exchanges fall under this definition.

### 5.5.1 Intercultural sensitivity

#### A school exchange lastingly increases the participants' intercultural sensitivity.

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) developed by Bennett (1986) "posits that people go through different stages of intercultural development, which can be represented on a continuum".<sup>32</sup> The model differentiates between ethnocentric stages (Denial, Defence and Reversal, and Minimisation in relation to cultural differences) and ethnorelative stages (Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration).<sup>33</sup> To put it somewhat simplistically, people move from ignorance and denial of the existence of other cultures and their differences from their own culture, through to the integration of the behaviour and thought patterns of different cultures into their own personality. This

happens through the acquisition of intercultural sensitivity. These are the two extremes of a continuum: in reality each person's cultural sensitivity is located somewhere between the two poles.

Based on Bennett's DMIS, a questionnaire was developed to assess people's intercultural sensitivity. This questionnaire, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), has been the main data-gathering tool in a large number of impact studies on youth exchange in general. With it, the development in intercultural sensitivity of the sojourners can be traced over a given period of time.

Hammer (2005) and Hansel and Chen (2008) used the IDI to highlight the positive influence of a school exchange on the intercultural sensitivity of the young participants. In a direct comparison with their peers who remained at home, exchange students recorded a significantly higher rating for their intercultural sensitivity following the exchange. Hammer found that this "lead" was still there even six months after the exchange experience, while Hansel and Chen were able to prove it still existed even 20 to 25 years after the exchange. Thomas (2005) and Hetzenecker and Abt (2004) also found that former participants still attributed their increased intercultural skills to that experience some ten years after the exchange.<sup>34</sup>

29 The term "significant difference" refers to a key concept in statistics. It means that there is a very high probability (generally speaking, this is registered at maximum 5 per cent, and mostly 1 or even 0.1 per cent) that the observed difference is not due to pure coincidence but to the systematic correlation of a quantity of measured data. However, it does not give any information about the size of the presumed difference.

30 Bachner/Zeutschel, 2009b, p. 56.

31 This definition of intercultural competence is derived from the definitions proposed by Hinz-Rommel (1994) and Bertels et al. (2004).

32 Gisevius, 2005, p. 12.

33 Bennet, 1986.

34 See also section 5.4.4 "self-decentralisation".

An increase in intercultural sensitivity was also evident in the fact that host families credited the youngsters they had taken into their homes with better intercultural effectiveness the further into their sojourn they were. In the eyes of the host family, the sojourners broadened their knowledge of the host culture and were increasingly able to behave culturally appropriately.<sup>35</sup>

The *Impact of Living Abroad project* also came to a similar conclusion. The concept of *cross-cultural competence* explored by Geeraert is very similar to intercultural sensitivity and is described as “the ability to adjust well to new cultural environments and cope well in interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds”.<sup>36</sup> With the aid of the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) developed by Ang et al. (2007), Geeraert was able to confirm the above-mentioned correlation between school exchanges and general intercultural competence in a direct comparison of exchange students and their peers who had stayed at home.

With reference to language immersion programmes in other language regions of Switzerland or abroad, Heinzmann et al. (2014) also confirmed the positive correlation between the participants’ exchange experiences and their intercultural competence. Even though a proportion of the respondents spent less than a month on the exchange and therefore did not fall under the definition of school exchange used here, this work carried out at the University of Teacher Education Lucerne still corroborated the correlation posited here.

A sojourn abroad in the context of a school exchange has the potential, therefore, to exert a positive and lasting influence on the sojourner’s perception of other cultures, and this leads to a more sensitive and effective way of handling cultural differences. In an increasingly globalised world, this effect is immensely relevant and equips young people with important competencies for their dealings with their fellow human beings.

**Big Impact**

The increase in intercultural sensitivity reveals a tendency that was already apparent in the influence of exchange experiences on the participants’ self-esteem: it is particularly those young people who were less competent before the exchange who make the greatest progress. In the case of intercultural sensitivity, this means that the ones who particularly benefit from the exchange programme are those who were ranked at the “Defence” stage, or lower, on the DMIS scale at the start of the year.

Young people whose attitude towards other cultures before the exchange could be characterised with the words: “There are different cultures, but mine is the best,” generally advanced a whole stage higher on the DMIS scale. Their exchange year enabled them to recognise similarities between different cultures, and after the exchange they demonstrated an attitude characterised

by minimisation of the cultural differences. Those young people who had already reached this stage before the exchange increased their intercultural sensitivity by much less and generally remained within this stage.<sup>37</sup>

**Enabling factors**

The factors identified by Geeraert (2012) as being associated with a particularly strong increase in young people’s intercultural competence are reminiscent of those that the same study showed as predicting an increase in language skills. These were extroversion, openness to new experiences and less anxiety about intercultural situations on the part of the participating secondary students. The quality of contact to people in the host country was a further factor that promoted the development of intercultural skills.

If one looks at the school exchange from a longer-term perspective, it is apparent that this form of exchange has an even stronger positive effect on the participants’ intercultural sensitivity when they also complete at least a part of their studies abroad.<sup>38</sup> This would appear to suggest that intercultural skills could potentially keep on growing with more frequent sojourns abroad.

With regard to the length of an exchange, too, there is reason to assume that longer sojourns lead to greater impacts. Bachner and Zeuschel (2009a) gave an insight into the feeling many young people have of only really having “arrived” after around six months, and of only then really experiencing the day-to-day life of the host culture rather than just observing it from the outside. They therefore came to the conclusion that the impact of a school exchange on the young participants increases with the duration of the sojourn. This is a finding that was confirmed by Dwyer (2004), who investigated it in university students with the telling words “more is better”.

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas, 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Geeraert, 2012, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Hammer, 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Hansel/Chen, 2008.

### 5.5.2 Social intercultural contacts

It is hardly surprising that, following a lengthy sojourn abroad, people have quite a large number of social contacts from different cultures. This consequence of a school exchange is worth mentioning at this point, as it has been documented by several large-scale studies.<sup>39</sup> Forming friendships with people from other cultures, or even simply with people who have other interests and preferences, is not limited to the duration of the exchange. Thomas (2005) described the increased willingness of former teenage exchange students to make friends, after their return, with people whom they had considered to be less interesting or socially compatible before their sojourn abroad. And former sojourners still had a greater number of friends and contacts from other cultures even a long time after an exchange.<sup>40</sup>

### 5.5.3 Openness towards other cultures

**Taking part in a school exchange can increase teenagers' confidence and well-being in intercultural situations, and can help to overcome cultural isolation.**

The challenges offered by experiences in foreign cultures, and by interaction with the people who belong to them, can be huge and varied. This is known to anyone who has spent any time in a country with a culture that exhibits major differences from his or her own, familiar, cultural environment. The confidence with which people behave in these types of situation, and their well-being while doing so, are factors that are very heavily influenced by the kinds of experience that occur during a school exchange.

The impact of a year-long sojourn abroad on students' anxiety and insecurity in intercultural situations (intercultural anxiety) was a key subject of the two impact studies carried out by AFS.<sup>41</sup> With the aid of a survey tool entitled Intercultural Anxiety Scale, the authors showed that feelings such as anxiety, awkwardness and irritation towards other cultures were already less pronounced in young people before an exchange visit than in young people who were not taking part in an exchange. These feelings diminished even further over the course of the school exchange and were often replaced by feelings of acceptance and self-confidence. Thus, after an exchange experience, young people exhibit reduced fear of intercultural situations and appear significantly more self-assured in this regard than their peers who remained at home.

Hansel and Chen (2008) showed that this effect persists even long after a school exchange. They proved that, even 20 to 25 years after the respondents' exchange, these people felt more at ease among people from other cultures and were less nervous, irritated and anxious in intercultural contexts than was the case for their peers who had not taken part in an exchange and also generally had very little experience abroad.

**“And not being frightened of new cultures – having like a real fear of new cultures being beaten out of me at an early age.”<sup>42</sup>**

Bachner and Zeutschel (2009a) also reached similar conclusions in relation to prejudices and stereotyping. A large majority of the former participants in a year-long school exchange surveyed by the authors reported that the way they viewed people of different nationalities had changed. Instead of dividing people up according to national stereotypes, they reported a tendency to consider people on an individual basis. This was also confirmed by Hetzenecker and Abt (2004) and Thomas (2005), who reported a greater openness towards the foreign and the unfamiliar as a result of an exchange experience.<sup>43</sup>

### 5.5.4 Knowledge about host culture/bilateral relationship

A year-long sojourn abroad as part of the school curriculum not only offers the opportunity to gain important skills and competencies, it also gives young people in-depth knowledge about a hitherto unfamiliar country and its culture, and allows them to build up a long-term relationship with it.

Hammer (2005) showed that knowledge about the host culture improves substantially over the course of the exchange year, both in the eyes of the host family and from the perspective of the participants. This can manifest as an increased involvement of the participants with the former host country and friendships with people living there, even years after the exchange.<sup>44</sup> After their sojourn, the participating secondary students often remain in regular contact with people whom they befriended in the host country.<sup>45</sup> A similar increase in knowledge about other countries and their culture cannot be observed in the students who remained at home.

<sup>39</sup> Hammer, 2005; Hansel/Chen, 2008; Thomas, 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Hansel/Chen, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Hammer, 2005; Hansel/Chen, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas, 2005, p. 312

<sup>43</sup> See also "self-decentralisation" in section 5.4.4.

<sup>44</sup> Bachner/Zeutschel, 2009a.

<sup>45</sup> Weichbrodt, 2014.

## 5.6 Biographical impact

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### A school exchange increases the probability of students being internationally mobile during later life.

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A school exchange is able to set in motion profound, long-term personal and intercultural changes that stay with the participants in their later lives. In the broadest sense, therefore, all the above-mentioned effects of this type of youth exchange can also be interpreted as effects that in one way or another have an impact on the participants' biography. As a result, this chapter on biographical impact uses a narrower definition and takes biographical impact to mean those consequences of an exchange that lead to actual external changes in living conditions. This includes moving abroad, better job chances and so on.

The research that has looked into school exchanges has focused very little on the biography of the sojourners as a consequence of an exchange. An exception to this is Weichbrodt's work (2014), which examined the future mobility of former exchange students.

Weichbrodt showed the self-reproducing nature of mobility with a survey of young Germans who took part in a school exchange. The young people he surveyed demonstrated a strikingly high probability of having further long-term experiences abroad over the course of their lives. A comparison with the German population of the same age made it clear that the willingness of former exchange students to go abroad (mainly spending time abroad for education or career reasons) was many times higher than the national average.

Six years after their exchange experience, some 80 per cent of the respondents had spent a period of longer than six weeks abroad. Weichbrodt saw this high value as an indication of the normalisation of a transnational societal practice. In other words: spending time abroad, even beyond the normal length of a holiday, has developed into a normal component of young people's social behaviour.

And mobility reproduction even extends beyond participants' own biography. Hansel and Chen (2008) showed that, 25 years later, former participants in an AFS school exchange particularly encouraged their children to have international experiences. A school exchange can therefore be the starting point for an internationally oriented life that continues to have an impact on the experiences of future generations.

When considering the many positive effects that sojourns abroad can have on young people, one extremely positive finding is that an exchange as part of the school curriculum has the potential to lastingly inspire young people to spend time abroad. A school exchange can act as an initial trigger for developing essential personal and intercultural competencies through experiences abroad. Not all young people have the same chances to have a key experience of this type, however, as Carlson et al. (2014) found in Germany. The probability of taking part in an exchange while at school also depends on the socio-economic conditions secondary students grow up in. The importance of this and its implications for international youth exchange is examined in a dedicated chapter.<sup>47</sup>

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46 See chapter 12 "Opportunity in life".



# 6

## SHORT-TERM PROGRAMMES



## 6.1 Chapter summary

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### ◦ Literature:

Research is relatively limited and often restricted to very specific programmes. The few large-scale studies that exist have focused mainly on international youth encounters, most often looking at the effect an exchange has on the sojourners' personal and intercultural skills.

### ◦ Children (8- to 12-year-olds):

- Children can acquire new communication strategies and learn about the countries they visit.

### ◦ Young people from the age of 12

#### Personal competence:

- Acquisition of foreign language skills and increased motivation to learn languages.
- Greater personal growth and development, as well as increased self-confidence and independence.
- Greater openness and flexibility. Increased social skills.

#### Intercultural competence:

- Increased intercultural sensitivity.
  - A general increase in intercultural skills and multicultural awareness and understanding.
- 

## 6.2 Definition

The characteristics of a short-term programme differ in many ways from the "classic" school exchange. The most obvious difference is the duration. In the following, short-term programmes are taken to mean those exchange activities whose duration does not exceed three months; in fact, in most cases the activities only last a few weeks. In addition, short-term programmes are often a group activity. The group can have a bi- or multinational make-up, while the programme can offer various accommodation possibilities. Furthermore, the participants span a wider age range that also includes young people who are at university or not in school (any longer), together with children from a very young age.

Short-term programmes can focus on a very wide range of different areas, from joint project work with participants of different nationalities to targeted individual language immersion programmes, right through to study trips lasting several weeks in the context of a university course. A short-term programme, therefore, as the term is used here, should be understood as a collection of activities characterised by considerable diversity, not as a uniform format. The only unifying elements are the fact that it is an international and intercultural exchange, and the duration of the activities.

## 6.3 Literature review

The existing impact research on short-term programmes is relatively limited; what stands out above all is the small number of large-scale studies. One of the exceptions is the study by Thomas et al. (2007) that focused on the long-term impacts of participation in international youth encounters on the personality development of the participants. Their research, funded by the Stiftung Deutsche Jugendmarke e. V. (a German foundation that finances selected youth projects out of the proceeds from certain postage stamp sales), is closely associated with the German Forscher-Praktiker-Dialog – a institutionalised form of exchanging "science and prac-

tice in the field of international encounters having the objective of certifying youth encounter programmes and advising the people working in them".<sup>47</sup>

Using qualitative interviews and questionnaires, Thomas et al. surveyed around 660 former participants in youth encounter programmes approximately ten years after their sojourns.<sup>48</sup> The survey focused on long-term effects that could be traced back to experiences in different types of encounters.

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<sup>47</sup> F-P-D, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> Interviews were conducted with 93 Germans and 40 participants from other countries. There were 532 completed questionnaires, and some 90 per cent of the respondents were German. Those surveyed by questionnaire were between 11 and 28 years old at the time of the survey (the mean age was 17; the standard deviation was 2.83).

Chang et al. (2007) presented a further study that focused exclusively on the impacts of international work camps on their young participants. The authors polled them before, immediately after and three months after their sojourn and compared the data obtained in this way with that of young people who had not taken part in the activities.<sup>49</sup>

Van Eerdewijk et al. (2009) took a very specific perspective in their research into the effects of an exchange programme set up by the Dutch development organisation *Edukans*. They investigated whether the programme was able to increase social support for development cooperation. To do this, they polled participants in *Edukans' Going Global* programme and compared their attitudes with those of their peers and with those of secondary students who had had no exposure to the programme.<sup>50</sup>

Impact research on short-term programmes also uses a number of standardised questionnaires to investigate intercultural competence. Anderson et al. (2006) and Patterson (2006) used the IDI, which also plays a central role in the literature on school exchanges. In both studies, the intercultural sensitivity of participants and non-participants was measured before and after the exchange, and the changes were compared. Other tools that are used to make comparisons before and after a short-term programme are the Multicultural Awareness/Knowledge/Skills Survey<sup>51</sup> and the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory.<sup>52</sup>

Chieffo and Griffiths (2004)<sup>53</sup> focused on the changes in attitudes to global issues after a short study sojourn abroad. For their research, the authors polled a large number of US university students after the students' return and compared the self-assessments they obtained with those of university students with no exchange experience.<sup>54</sup>

The impact of short-term programmes on the language skills of the participants has been the subject of numerous studies. The studies by Martinsen (2010), Arnett (2013) and Ecke (2012) deserve particular mention here, as they are best suited, both methodically and in terms of the questions examined, to making empirically substantiated statements about the above-mentioned connection.<sup>55</sup> These authors based their work on research designs that measured foreign language skills before and after a sojourn abroad and so were able to follow growth in ability over time.<sup>56</sup> Martinsen (2010) also investigated the connection between intercultural competence and the improvement in language skills.<sup>57</sup>

In the only impact research project in the area of international youth exchange to focus on 8- to 12-year-old children, Krok et al. (2010) attempted to answer the question as to whether intercultural competence can already be acquired at this age in the context of group encounters. In a multi-methodological study, data from teachers, children and their parents was collected and evaluated.<sup>58</sup>

## 6.4 International child encounters (8- to 12-year-olds)

### Children can already benefit from international encounters from a very young age.

The simple and encouraging conclusion drawn by Krok et al. (2010) was that even children from the age of eight can have a variety of learning experiences in international child encounters. And the feeling of having learnt something does not depend on the age of the participants.

International child encounters offer children the opportunity to gain experience in how communication strategies can be adapted to intercultural situations. The authors found that the children's initial optimistic expectations of being able to overcome the language barriers were often disappointed. Communication with children speaking another language often turned out to be more difficult than was assumed before the encounter. According to Krok et al., this "reality check" can lead children to revise their expectations and thus assess their own competencies more realistically. That is an important realisation in terms of being able to maximise one's potential for improvement. In addition to this, new experiences are often made not only with verbal communication but also, and above all, with non-verbal communication, which can lead to new ways of understanding each other.

49 The respondents were surveyed in three waves. In a first pilot study, 29 young people were questioned in semi-structured problem-focused interviews. In a second pilot study, 184 university and secondary students were polled. This group was composed of participants and non-participants. In the main study, a total of 462 university and secondary students were polled, of whom 318 participated in a short-term programme; the other 144 served as a control group.

50 The authors polled 186 participating secondary students and 608 of their peers. They also polled a comparison group of 276 secondary students who had had no exposure to the programme.

51 Fairchild et al., 2006. The authors analysed data from 29 university students from the social sector before and after a two-week sojourn abroad.

52 Mapp (2012) surveyed data from 78 university students before and after sojourns abroad lasting between nine days and two weeks.

53 The statements are drawn from remarks made by the author elsewhere (Ecke, 2014).

54 Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) used the answers of 2336 university students. No survey was conducted before the exchange experience, so the authors were not able to account for any selection bias on the part of the students.

55 Ecke's research (2012) has not been published but is discussed by the author in detail elsewhere (Ecke, 2014).

56 Patterson (2006) evaluated the answers from 60 students at a US university; Anderson et al. (2006), those of 23 students at a US university.

57 Martinsen (2010) polled 45 US students studying Spanish before and after their six-week sojourn in Argentina.

58 The types of data collection included written surveys of the children taking part at the start of the encounter, towards its end and three to four months after it had finished. In addition to this, the children's socio-economic background was determined by surveying the parents, and observations were conducted during the encounters. Data collection was concluded with qualitative interviews with selected children three to four months after the encounter, and with a written survey of the people organising and/or implementing the project.



Another learning aspect that children can already benefit from at this young age is the transfer of knowledge about the lifestyle, customs and habits of people in hitherto unknown countries. General aspects such as geography can be assimilated and retained by the participants in a recreational context away from the classroom.

#### **Enabling factors**

By carefully observing the children taking part, Krok et al. were able to make differentiated statements about varying reactions to similar intercultural situations. They thus came to the conclusion that the learning increase a child can achieve in international child encounters is the result of a complex interaction of personal and structural factors. The greater the personal initiative required

of the children when making contact with their peers from other countries, the greater the difference in the experiences gained and therefore in the learning effects achieved.

Not all children find making contact on their own initiative easy, something that can lead to misunderstandings and stereotyping of the “foreign” children. This is particularly the case when the only intensive contact with children from other countries is the shared accommodation. Additionally, with more timid children, it is often the case that no international contact is established if it is not actively initiated. The authors felt it was the duty of the programme developers and programme supervisors to consciously seek out and establish the desired intercultural contact.

## 6.5 Personal competence

Short-term programmes are able to provide key experiences that can stimulate a multitude of personal developments.

**“It was just a week, but a week that changed my life definitely and opened me up to a completely different perspective and I loved it.”<sup>59</sup>**

### 6.5.1 Foreign languages

Even sojourns abroad of just a few weeks can significantly improve language skills.

With short-term programmes, too, the focus is often on learning and/or improving foreign languages. But is a format with such serious time limitations really ideal for improving language skills? Statements from the relevant research suggest that this really is the case and that participants can make significant learning progress.

Arnett (2013) found that university students had made greater progress in lexical fluency after a twelve-week language immersion programme than their peers who had remained at home. Furthermore, the author observed a clear increase in the vocabulary used by the participants.

Martinsen (2010) detected a distinct improvement in the language skills of university students after a sojourn of just six weeks. Even if the progress made was not on a particularly large scale, Martinsen attributed it conclusively to the short sojourn abroad. This finding was shared by Ecke (2012), who measured a significant increase in university students’ speed in finding words after a four-week language immersion programme. Thomas et al. (2007) also found that participants still reported an improvement in their foreign language skills a long time after their experience.

The study by Heinzmann et al. (2014) that was already presented in the chapter on school exchanges is also highly relevant in relation to short-term programmes. It shows that language exchange activities are able to significantly increase young people’s motivation to learn languages. This applies both to relatively long sojourns of over three months and to much shorter ones. The latter made up the majority of the cases the authors examined.

In addition to the studies referred to here, there are numerous other studies that deal, sometimes anecdotally, with learning foreign languages during short sojourns abroad and which also confirm the positive influence of these on the sojourners’ language skills.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Rowan-Kenyon/Niehaus, 2011, p. 218.

<sup>60</sup> Arhangeli, 1999; Brubacker, 2007; Kinginger, 2009; Lindseth, 2010; Tschirner, 2007.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, despite their limited duration, short-term programmes are absolutely capable of improving competence in a foreign language. Even if one cannot expect young people to improve from a beginner's level to a highly advanced level in just a few weeks, they can still achieve significant progress within their own language level.

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**“The Czech Republic [trip] kind of gave me a little travel bug and it’s growing rapidly. I visited I would say 14 countries while I was over there. Just, that’s what I want to do, I want to travel, I want to see the world. So, and I really would say that stemmed off from the Czech Republic program.”<sup>61</sup>**

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**Components for success**

The relationship between intercultural sensitivity and progress in foreign language skills was explored by Martinsen (2010), and his findings point to a remarkable connection between these two competencies. University students who showed higher scores in the field of intercultural sensitivity before their language immersion programme achieved greater improvements in their language skills during a sojourn abroad. Martinsen was not able to explain this connection fully but suggested some possible hypotheses.

One of these was that frustration caused by difficulty adapting to a foreign culture could lead to reduced learning effects with respect to the language of the host country.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, greater cultural sensitivity could be associated with less frustration caused by cultural differences, thus allowing students to assimilate linguistic experiences more thoroughly. Another explanation related to interaction with people in the host country. More intercultural sensitive people could be more able to focus on the language in encounters and not allow themselves to be “distracted” by cultural differences.

Even if the positive correlation between intercultural sensitivity and linguistic improvement has not been fully clarified, it still points to the enormous potential that the development of intercultural competence can unlock in young people in their later lives.

**6.5.2 Self-skills**

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**Short-term programmes can influence the development of important self-skills and thus lead to lasting personal growth.**

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Thanks to the work of Thomas et al. (2007) and Chang et al. (2007), empirically substantiated statements can be made about long-term impacts on the personality development of the participants in youth encounters. Former participants have reported lasting impacts from this experience on their personal development.<sup>63</sup> They have done so as much as ten years after their sojourn and have also been able to describe in detail both their encounters and their feelings and thoughts in these situations.<sup>64</sup>

Former participants have reported long-term impacts on personal competence that are reminiscent of those made by youths during significantly longer exchange programmes. For the majority, these included a heightened self-confidence, greater independence and an increased self-efficacy expectation.<sup>65</sup> Around half of the people polled by Thomas et al. (2007) declared that they had become more open, flexible and relaxed as a result of the experience – an effect that Chang et al. (2007) also described. The same was true of the acquisition of those social skills that are relevant in group situations, principally with reference to team and conflict management. At the same time, a third spoke of self-reflection and self-awareness processes that were set in motion by their encounters.<sup>66</sup> This was also highlighted by Chieffo and Griffiths (2004), who found that participants in short study trips abroad showed a significantly higher degree of personal growth and development than their peers with no exchange experience.

The overall importance that former participants attribute to the relatively short youth exchange even years later is also notable. More than a third of the respondents characterised the experience either as a watershed in their personal development or at least as the start of a chain of important decisions in their life.<sup>67</sup>

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61 Rowan-Kenyon/Niehaus, 2011, p. 221.

62 Twombly, 1995; Wilkinson, 1998a; Wilkinson, 1998b.

63 Chang et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2007.

64 Thomas et al., 2007.

65 Chang et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2007.

66 Thomas et al., 2007.

67 Thomas et al., 2007. The youth encounter was seen by 7 per cent as a watershed, and by 31 per cent as the start of a chain of important decisions.

In addition to the specific literature on youth encounters, there are statements on other personality-related developments following short-term programmes. In particular, authors have mentioned increased engagement with questions of social policy and justice<sup>68</sup>, greater openness towards new ways of thinking and a heightened awareness of one's own values<sup>69</sup>, together with general personal growth.<sup>70</sup> These statements are based on studies that used purely qualitative methods with a very small number of respondents and can thus only be partially generalised. However, they are based on detailed observation of the participants and their lives before, during and/or after the exchange experience. They therefore provide an important insight into the wide variety of the possible impacts of short international experiences on the personal development of young people.

### **Big impact**

Both Chang et al. (2007) and Thomas et al. (2007) reported a phenomenon that could be viewed as an effect of school exchange programmes. It was above all those participants who had fewer personal and/or intercultural competencies before the experience who most benefited from taking part. This suggests that even short-term programmes are able to compensate poorly developed competencies in young people. They therefore represent an immense development opportunity to further develop and strengthen underdeveloped skills.

## 6.6 Intercultural competence

Even very short intercultural experiences can potentially increase intercultural sensitivity and develop a greater understanding and knowledge of other cultures.

Similarly to the school exchange, the development of intercultural competence is often emphasised in short-term programmes, too, when referring to positive impacts. The impact research in this context has shown that this is justified and that even short encounters and exchange experiences are able to lastingly increase the intercultural competencies of young people.

**“I feel that I have learned to be open-minded and not judgmental. There are millions of people in this world, and there are lots of people who are just like me. The world is not confined to my backyard. Traveling is a very important part of life for me now.”<sup>71</sup>**

68 Gilin/Young, 2009; Cordero/Rodriguez, 2009.

69 Lindsay, 2005.

70 Poole/Davis, 2006.

71 Chieffo/Griffiths, 2004, p. 174.



### 6.6.1 Intercultural sensitivity

The literature on short-term programmes suggests that short experiences can also positively influence the sojourners' intercultural sensitivity. Two separate studies used the IDI to demonstrate this connection through a survey of participants in exchange programmes organised by US universities that lasted a few weeks.<sup>72</sup> Both studies agreed that no substantial progress can be made in just a few weeks; however, the improvements were clearly measurable.

Anderson et al. (2006) found that, on average, the group of university students they polled had a reduced tendency to view their own culture as superior to other cultures after their sojourn abroad. Individual participants even exhibited very large improvements and moved out of the ethnocentric spectrum in their attitude towards other cultures.<sup>73</sup> Overall, the group improved its ability to accept cultural differences and to adjust appropriately to them. Both Anderson et al. (2006) and Patterson (2006) also showed that an improvement in intercultural sensitivity is possible even in short sojourns abroad.

### 6.6.2 Further intercultural skills

Using a questionnaire they devised themselves, Heinzmann et al. (2014) analysed the intercultural competencies of participants in language exchange activities. They, too, confirmed the positive effect even of exchange activities that only last a few weeks. However, the relevant literature also contains a number of statements on a wide variety of more specific effects of short-term programmes on the participants that can be summarised under the term intercultural competence (as defined in the chapter on school exchange)<sup>74</sup>.

Fairchild et al. (2006) used a standardised questionnaire<sup>75</sup> to examine the multicultural awareness and multicultural knowledge of university students studying in the field of social work. They found that the respondents already showed significant improvements in these competencies and developed a greater aware-

ness of the significance of global interdependence after a sojourn abroad of just two weeks. Their finding was consistent with that of Chieffo and Griffiths (2004). The university students the latter polled who had taken part in an exchange during their studies showed a significantly higher intercultural awareness than their peers who had not completed a comparable exchange. In addition to this, after their return they knew more about the practical aspects of international travel and life abroad, and demonstrated more patience with people in their own country who did not speak the same language.

Mapp et al. (2007) obtained similar results in their work, which focused on the effects of a range of study trips on the participating students.<sup>76</sup> Mapp (2012) showed that participants registered a significant increase in competencies that allowed them to respond to the challenges of multicultural situations appropriately.<sup>77</sup> The respondents showed the greatest increase in the field of emotional stability. The authors also showed that neither the host country, the language nor previous experience abroad had an influence on the learning effects achieved.

Chang et al. (2007) and Thomas et al. (2007) also referred to the identity-creating effect of international youth encounters. Encountering young people with different ethnic backgrounds and nationalities strengthens the participants' own national identity. This effect can primarily be seen in those young people who travel abroad to participate because the youth encounter is not being held in their own country.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, anyone looking for a way to broaden their horizons, strengthen their personal and intercultural competence or improve their knowledge of a foreign language can find promising opportunities for this in even relatively short international encounters. While research results confirm the importance of the length of exchange visits, the literature on short-term programmes proves that significant developments can be set in motion even in a comparatively short time.

72 Anderson et al., 2006; Patterson, 2006.

73 See also the explanation of Bennet's Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) in section 5.5.1 "Intercultural sensitivity".

74 See section 5.5 "Intercultural competence".

75 The authors used the Multicultural Awareness/Knowledge/Skills Survey.

76 Mapp et al., 2007; Mapp, 2012.

77 Mapp used the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCA) developed by Kelley and Meyers (1995).

78 Chang et al., 2007.



# 7

## UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' MULTICULTURAL EXPERIENCE



## 7.1 Chapter summary

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- **Literature:**

The research is extremely extensive and varied. There are numerous wide-ranging studies that deal with various aspects of university students' multicultural experiences. This variety makes it essential to select the most relevant works.

- **Personal competence:**

- Increase in foreign language skills.
- Increase in creativity and the ability to solve unconventional problems.
- Increased openness towards new experiences, social interactivity and emotional stability.
- Increase in international contacts.
- Greater self-confidence and increased capacity for teamwork.
- Increased employability; reduced probability of long-term unemployment.

- **Intercultural competence:**

- Increase in general intercultural competence, and in intercultural sensitivity and communication skills in particular.

- **Biographical impact:**

- Increased international professional mobility.
  - Increase in national and global civil engagement.
- 

## 7.2 Definition

With the growing popularity of the ERASMUS higher education programme and the related Bologna reform of European universities, the mobility of European students is constantly increasing. But an increase in cross-border encounters in students' lives is also being observed in many other areas, a trend that is in no way limited to encounters in lecture theatres and university quads. The following chapter will examine the effects of a wide range of multicultural experiences on the lives of students, their skills and, not least, their career prospects.

The literature deals with a wide range of extremely varied aspects relating to students. This naturally includes exchange programmes such as ERASMUS, but also individual experiments with selected students or cases of young people who spend the whole

of their studies and/or periods of their lives abroad. Common to all these aspects is the multicultural experience of the students, that is, experiences that extend beyond their own familiar cultural contexts. In general this happens through cross-border activities, but it is also possible within one's own country, through contact with people of other cultures and the associated ideas and concepts.

In certain areas this definition coincides with that developed for short-term programmes, as of course students are also among those who take part in short-term exchange programmes. Statements that have already been made in the context of short-term programmes are, not, however, repeated in the following text, even if they relate to the experience of students.

### 7.3 Literature review

The potential diversity of students' cross-cultural experience is equalled by the range of the literature which has been considered for the purpose of this chapter. Due to this variety, only a selection of the research is presented in the following. The focus is on those works whose methodological approaches enable them to make well-founded statements and/or which are of particular relevance due to their specific thematic focus.

With regard to the improvement of foreign language skills, reference is made to the work of Stebleton et al. (2013). In the one-off survey *Student Experience in the Research University* (SERU), data were obtained from 99,810 students at twelve US universities. The study was not in a position to determine changes in the language skills of the sojourners over the time span of the sojourn, but the large quantities of data examined allowed for a good generalisation of the situations examined.

Other works examined have supplemented the research of Stebleton et al. (2013) by obtaining data before and after a sojourn abroad, enabling them to confirm the causal correlation that could only be assumed by the SERU survey with its investigation at a single point in time. The numbers of students considered in these are mainly relatively small, but the results all point in the same direction.

The combination of multicultural experience and creative problem-solving are among the best-researched of the aspects presented here. This correlation has been investigated by a large number of authors in a range of different experiments<sup>79</sup>, and confirmed many times.<sup>80</sup> Multicultural experience here ranges from the simultaneous consideration of cultural symbols in a video presentation, through longer sojourns abroad, to permanent living in a foreign culture. The wide variety of this literature and its broad empirical support give particular weight to the statements made.

With regard to personal competences, the research carried out by Zimmerman and Neyer (2013) stands out. The two authors examined the development of underlying personality traits of students at German universities, and the changes to these as a result of a year of study abroad. To this end, 1134 students were questioned, 527 of whom had spent a year abroad.

Data were obtained on five main dimensions of the students' personalities before, during and after the sojourn abroad. These dimensions were neuroticism, extraversion, openness to new experiences, conscientiousness and agreeableness, based on the five factor model which is widely used in personality psychology.<sup>81</sup> The authors also devised a method of their own for the measurement of the loss and gain of social relations. This com-

prehensive methodical procedure enabled the authors not only to make causal statements about the development of the students' fundamental personality traits, but also to apply these to their social relations.

The professional impact of a sojourn abroad has been examined in research carried out within the framework of the ERASMUS programme. The significant scope of this increasing interaction between European universities has inspired research work in which large numbers of students have been questioned. Teichler and Janson (2007) have drawn on three ERASMUS surveys on the beginnings and early phases of students' careers, in which a total of almost 78,000 former ERASMUS students were questioned.

In just one year, the latest work relating to ERASMUS with regard to the professional competences of students, the ERASMUS *Impact Study* (EIS), created a database of more than 73,000 mobile and non-mobile students, 625 employers<sup>82</sup> and 964 universities. The analytical methods used include examining career-relevant personality traits and questioning employers and higher education institutions.

As is also the case in the literature on school exchanges and short-term programmes, some of the research has made use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to determine the development of students' intercultural sensitivity. Paige et al. (2004)<sup>83</sup>, Clarke et al. (2009)<sup>84</sup> and Engle and Engle (2004)<sup>85</sup> have assessed a similar number of students, before and afterwards, and compared the data thus obtained. However, the number and diversity of the respondents cannot be compared with that of respondents in surveys concerning school exchanges. Nevertheless, they indicate a trend and make important statements on the development of students' intercultural sensitivity.

Salisbury et al. (2013) criticised the existing literature on the intercultural learning of students, as this was generally limited to students from a single institution and a relatively low number of participants and/or had a noticeable lack of a control group. They tackled this deficiency by questioning 1647 students from a total of 17 US universities. The authors assessed the intercultural competence of the students at three points in time<sup>86</sup> using the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale (MGUDS), and in their subsequent analysis considered important demographic data such as socio-economic status and parents' education, as well as the subjects studied and academic achievement.

The project *Beyond Immediate Impact: Study Abroad for Global Engagement* (SAGE) has provided us with statements on the effects of cross-border experiences on students' attitudes and

79 The social studies literature understands an experiment as a type of research that compares two or more groups, with a random allocation to each group. The aim is to keep all relevant factors as similar as possible, while the different groups are exposed to different stimuli (or none at all). This enables the best possible attribution of the causal effects to the given stimuli.

80 Leung/Chiu, 2008; Leung/Chiu, 2010; Leung et al., 2008; Maddux/Galinsky, 2009; Maddux et al., 2010; Maddux et al., 2013; Saad et al., 2012; Tadmor et al., 2012a; Tadmor et al., 2012c.

81 For the applicability of this model in a German-speaking context, see Lang et al. (2001).

82 55 per cent of the employers questioned were SMEs.

83 The authors analysed data concerning 86 students from a US university.

84 The authors analysed data concerning 87 exchange students from a US university and 70 of their peers who attended comparable courses at their home university during the period of the sojourn.

85 The authors analysed details of 137 students studying French.

86 The data were obtained at the start and end of the first year of study and at the end of the fourth year of study.



civil engagement. In the course of this project, Paige et al. (2009) surveyed 6391 exchange students on various aspects of national and global engagement, and on their professional and academic decisions as a result of their sojourn. They also carried out 63 interviews in order to obtain a detailed insight into the degree of influence that the students' sojourn abroad had on the areas in question.

The work of Paige et al. (2009) was supplemented by Murphy et al. (2014) with the methodologically significant addition of a control group. Here, the same data were obtained from 1013 students, of whom 270 had undertaken a sojourn abroad, but the remainder had not.

## 7.4 Personal competence

**“I can’t imagine my life without having had international experiences. They’ve completely influenced my way of not just looking at my own life, but my own society and the world ... It makes the world feel a lot smaller.”<sup>87</sup>**

### 7.4.1 Foreign languages

**Sojourns abroad enable students to improve all the skills that are essential for mastering a foreign language.**

Reference has already been made to the positive effects of sojourns abroad and short-term programmes during the school years on sojourners' foreign language skills. It therefore comes as little surprise that students are also able to make great progress in this area. Using the example of US exchange students in Germany, Lindseth (2010) showed that significant improvements in oral language skills are very probable, although it takes some time before progress begins.<sup>88</sup> This was also confirmed by Barron (2006), who observed that, after a ten-month sojourn in Germany, Irish students used the familiar or formal second person address (*du* or *Sie*), which is strongly dependent on the situation and cultural dimension, in a way that is comparable to German native speakers.<sup>89</sup> In their extensive survey of US students, Stebleton et al. (2013) also established a positive development of linguistic-cultural skills as a result of sojourns abroad – a finding also shared by Engle and Engle (2004).<sup>90</sup>

Written language skills also showed substantial progress. The results presented by Fraser (2002) are of particular interest here. Among the 30 students surveyed, the author found that those who made the greatest progress were the ones who had gained significant input from non-traditional methods, such as membership of a football team or an orchestra. A possible explanation of this was offered by Cubillos and Ilvento (2012), who showed that students' self-confidence in their own language skills increases during a sojourn abroad. The degree of increase in turn depends on the frequency of interaction with representatives of the host community.<sup>91</sup> This would seem to suggest that informal situations during sojourns abroad facilitate the potential to deepen foreign language skills and can give students greater confidence in their own abilities to use the foreign language.

<sup>87</sup> Page et al., 2009, p. 39.

<sup>88</sup> Lindseth investigated the linguistic progress of 28 students over the period of a semester.

<sup>89</sup> Barron followed 33 exchange students for a period of seven months.

<sup>90</sup> The authors examined data concerning 187 French students from a US university.

<sup>91</sup> The authors collected data from 39 students of a US university, who undertook a sojourn of a few weeks or a semester in France or Spain.

Once acquired, language skills often influence students' professional career paths. Those who have undertaken a sojourn show a higher probability of pursuing a career abroad. The language skills acquired or improved during the sojourn are often of central importance here.<sup>92</sup>

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**„I get job offers because of the new language and knowledge I have about the country.“<sup>93</sup>**

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#### 7.4.2 Creativity

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**Multicultural experience has a strong stimulating effect on creativity. This is even stronger if the students immerse themselves deeply in a foreign culture.**

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This very notable consequence of intercultural experience has been reported by studies undertaken within the discipline of cognitive psychology. A range of authors have widely examined the effect of cross-cultural experiences on the creative abilities of people, coming to spectacular conclusions.

In a range of experiments at US and European universities, Maddux and Galinsky (2009) proved a positive correlation between sojourns abroad and creativity.<sup>94</sup> The authors were able to examine this effect on students on both sides of the Atlantic, and across a broad spectrum of creative aspects. Leung and Chiu (2008) confirmed these findings. They also observed that an increase in creativity is also possible as a result of cross-cultural exchanges when these exchanges take place within the respondent's own country, as concepts and ideas from foreign cultures may also be perceived and compared within the home country. This means that, in terms of developing their creative abilities, students not only benefit from their own sojourns abroad, but those who choose to stay at home also benefit from contact with students from different cultures.

The results of the research in this discipline indicate that, above all, the cognitive comparison of ideas from different cultures, which at first glance have nothing to do with one another, activates a creative mindset that in turn leads to the observed creative results. Multicultural impressions therefore have a positive effect on the probability of people coming up with unconventional solutions to problems.<sup>95</sup>

Leung and Chiu (2008) also determined that experience in dealing with unfamiliar concepts, as is obtained in cross-cultural situations, can increase an individual's readiness to accept new and unconventional ideas. This is described as integrative complexity skills and represents a central element in the understanding of the creativity-enhancing effect of multicultural experience.<sup>96</sup> In other words, this competence enables people to view tasks from different perspectives and to consider multiple possible solutions, as they have higher cognitive versatility.<sup>97</sup>

#### *Enabling factors*

A sojourn in a foreign country is not in itself enough to trigger the changes noted by cognitive psychology. The way in which dealing with foreign concepts and ideas informs one's own problem-solving strategies depends above all on the intensity with which cultural differences are faced.

Maddux und Galinsky (2009) reported that, while time spent abroad has a positive effect on creative problem-solving, this is only the case if students live in a foreign country and do not merely travel through it. They concluded that the required adaptation to the host culture is what sets in motion the psychological developments necessary for an increase in creativity – adaptation that is called for to a far lesser extent as a tourist. This conclusion was also reached by Leung et al. (2008). Everything therefore points to the idea that the effect of multicultural experiences increases in line with the immersion in the foreign culture. Participating regularly in university life and the associated immersion in social networks are obviously perfectly suited for this.

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92 Norris/Gillespie, 2009; European Commission, 2014.

93 European Commission, 2014, p. 102.

94 The authors carried out five independent studies: Study 1 examined 205 students of different nationalities at a US university; Study 2 examined 108 students of different nationalities at a US university, Study 3 examined 56 French students at a French university, Study 4 examined 133 students of different nationalities at a European university and Study 5 examined 102 students of different nationalities at a French university.

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95 Leung and Chiu (2010) carried out five individual studies: Study 1 examined 65 students; Study 2 examined 111, Study 3 examined 83 students, Studies 4 and 5 examined 64 students. All respondents were US Americans of European origin.

96 Tadmor et al., 2012a.

97 Maddux et al., 2013.

### 7.4.3 Character traits relating to self-skills

Sojourns abroad during a course of study favour the positive development of a variety of character traits relating to self-skills.

**“I see myself a better person than I was before going abroad.”<sup>98</sup>**

The list of the positive effects of student sojourns abroad is as long as it is varied. Students spend varying lengths of time outside their familiar cultural circles, and they do so for different reasons. For example, completing a course of study at two universities or spending the whole duration of a degree course abroad is no longer a rarity. Zimmermann and Neyer (2013) highlighted this by stating that “international mobility is a relevant life event for the personality development of young adults”.<sup>99</sup>

In a wide-ranging study, the authors cited above investigated the personality developments that students underwent in connection with mobility experiences of one or two semesters. The results speak for themselves, enabling the authors to make empirically very well-founded statements on the positive effects that cross-border activities can have on important dimensions of students’ personalities.

While openness to new experiences decreased over the period of the study in the non-mobile control group, those returning from a sojourn displayed a clear increase in this trait. The same applies to the character trait known as agreeableness, which showed a clear increase after the sojourn abroad. The emotional instability trait labelled as neuroticism also showed a much stronger positive development in the group of mobile students than was the case with the control group.

As well as the fundamental personality traits, Zimmermann and Neyer (2013) also examined the type and scope of students’ social relations. As was expected, the number of students’ international social relations increased if they spent one or two semesters of the course of study abroad. However it is interesting to note the effect of the internationalisation of their own social environment. The authors attributed both the increase in openness to new experiences and the decrease in neuroticism to

the expansion of the social network to include persons of different nationalities. A personal sojourn beyond the boundaries of culture and nationality should therefore not only be understood as an experience that promotes cognitive skills through the acceptance of hitherto foreign ideas, but it may also have a positive effect on the underlying dimensions of the human personality.

New experiences in connection with sojourns abroad are also capable of shaking up fixed points of view and calling long-standing knowledge into question. In a qualitative examination of religiously motivated sojourns abroad by US students, Walling et al. (2006) found that after their return home the respondents had both a very critical attitude towards their own culture and an increased appreciation of its value. The authors suggested that questioning their own home culture is a facet of the sojourners’ personal growth and personal development.

A further effect of youth exchanges, which has already been noted in the context of school exchange programmes, is the development of self-confidence. Cubillos and Ilvento’s findings (2012) in relation to foreign language skills were confirmed by Black and Duhon (2006) and Brown and Graham (2009) with regard to general personal skills.<sup>100</sup> After their sojourn, students perceived themselves to be more culturally aware, more independent, more self-confident and more determined.

**“I am more extroverted, open to new things and adaptive now than before the exchange. Everyone should go and experience what it is like to live in another country. I now appreciate my own country more and my attitude is more positive.”<sup>101</sup>**

The results from the latest ERASMUS *Impact Study* suggest that students can increase their capacity for teamwork through mobility experiences while at university – undoubtedly a competency that is highly relevant to the professional realm, but that can also be applied to many other areas of daily life.

<sup>98</sup> European Commission, 2014, p. 84.

<sup>99</sup> Zimmermann/Neyer, 2013, p. 515.

<sup>100</sup> Using the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory, Black and Duhon (2006) collected data from 26 students at a US university on intercultural competence before and after a sojourn abroad. The data they collected after the sojourn also enabled them to assess personal development. Brown and Graham (2009) presented the results of an ethnographical study.

<sup>101</sup> European Commission, 2014, p. 105.

Stebleton et al. (2013) provided insights into the relationship of learned knowledge and its application in the context of experiences abroad. They found that students' international activities give them an increased understanding of complex global themes, which makes them better placed to apply disciplinary knowledge within a global context.

#### 7.4.4 Professional prospects and employability

**Sojourns abroad during studies increase the employability of students, raise their opportunities for pursuing an international career and reduce the probability of them falling prey to long-term unemployment.**

A course of study not only expands young people's horizons and personal competences, but should above all provide knowledge that enables them to successfully embark on a career and thus make an important contribution to society. Student mobility represents an ever-increasing part of the academic education of young people and of the provision of professionally relevant competences. The extent to which skills obtained as a result of a sojourn are also professionally relevant is therefore an essential question that is of significance to society as a whole.

Impact research into European student mobility focuses particularly on Europe's largest and most important exchange scheme, the ERASMUS programme. The question of the employability of former ERASMUS students, including comparison with non-mobile students, is a central theme of the research literature relating to this aspect. The following statements come from publications that examine the effects of the ERASMUS programme.

In the context of mobility while studying, Kehm (2005) talks of the "warm-up effect" this experience can have on a student's subsequent professional life. Almost three-quarters of the former mobility students included in the study considered their sojourn abroad to have been helpful in obtaining their first job, and at least half of them believed that their experiences were directly relevant to their current work. Although Kehm did not find any increase in vertical career development, such as higher income, status, etc., she did note a substantial increase in horizontal professional mobility, in other words, a higher probability of finding work abroad or working in an international context. Her main conclusion was that sojourns abroad successfully prepare students for international mobility in their working lives and for professional tasks with international components both at home and abroad.

Teichler und Janson (2007) also confirmed the positive effect of ERASMUS experiences on university graduates starting their careers. They found that in the 1980s, 71 per cent considered their ERASMUS exchange to have been helpful in obtaining their first job. In the 1990s this figure was 66 per cent, and around the turn of the millennium, 54 per cent. Although a decreasing trend was observed, it is still the case that more than half of the respondents considered their experience abroad to have been relevant to starting their careers. A possible explanation for the decreasing significance of ERASMUS participation could lie in the increase of international experiences in many other areas of young people's lives since the 1980s.

**"It definitely helped me to get the job position I am currently holding. It is a valuable item in my CV."<sup>102</sup>**

The relevance of competences obtained abroad was also confirmed by the employers who were surveyed. Between 2000 and 2001, the majority of employers considered the work-relevant competences of former ERASMUS students to be higher than average when compared to those of other students.

In September 2014 the European Commission published the ERASMUS *Impact Study* (EIS). This comprehensive research project explicitly examined the degree of influence that mobility experiences while studying have on professional competences and the further career opportunities of students. With responses from more than 73,000 students or former students, with and without mobility experience, the EIS was able to make very soundly based statements drawing on the analysis of a large quantity of empirical data.

In order to measure the employability of former ERASMUS students, the EIS used a survey of personality traits that have been classified as particularly relevant to employment. These properties, designated *memo factors*, are Tolerance of Ambiguity (acceptance of other people's culture and attitudes and adaptability), Curiosity (openness to new experiences), Confidence (trust in own competence), Serenity (awareness of own strengths and weaknesses), Decisiveness (ability to make decisions) and Vigour (ability to solve problems).<sup>103</sup> In addition, students were asked to self-assess their personality traits.

<sup>102</sup> European Commission, 2014, p. 95.

<sup>103</sup> The survey using memo factors was based on a design by the CHE Consult consultancy. (European Commission, 2014, p. 15).

Even before their sojourn experiences, exchange students had slightly higher memo factor averages than non-mobile students. This lead increased further, by a considerable 42 per cent, during their sojourn abroad. The average ERASMUS student had higher memo factors than 70 per cent of their peers who did not participate in a sojourn. These figures are impressive and emphasise the major effect that experience abroad can have on young people. The EIS also pointed out that the personality traits measured using the memo factors are generally very stable traits in an individual's personality and that changes occur only very slowly and slightly. The changes measured in connection with the ERASMUS experience are comparable with those observed as a result of major life events such as moving away from the parental home.

The relevance of the measured memo factors to the employability of students was confirmed in a survey of 652 European employers. 92 per cent stated that in their recruitment procedures they considered competences that were largely in line with those of the memo factors. Transversal job skills such as these thus represent an important factor in the recruitment decisions of employers – even more important than sector-specific knowledge (91 per cent) and relevant work experience (78 per cent).

In view of these statements it is not surprising that the EIS found a figure for the probability of long-term unemployment among former ERASMUS students of around half the figure for non-mobile students. Even five years after completion of their studies, the unemployment rate of mobile students was 23 per cent lower than that of the non-mobile. In addition, ten years after graduation, there was a 44 per cent higher likelihood of former mobility students working in a management capacity.

As it is based on a considerable volume of data, the impact research of the ERASMUS programme is able to make important statements regarding the effect of a study experience abroad on students' career opportunities. A study sojourn abroad provides significant employment-related competences and increases the employability of graduates. It should therefore be seen as a significant investment in students' professional careers.

## 7.5 Intercultural competence

Sojourns abroad equip students with central competences in intercultural interaction.

**“I feel very positive about international mobility, it is important for students nowadays. After the course I understand different cultures and people from different cultures better.”<sup>104</sup>**

### 7.5.1 Intercultural sensitivity

Intercultural sensitivity should be understood as a competence acquired in a learning process that is not limited to childhood. Significant progress in attitudes towards foreign cultures and behaviours can also be made in the student years. Paige et al. (2004) used Bennett's Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to measure the development of the intercultural sensitivity of

language students during a study sojourn abroad, and found a significant, if slight, increase in this competence. The strategies used by students for cultural and language learning also improved during the course of the language study sojourn.

These findings were also shared by Clarke et al. (2009) and Engle and Engle (2004). Clarke et al. (2009) also used the IDI in a survey of US marketing students. They came to the conclusion that students with experience abroad achieve a higher level of ethnorelativism<sup>105</sup> and are thus better placed to understand the life decisions and behaviour of people from foreign cultural backgrounds, and to behave appropriately in intercultural situations.

Engle and Engle (2004) also carried out a before-and-after survey of US students using the IDI. They also found the previously suggested improvement in intercultural sensitivity following a sojourn abroad.

<sup>104</sup> European Commission, 2014, p. 109.

<sup>105</sup> Ethnorelativism refers to the extreme of the *Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* that is characterised by acceptance, adaptation and the integration of foreign cultural behaviour into respondents' own typical behaviour. See section 5.5.1 "Intercultural sensitivity".

**Enabling factors**

Engle and Engle (2004) confirmed the aforementioned statements regarding the correlation between the duration of a sojourn abroad and its effects on intercultural sensitivity. The students questioned who had spent two semesters abroad had higher IDI values than those whose sojourn had been for only one semester. The improvement rate itself increased during the second semester, which indicates that the development of intercultural sensitivity requires a certain period of “settling in”.

There is no consensus in the literature regarding the effects of preparation measures on intercultural learning and ways to promote and support it. Paige et al. (2004) investigated the effect of learning materials aimed at maximising learning efficiency during sojourns abroad. However, the authors did not find any difference in the intercultural sensitivity of those students who consulted such a textbook prior to their sojourn.<sup>106</sup>

Pedersen (2010), on the other hand, found that there is a correlation between the development of students’ intercultural sensitivity and their attendance at a relevant course on themes of intercultural learning.<sup>107</sup> The author also made use of the IDI and collected data from students before and after a one-year sojourn abroad. During this period, some of the students took part in a course on the psychological aspects of group dynamics, which dealt with areas of intercultural effectiveness and diversity as well as cultural immersion, and which also offered moderated reflection and intercultural coaching.

Pedersen found a significant difference in the IDI values of those students who participated in the course. As a result of their sojourn experiences they moved well away from the ethnocentric view of the IDI towards an attitude that was strongly determined by ethnorelativistic concerns. Interestingly, the same could not be said of students who spent two semesters abroad but did not follow the accompanying course; they showed no significant increase in their intercultural sensitivity.

Pedersen’s work therefore represents an exception in the research on the effectiveness of student exchanges, to the extent that it found an increase in intercultural sensitivity following a period of study abroad only under certain conditions. However, due to the very low number of students questioned, these results should be interpreted with due care.

**7.5.2 Further intercultural skills**

There are numerous works that deal with the various aspects of intercultural competence in students who have been able to have cross-border experiences. In general it may be said that students usually consider a sojourn abroad as part of their studies to be a cultural enrichment.<sup>108</sup> Various effects of this enriching experience are described in the relevant literature.

In an examination of the intercultural communication skills of students, Williams (2005) came to the conclusion that a one-semester sojourn abroad substantially increased the ability to communicate effectively and successfully across cultural borders.<sup>109</sup> Clarke et al. (2009) also found that the awareness of cultural differences in interpersonal communication was increased by a sojourn abroad, which offered the first opportunity to overcome these differences.

In addition, Stebleton et al. (2013) suggested that successful communication in a foreign language requires not only purely linguistic competence but also a certain degree of cultural competence. The authors came to the conclusion that cross-border experiences during a period of study could increase this competence, and thus contributed to the students’ communication abilities in intercultural contexts. An example of this is the issue of the German second-person form of address referred to above.<sup>110</sup> The question of whether a person should be addressed as *du* or *Sie* goes beyond pure grammatical knowledge – it requires a certain familiarity with cultural elements of the German-speaking society and the given social context.

The question of the development of intercultural competence was also examined by Kitsantas (2004). The author used the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) to investigate the development of this competence area in students as a result of a sojourn abroad.<sup>111</sup> Her analysis showed that students experienced a significant increase in their intercultural competence from a sojourn abroad. By subdividing the CCAI into its individual subcategories, she found an improvement in emotional stability, openness, flexibility and personal autonomy in the respondents.

Salisbury et al. (2013) were more cautious in their investigation of the effects of sojourns abroad on the intercultural competence of students. While they also found the same correlation in their wide-ranging study, they differentiated their conclusions by examining them more closely on the basis of the instrument they selected for the survey.

The Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale (MGUDS) used by the authors consists of three subscales, which measure the diversity of social contacts and activities, the awareness of cultural differences and shared values and feeling comfortable in the face of differences. All three contribute equally to the overall MGUDS value. When considered together, a significant difference in intercultural competence before and after a sojourn abroad becomes apparent. However, when considered separately it appears that this is only due to a substantial increase in the diversity of social contacts and activities. The authors therefore warned against an unconsidered assumption that a sojourn abroad leads in every case to improvements in the overall spectrum of intercultural competences.

106 The study compared students who, prior to their sojourn, had read the *Maximizing Study Abroad Guide* by Cohen and Paige with students who had not done so.

107 The author considered data from 16 sojourners who participated in the *Psychology of Group Dynamics* course, 16 sojourners who did not attend such a course, and 13 students who did not participate either in a sojourn or this course.

108 Kehm, 2005.

109 The author compared data from 44 sojourners with 48 comparable students who did not participate in a sojourn. Both groups consisted of students from a US university. Williams used the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) and the Global Competency and Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) to examine the concept of intercultural communication.

110 See section 7.4.1 “Foreign languages”.

111 The author took account of responses given before and after a sojourn abroad by 232 students of a US university.

The survey carried out by Stebleton et al. (2013) of a very large number of students at several US universities contradicted the findings of Salisbury et al. (2013). Stebleton et al. found evidence of a causal link between sojourns abroad and an increased feeling of well-being from working together with people of different cultures. This is in contrast to the results of Salisbury et al. (2013), who found no difference following a sojourn in students' likelihood to feel comfortable with cultural differences. However, these results need not necessarily be considered contradictory, but indicate a lively scientific discussion of the effects of youth exchanges. They also highlight the complexity underlying the influences on human character traits.

### **Big impact**

The phenomenon of the Big Impact, already ascertained in connection with the effects of school exchanges and short-term programmes, was also found by Stebleton et al. (2013) in connection with study sojourns abroad. The authors looked at the application of disciplinary knowledge, the development of linguistic and intercultural skills and the ability to work together with people from other cultures. They came to the conclusion that sojourners from under-represented minorities and from lower working class families showed a greater increase in all the aforementioned areas than sojourners from other backgrounds. They are therefore the ones who benefit the most from their sojourn abroad.

### **Enabling factors**

With regard to the development of intercultural competence, Kitsantas (2004) found a remarkable correlation with the main motivation behind the decision to spend a part of one's study period abroad. The author identified three predominant motivation categories: an increase in intercultural competence, the learning of specialist knowledge and the use of such a possibility for social interchange. Analysis of the data indicated that the motivation factor of increasing their own intercultural competence was the only one that actually caused sojourners to show an increase. Students whose main motivation lay in one of the other categories had significantly lower CCAI values after their return. This would suggest that the acquisition of certain skills is connected to the will to learn those skills.

Williams (2005) also relativised the increase in skills she found relating to a cross-cultural exchange. Her research led her to conclude that contact with other cultures was the strongest factor behind the acquisition of greater intercultural communication skills. Of particular interest here is the finding that this confrontation with a foreign culture may also be found in social interactions outside the context of a sojourn, such as being romantically involved, house sharing, etc. This strengthens the statement already made about the potential available to student sojourners for the intercultural development of their social environment in the host country.<sup>112</sup>

## 7.6 Biographical impact

**Sojourns abroad during a course of study contribute to students' national and global civil engagement. Their international professional mobility also increases.**

The findings already presented regarding the reproductive character of international mobility also apply to the student years. In their study of the career patterns of former sojourners, Norris and Gillespie (2009) found that the probability of following a globally-oriented career increases in line with the amount of international experience a young person has. Moreover, this appears not to be planned prior to the sojourn, but is often a result of it.

**“I am undoubtedly a better person thanks to my experience of living and working abroad. I would not be who I am without this. Had I not had these experiences when young, I would have followed a very different professional path.”<sup>113</sup>**

<sup>112</sup> See section 7.4.2 "Creativity".

<sup>113</sup> European Commission, 2014, p. 93.

The research carried out on the ERASMUS programme also highlighted this correlation. Using a broad base of data, it concluded that a period spent studying abroad has a strong effect on the future international job mobility of students.<sup>114</sup>

The literature on the effects of student sojourns on the civil engagement of young people has contributed further findings to the biographical impact of mobility experience. Paige et al. (2009) found that student sojourns abroad have a substantial effect on students' future lives. Over 80 per cent of the sojourners questioned stated that after a sojourn they practised a conscious simplicity in their lifestyle, around half of the sojourners were engaged in philanthropic activities and a quarter were actively involved in corporate social responsibility.

These results were also confirmed by Murphy et al. (2014), whose study was intended as a continuation of the SAGE project, since they reproduced the work of Paige et al. (2009), expanding it with the methodologically important element of a control group. They found that students who have participated in an exchange have a significantly higher level of civil engagement in all the areas of international relevance that were examined, and in three out of nine areas of national relevance, than their peers who stayed home.

It is difficult to view the skills and competences gained from sojourn experiences abroad separately from biographical developments; in reality, one is strongly linked to the other. However, if the focus is shifted to the subsequent course of mobile students' lives it becomes clear that their cross-border and cross-cultural experiences have not only changed their personal and intercultural competencies, but have also influenced changes in their behaviour and their engagement.

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**“By this experience of traveling, living abroad and studying abroad, I came to realize that I was a human being; that I was not an inferior being that I had been told all my life [that I was Black and inferior].”<sup>115</sup>**

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<sup>114</sup> European Commission, 2014; Kehm, 2005; Teichler/Janson, 2007.

<sup>115</sup> Paige et al., 2009, p. 40.





# 8

## TRAINEE MOBILITY AND INTERNSHIPS ABROAD



## 8.1 Chapter summary

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- **Literature:**

There are several works that involve surveys of a considerable number of young people and companies. The literature also contains individual case studies. Despite the huge data basis, the existing works should rather be considered as (opinion) polls, since they have mainly obtained self-assessments.

- **Personal competence:**

- Increase in foreign language skills.
- The promotion of personal and social skills, in particular self-awareness, capacity for teamwork and responsibility.

- **Intercultural competence:**

- Increased intercultural competencies such as openness to other ways of thinking and increased readiness to travel.

- **Professional impact:**

- Lower unemployment, a higher rate of professional independence.
- Enhanced career development.

- **Obstacles:**

- Passive attitudes of companies.
  - Companies' ignorance about existing exchange opportunities, and about their benefits for young employees and for the companies themselves.
  - Bureaucratic and administrative hurdles.
  - Potentially demotivating role of the familiar environment.
- 

## 8.2 Definition

The increasing interlinking of innumerable aspects of global working structures has led to a frequency of cross-border contacts in the world of work that has never before been observed. Internationally active companies and organisations recruit a large proportion of their staff globally, resulting in working environments that are culturally and geographically very diverse. One way of preparing for this new environment is a vocational sojourn abroad at the start of a career.

The concept of “trainee mobility and internships abroad” refers to vocational exchanges, where young people work for a limited period abroad, while the focus of their vocational life remains in their home country. In general, such exchanges are connected to

the participants' occupation or occupational training. The available literature is concerned primarily with the mobility of young people during an apprenticeship. However, as young people's vocational exchanges are by no means limited to apprentices, a more open definition has been chosen here.

It should also be noted that many of the observations made relate to very general aspects of mobility, and it can be presumed that they also apply to the context of non-vocational exchanges. But as they originate in a literature that deals explicitly with aspects of trainee mobility and internships abroad, they are presented here in this section.

### 8.3 Literature review

The literature on vocational exchanges is thematically relatively limited, but well-supported empirically. It is limited because the focus is mainly on the mobility of apprentices. It is well-founded as some of the works have surveyed a large number of young people and/or companies and have therefore obtained results that can be considered fairly representative.

In a survey of 67 Austrian companies who employ apprentices, Klimmer (2010) investigated the benefits of internships abroad for the companies who send trainees on exchanges. She sent questionnaires out to the companies in question, in a procedure similar to that used by Berner (2004), who surveyed 137 German trades businesses in a written questionnaire on the qualifications of their apprentices. By taking account both of those companies that enable their apprentices to undertake an internship abroad and of those that do not, the author was able to compare these two groups.

Becker et al. (2012) concentrated on German young people with learning difficulties<sup>117</sup> or who are socially disadvantaged<sup>116</sup>. Questionnaires were used to obtain findings on 151 young people who undertook an internship abroad, and compare them with the experiences of 259 apprentices who obtained their practical experience in their home country. In both cases the period of experience was three to four weeks. The authors also carried out a qualitative survey of 55 specialist social workers who monitored them, as well as 15 small businesses who provided training. Kristensen (2004) also considered the effects of vocational exchanges on disadvantaged<sup>118</sup> young people. He based his work on four case studies in which he carried out interviews with the key people involved in the exchange, and observed their experiences on site.

Fuß et al. (2004) presented a further comprehensive survey of former participants. The authors put forward a survey of all scholarship holders, whose postal addresses were known, from the academic years 1984 to 1998 of the German-US Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX) programme. This bilateral exchange programme, established in 1983, enables young people in education or at the start of their careers to undertake a twelve-month exchange in the partner country. 826 former exchange programme participants were questioned in the survey, some of them years after their participation, on the perceived effects of this experience. The statements obtained were compared with the overall working population in Germany. However, the method used meant it was not possible to account for the participant selection effects.

Friedrich and Körbel (2011) contributed to the literature with a major survey carried out in Germany. The authors questioned 502 trainees and students at vocational colleges who had undertaken an internship abroad, as well as 825 vocational school leavers who had also participated in an exchange. They also obtained data from 785 companies, of whom the vast majority (87 per cent) were or had been involved in training. The scope of the study is comparable with the survey of trainees and young skilled employees in 1800 German companies, carried out in 2002 for the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)<sup>119</sup>.

By far the largest quantity of data obtained in the area of vocational exchanges was collected as part of a survey of trainees who had participated in the Leonardo da Vinci mobility programme. The Leonardo da Vinci study<sup>120</sup>, carried out for the European Commission, analysed the data obtained from around 8400 young people<sup>121</sup> who had completed an exchange under the programme during their vocational training.

Kristensen and Wordelmann (2010) provided insights into the point of view of small and medium-sized enterprises in an analysis of the existing literature and of these enterprises' published experiences of transnational mobility. The authors also presented Europe-wide figures on vocational exchanges.

Case studies giving detailed insights into four internationally active companies are provided by the work of Barthold (2010). The author used 34 interviews with trainees to consider the acquisition, imparting and evaluation of international competencies as a result of exchange experiences during vocational training.

The literature on trainee mobility and internships abroad can thus draw on an unusually large quantity of respondents and a number of detailed case studies. Although it lacks methodically sophisticated examinations of how skills are developed, in contrast to those available in the area of school exchanges and the multicultural experiences of students, the findings obtained from the research have a respectable empirical basis and therefore enable clear statements to be made both about the effects on participants and about the attitudes of companies who send trainees on exchanges.

116 The authors defined young people with learning difficulties as those without high-school leaving qualifications or equivalent, those from special schools or those with high-school leaving qualifications but with considerable deficiencies.

117 The authors defined socially disadvantaged young people as those with serious social, personal and/or psychological problems; young people with functional deficiencies; young people whose upbringing has been the subject of assistance as provided by the German Social Security Code VIII; former drug addicts; young people with a criminal record; foreign young people with language difficulties; young people with social integration problems; young single parents.

118 The author defined disadvantaged young people as those in education with low ability levels, the unemployed and those in work for whom there is a risk of being marginalised on the employment market.

119 BIBB, 2002.

120 European Commission, 2007.

121 The Leonardo da Vinci study collected data during the period 2004 to 2005.

## 8.4 Personal competence

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**The greatest benefit of vocational exchanges is the acquisition of personal and social skills.**

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### 8.4.1 Foreign languages

The very limited literature regarding the improvement of language skills during vocational exchanges does not offer any definitive conclusions. A study on the effects of experiences under the European Union's Leonardo da Vinci programme<sup>122</sup> found, however, that the participants believed their language skills to have been strongly influenced by their exchanges. The companies sending apprentices on exchanges share this opinion, as determined by Klimmer (2010) in the Austrian context: over 80 per cent of the companies she surveyed believed they benefit from their apprentices gaining foreign language skills during a sojourn abroad.

Kristensen (2004) found a positive effect from participation in various vocational exchange programmes on the foreign language skills of disadvantaged young people.

The scant research into this aspect makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions. However, vocational exchanges are similar in their duration and concept to certain short-term programme formats, in which an improvement in foreign language skills has clearly been found. It can therefore be assumed that participants' foreign language skills can also be improved as part of a vocational exchange.

### 8.4.2 Personal and social skills

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**Trainee mobility and internships abroad can increase a number of personal skills and competencies.**

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Technical and social changes require professionals to constantly adapt to new circumstances. This gives lifelong learning an increased significance. Whereas the parents of today's career starters often learned a single job and continued in this with a small number of employers throughout their working lives, this continuity has long since been superseded in today's world. Entire professional groups can be rendered obsolete by technical innovations in just a few years and/or be forced to train in completely new areas of activity. Against this background, Kristensen

and Wordelmann (2010) found that this is precisely what makes the social and personal skills gained during a trainee exchange particularly important, as they can promote lifelong learning. This dynamic places particular emphasis on the fact that the greatest effects observed in the literature of trainee mobility and internships abroad are in the area of personal and social skills.

One effect of mobility, already known from other forms of exchange, is the increase in participants' self-confidence. Fuß et al. (2004) found this conclusion to be confirmed in the vocational context as well, and stressed the importance of self-confidence in job recruitment interviews and similar situations.

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**"I learned [from the exchange] to believe in myself."<sup>123</sup>**

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Kristensen (2004) also confirmed this effect in the group of so-called disadvantaged apprentices, adding that an increase in competence was also observed in the areas of self-esteem, determination, personal meaningfulness and the ability to deal with uncertainty. In their study of disadvantaged young people, Becker et al. (2012) also found that reliability, resilience, capacity for teamwork, flexibility, responsibility and independence increased to a relatively high level as a result of vocational exchanges. In all the areas specified, the self-assessment of their own growth was higher among young people who had had an internship abroad than among those whose internship had been in their own country.

The work of Kristensen (2004) not only contains statements on the effects of a vocational exchange on disadvantaged young people, but also seeks to explain these effects. The author speaks of a process of "responsibilisation", which comes about as a result of two elements. The first element is that the necessity of finding their way in a strange environment gives participants the feeling of having faced a major challenge successfully. This sense of achievement increases self-confidence and can trigger positive development when the participants return home.

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<sup>122</sup> European Commission, 2007.

<sup>123</sup> Fuss et al., 2004 (translated from the original source).

The second element lies in the fact that participants generally find themselves alone in a new environment where their anonymity enables them to make a new start. This freedom releases young people – especially disadvantaged young people – from the expectations and stigmatisation they would otherwise encounter in their usual environment. This allows them to experiment with aspects of their personality and education and to apply what they learn when they return home.

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**“I thought that I was a loner, but have realised that this is not true at all.”<sup>124</sup>**

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Kristensen deals explicitly with the experiences of disadvantaged young people undergoing vocational training. The author considers their greatest challenge to be trust in their own abilities. However it stands to reason that the process he describes of engaging with responsibilities also takes place in young people who are not covered by his (rather vague) definition of disadvantaged – a supposition confirmed by the results of Fuß et al. (2004).

In a study of the German-US exchange programme, CBYX, Fuß et al. found that almost 90 percent of respondents reported an increase in their self-confidence in situations such as presentations or interviews. At least 65 per cent felt that their readiness to take more professional responsibility had grown as a result of participation in the programme. The positive effects of exchanges on young people’s self-confidence thus run like a thread through the impact research, and have been confirmed in the context of trainee mobility and internships abroad.

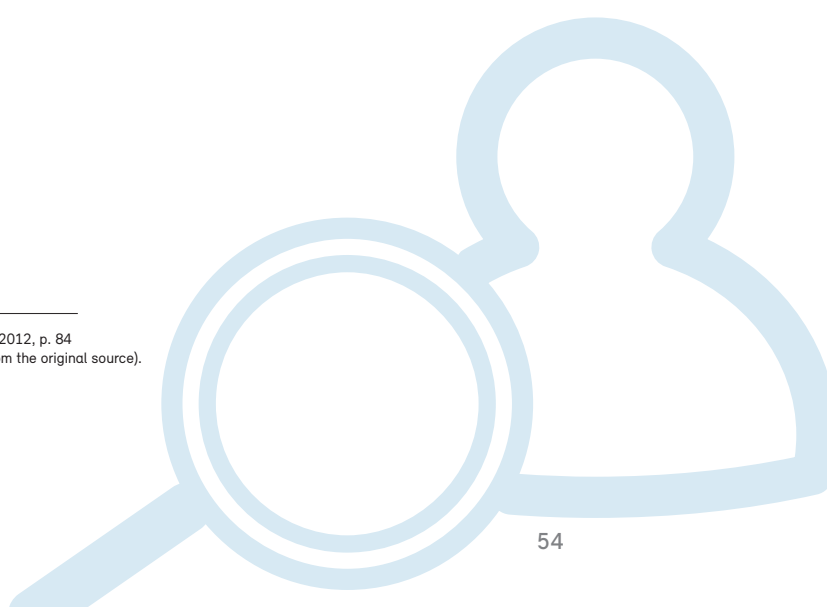
The companies in which these young people work are clearly also aware of these effects. Over 90 per cent of the European companies surveyed by Friedrich and Körbel (2011) who gave their trainees the opportunity of foreign exchanges believed that they increased the young people’s independence. Over 70 per cent perceived an increase in motivation after the exchange. This was also confirmed in the Austrian context by Klimmer (2010), who found that almost all the companies she questioned were convinced that an internship abroad had made their apprentices more independent, more autonomous, more enthusiastic and better motivated. The same applied to the capacity for self-reflection; two-thirds of the companies surveyed were convinced of an increase in this quality.

Another interesting skill development in connection with work-related mobility measures was picked up on by Barthold (2010). The author noticed that the concept of apprentices within a company was not well-known in countries without a dual vocational education system. As a result, the exchange participants were often more closely involved in the operational business and service processes of the company. They were not generally treated like trainees, but like normal employees, with the associated requirements placed on their work. Barthold believed this potentially gave them an increased ability to accept criticism.

Barthold also pointed out that a lack of opportunity to resort to known relationships and networks often forced young people to show greater independence in their working environment during the exchange. This necessity to stand on their own two feet contributed to an increase in their ability to organise themselves.

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<sup>124</sup> Becker et al., 2012, p. 84  
(translated from the original source).



## 8.5 Intercultural competence

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**The acquisition of intercultural competence is rather neglected in the available literature. Nevertheless there are indications that vocational exchanges promote skills in this area.**

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The development of intercultural competence as a result of trainee mobility and internships abroad is not examined closely in the available literature. Unlike the research in connection with other forms of exchange, there is no research here on intercultural sensitivity or related competencies. However, several works mention the acquisition of intercultural competence as a consequence of a vocational exchange.<sup>125</sup> These statements are not based on systematic research, but above all on practical experience with vocational exchange programmes.

Most of the companies surveyed by Klimmer (2010) were convinced that an internship abroad contributes to breaking down apprentices' prejudices. In addition, a survey of German companies by the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education reveals a conviction that cross-border exchanges of trainees and young skilled employees increase the acquisition of intercultural competencies.<sup>126</sup> This finding is also shared by Barthold (2010) and Kristensen (2004).

Both the companies questioned by Klimmer and those surveyed as part of the Leonardo da Vinci study<sup>127</sup> referred to two aspects that are of central significance in an increasingly mobile world of work. Firstly, these companies saw in their exchange apprentices an increased understanding of hitherto foreign behaviours and secondly, they noticed that these apprentices were more prepared to travel in connection with their work. In areas of business where contact with partners and/or customers requires cross-border travel, the appointment of such employees can be an important resource for a company.

## 8.6 Professional impact

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**Trainee mobility and internships abroad can have a positive effect on the career development of young people. They also reduce the likelihood of unemployment.**

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According to the existing literature, exchanges in a vocational context present in particular the opportunity to acquire and develop personal competencies. The Leonardo da Vinci study<sup>128</sup> concluded that a vocational exchange has a positive effect on young people's career development.

It was found that the greatest effects were on young people who had no fixed employment. Almost 60 per cent of the young people surveyed had found a job as a result of their exchange experience. Many of the young people who were already in a job found they were given better work, a promotion and/or increased pay. Almost one-third of the respondents also said they had more responsibility at work since their exchange.

The Leonardo da Vinci study also made clear findings about young people who were starting out on their vocational training. More than two-thirds of the respondents from this group said they had found either a job or a training opportunity. They also said they had achieved greater success in their existing training and participated more actively in it.

Fuß et al. (2004) also made some clear statements relating to CBYX participants. When compared with the nationwide average of those completing apprenticeships, former CBYX participants showed twice the level of professional independence.<sup>129</sup> Half of them rose to a middle or higher management position within ten to fifteen years, which corresponds to three times the national average.

The figures put forward by Fuß et al. regarding unemployment of former CBYX participants are an impressive indication of the positive effect of vocational exchanges on working life. The authors showed that 99 per cent of the participants were in employment, an unemployment rate that is ten times lower than that of comparable qualified employees in the rest of the country.

It is not possible to say here whether the clearly positive effect of an exchange on the career development of young people is due to improved objective-setting skills, as described by Barthold (2010). However, the fact is that the author considers a vocational exchange to be an opportunity for young people to expand their horizons and thus to increase the range of options they would contemplate when planning their lives and careers.

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<sup>125</sup> Barthold, 2010; BIBB, 2002; Klimmer, 2010; Kristensen, 2004.

<sup>126</sup> BIBB, 2002.

<sup>127</sup> European Commission, 2007.

<sup>128</sup> European Commission, 2007.

<sup>129</sup> The comparison was based on the German national average figures for 1999.

## 8.7 Obstacles

**Companies' ignorance about existing exchange opportunities, and their benefits both for the participants and for themselves, is a strong limiting factor.**

A vocational exchange can contribute to the development of essential personal and social skills as well as the sustained career success of young people. Nevertheless, this form of exchange is still in its infancy compared to others.<sup>130</sup>

While a semester abroad during university studies has become commonplace and school exchanges are enjoying great popularity, trainee mobility and internships abroad are still a fairly marginal concept. Friedrich und Körbel (2011) found that only one per cent of the companies they surveyed regularly send trainees abroad, although five per cent said they do it occasionally. This is reason enough to consider in greater detail the obstacles in the way of this kind of youth exchange.

Surveys of German and Austrian companies with trainees provide a starting point for ascertaining the attitudes of employers towards trainee exchanges. Almost one half of all the companies examined by Friedrich and Körbel (2011) said that they had in principle no interest in the mobility of their trainees. In general companies believed that an exchange would be too expensive.

As there is a widely held belief that an exchange would only deliver slight benefits, if any, for the company, it is no surprise that there is such a low percentage of companies who send trainees on exchanges.

However, a more significant inhibiting factor is probably the low awareness of the concepts of trainee mobility and internships abroad. Friedrich and Körbel (2011) noted that most of the companies they surveyed are not aware of the existence of mobility programmes in which their trainees could participate; over 80 per cent of these companies said that they had never received an offer of that kind. This seems to be a central reason for the slow spread of vocational exchanges: – companies would not generally consider an exchange for their trainees under their own initiative. The attitude to this is predominantly a passive one. However, if the subject is raised, there is often the expectation that it is a matter for the organisations in question, vocational colleges etc., to approach the companies.<sup>131</sup>

The limited interest among companies is also linked to a limited knowledge of the effects of exchange experiences on the young participants. The companies surveyed by Friedrich and Körbel almost unanimously denied the vocational benefits of an exchange, but did, however, stress the high value they place on personal competencies when recruiting new staff. It would therefore seem that companies predominantly look for vocational benefits from exchanges, while remaining largely ignorant of their potential for equipping young people with personal skills.

This distorted view of the actual potential for acquiring competencies is also indicated by the fact that companies are divided into two camps, as observed by several authors.<sup>132</sup> The majority of companies that have experience of vocational exchanges are convinced of their benefits, both for the participant and for the company. Companies that do not have such experience do not expect any benefits from them and are therefore sceptical. An important step towards the promotion of this form of exchange should therefore be to explain the areas in which trainee mobility and internships abroad could create added value and thus offer great potential for both employees and the company.

Klimmer (2010) considers a further obstacle to be the bureaucratic hurdles companies have to go through to offer exchange opportunities. The author reported that “most companies [...] can only envisage offering internships abroad to their apprentices with the assistance of an agency that would undertake all of the organisation as well as the processing of any financial assistance.”<sup>133</sup> This assessment is shared by Friedrich and Körbel (2011) with regard to German companies. Three quarters of the companies surveyed by the authors, who offer internships abroad, call for more support or assistance in organising the sojourns and finding partners abroad.

In their observations on disadvantaged young people, Becker et al. (2012) reported that the family environment often has a demotivating role in potential participants' decision to take part in an exchange. This is probably due to scepticism towards the new and unfamiliar. In an analysis of school exchanges in Germany, Carlson et al. (2014) found that a lack of transnational experience on the part of parents reduced the likelihood of their children participating in an exchange.<sup>134</sup> This appears to be more marked in the case of trainee mobility and internships abroad.

<sup>130</sup> For Switzerland see AFS (2013), for Germany Becker et al. (2012), for Europe Kristensen (2004).

<sup>131</sup> Friedrich/Körbel, 2011.

<sup>132</sup> Berner, 2004; BIBB, 2002; Friedrich/Körbel, 2011; Klimmer, 2010.

<sup>133</sup> Klimmer, 2010, p. 15.

<sup>134</sup> See also section 12 “Opportunity in life”.



Some limiting factors for vocational exchanges are therefore known and can be tackled. However, there has been no systematic research into the obstacles, and it may be assumed that there are other factors that prevent the spread of trainee mobility and internships abroad. The design of vocational training systems probably has a substantial influence on the opportunities for young working people. Studies on this subject are urgently needed to remove the obstacles that prevent young people in work and/or vocational education from experiencing an exchange in the medium or long-term.

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**“Many companies [...] are unaware of the development of social and personal skills facilitated by an internship abroad.”<sup>135</sup>**

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<sup>135</sup> Becker et al., 2012, p. 102  
(translated from the original source).



# 9

## VOLUNTARY SERVICE



## 9.1 Chapter summary

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- **Literature:**

There is a lot of literature that is not traditionally published, or published at all. An overview of this literature in the European context is available. The published literature includes both in-depth case studies and comparative studies with a substantial number of respondents. The focus of the latter studies lies on the development of intercultural competence and the acquisition of international social capital.<sup>136</sup>

- **Personal competence:**

- Increased independence, self-confidence, self-reliance, assertiveness and self-efficacy expectation.
- Acquisition of technical knowledge and general vocational experience.
- Promotion of social and communication skills, and the ability to perceive and accept divergent opinions.

- **Intercultural competence:**

- Increase in intercultural competence.
- Acquisition of professional and otherwise useful international social contacts.

- **Biographical impact:**

- Voluntary service can lead to a changed outlook on life.
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## 9.2 Definition

Young people can have intercultural experiences in a variety of contexts – in classrooms, in the school yard, in lecture theatres or in their own living rooms. They can also occur in homes for the disabled, in environmental programmes, in human rights organisations and numerous other situations in which young people combine their social engagement with a curiosity about the world and its cultural variety.

Sojourns abroad in connection with voluntary service have long been an established form of international exchange, contributing to contact between young people across national, cultural, social and economic borders. However, it is hard to find a generally accepted definition of what constitutes voluntary service in the relevant literature, although two elements can be identified that are central and essential to voluntary service: firstly, providing a service on a voluntary basis and secondly, crossing national and/or cultural borders.

This definition lacks any specification of age. This is intentional, as the literature does not always differentiate on the grounds of age. As volunteer programmes are not necessarily limited to a specific age group, volunteers may also be included who cannot be described as young people. However, the literature presented here largely covers young volunteers, even though this is not always an essential criterion for their inclusion in the analysis.

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<sup>136</sup> The term social capital originated with Pierre Bourdieu and refers to current and potential resources that may be linked to participation in networks of social relationships with mutual acquaintance and recognition. Getting a job through an acquaintance is an example of making use of social capital.

### 9.3 Literature review

The great variety of volunteer programmes is reflected in the literature covering this form of sojourn. In many cases, however, the focus is on the effect of the volunteer activity on the recipients. This is completely understandable, as voluntary service is primarily aimed at having an effect in the place where the activities are carried out. Nevertheless, there are works that do not examine the effectiveness of the programmes themselves, but draw attention to the developments of the volunteers.

In their literature review, Powell and Bratović (2007) consider a quantity of so-called grey literature on voluntary service by young people in or from Europe.<sup>137</sup> The evaluation of works that are mainly unpublished vastly enriches the body of knowledge relating to the effect of voluntary service on the young people taking part. However, as many of the works examined by Powell and Bratović are not publicly available, it is very difficult to examine them in detail. Relevant findings from the unpublished works are therefore reported with reference to the publication by Powell and Bratović. However, where it appears useful, reference is made to the origins of the findings in the form of footnotes.

It is important to record that all the works taken into account by Powell and Bratović (2007) are based on questionnaires and self-evaluations. There has been no systematic survey of specific competencies using established instruments. The same applies to published works that either use the participant observation method or carry out in-depth interviews with a small number of volunteers. These include the studies of Broad (2003), Harlow and Pomfret (2007), Lo and Lee (2011) and Pan (2014).

Yashima (2010) presented a study that examined the development of intercultural competence in young Japanese people who undertook two or three weeks' voluntary service in various countries. A preliminary study, consisting of nine in-depth interviews, was used to substantiate the research design. In the main study, 395 students were surveyed using questionnaires; 115 of these had not been involved in voluntary service and were used as a control group. The survey measured their openness to other cul-

tures, ethnocentric tendencies, interest in international affairs, outlook on international volunteer work, communication skills, self-esteem, satisfaction and the feeling of having made a contribution.<sup>138</sup> The students were questioned before and after the volunteering activities, which enabled changes over time to be analysed.

Further studies with a large number of respondents were put forward by Lough. In a study<sup>139</sup> of 205 returning and 105 future young volunteers from the organisations *Weltwärts* and ICYE, data was obtained on openness, international understanding, intercultural relationships, international life plans, social activism and engagement, and media awareness.<sup>140</sup> The data obtained from these two groups were compared with each other.

In the same year, Lough (2011) published a survey of 291 volunteers returning from two volunteer programmes, which differed in the duration of the service and the volunteer selection criteria. Using the International Volunteering Impact Survey (IVIS), data were obtained from the respondents, most of them US students, on their intercultural competence, the duration of their volunteer service, the type of accommodation and general demographic information.

Working with four other authors, Lough finally presented a study on the effect of voluntary service on international contacts, global interpersonal relationships and interest in cross-border topics.<sup>141</sup> In a panel survey<sup>142</sup> by means of questionnaires one month before the volunteer service, immediately after the service and two to three years after the service, data from 129 volunteers for the organisations *Cross-Cultural Solutions* and *WorldTeach* were compared. In addition, data were obtained at the same points in time from people who had enquired about opportunities with these two organisations, but for various reasons had not participated in voluntary service. The latter – a total of 184 people – formed two control groups: one with experience abroad (71) and one without such experience (113). The two control groups were compared with the data from the volunteers.

137 Grey literature refers to works that are not published by a traditional publisher, but are self-published. This literature is theoretically publicly available, but is generally difficult to find or obtain through the usual catalogues and library systems.

138 Openness towards other cultures was measured by a questionnaire instrument developed by the author (2002); the same applies to ethnocentric tendencies, interest in international affairs (Yashima, 2009) and outlook on international volunteer work. Communication skills were recorded using the Affective Communication Test (ACT) developed by Friedman et al. (1980), and self-esteem on the basis of a survey instrument by Sheer et al. (1982). Satisfaction and the feeling of having made a contribution were recorded using survey instruments developed by the author.

139 Lough, 2011.

140 The concepts referred to were obtained from the *Volunteer and Service Enquiry of South Africa* (VOSESA).

141 Lough et al., 2014.

142 Panel surveys refer to periodically obtaining the same data relating to a specific selection, in this case of people. The purpose of such a survey is to use repeated data collections to reveal changes over the course of time.



## 9.4 Personal competence

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**Voluntary service can trigger personal developments that lead to a more mature and reflective interaction with people from foreign cultures and from the participant's own culture.**

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Exchange experiences make a substantial contribution to the personal growth of young people, since they lead to greater independence, increase creativity and contribute to the development of self-confidence. These findings permeate the literature on the various forms of exchange and are regularly confirmed by new research. So it is no wonder that almost all the works considered by Powell and Bratović (2007) show personal growth to be an effect of voluntary service. Where there has been a comparison with other effects, personal growth has been found to be one of the most marked consequences. An increase in independence is referred to particularly frequently in this context.

Broad (2003) monitored several volunteers on an environmental programme for the conservation of threatened species in Thailand. The author found that volunteers reported increased self-confidence in their ability to travel independently. She also observed an increased readiness to accept responsibility, and a greater assertiveness in various social contexts. Many of the volunteers monitored by Broad reported that they had learned more about themselves and had acquired skills that enabled them to handle more effectively challenges they would subsequently be confronted with: working in a foreign culture, handling emotions and working with others. Pan (2014) also reported increased self-confidence as a result of voluntary service among the students he interviewed.

Depending on the areas of activity assigned to them, during their sojourns volunteers also perform activities that require and foster various technical skills. Powell and Bratović (2007) showed that this enables skills such as computer or language skills to be improved or learned.<sup>143</sup> In this sense, voluntary service can provide additional and more in-depth work experience and offer experiences that may be of great benefit in the volunteers' subsequent working lives.<sup>144</sup>

Powell and Bratović considered the further development of social and communication skills to be another aspect of personal development, which was referred to in a number of the works they reviewed. Harlow and Pomfret (2007) also confirmed this as well as emphasising the potential for self-reflection that can develop in volunteering work. Lo and Lee (2011) even observed that volunteers from Hong Kong changed their outlook on their own lives as a result of experiences gained during their voluntary service, which is linked to improved relations with friends and relations who took part in the same voluntary service.

Pan (2014) also indicated very specific changes in the way volunteers deal with their own convictions and foreign points of view. The author observed personal development in the volunteers, strengthening their trust in others and promoting an awareness of their own faults. Divergent opinions are given more of a hearing and accepted as valid points of view – a skill that is essential to conflict resolution in social contexts. Given these insights, it comes as no surprise that Broad (2003) reported greater openness, satisfaction and lack of tension in the volunteers she monitored.

The wide-ranging study by Yashima (2010) also examined the communication skills of volunteers and clearly showed that they increased significantly as a result of their sojourn. The same applies to the central personal competence of self-efficacy expectation among young participants. Yashima thus presented findings on the impact of voluntary service that have been replicated and confirmed by research on school exchanges carried out on the basis of very meticulous methodology.<sup>145</sup> This suggests that various forms of international exchange enable young people to develop an underlying attitude that gives them the self-confidence to meet future, as yet unknown, challenges successfully.

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143 Alternative-V, 2003.

144 Birnkraut/Hein, 2004.

145 Hutteman et al., 2014.

## 9.5 Intercultural competence

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**Voluntary service offers the opportunity to develop intercultural competence and form international contacts that will be important in later life.**

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As would be expected, voluntary service also has positive effects on the intercultural competence of the young participants. While Powell and Bratović (2007) identified this link on the basis of information that is mainly subjective, Yashima's survey (2010) provided objective indications of a significant increase in openness towards foreign cultures, ethnorelativism and interest in international affairs. Japanese students showed clear growth in these areas, both compared with the time before their sojourn and compared with their peers who had not undertaken a period of voluntary service. This was confirmed by Lough's study (2011) of self-assessment regarding intercultural social capital. The volunteers he surveyed were fully convinced that their voluntary service had improved their ability for adequate, effective communication in intercultural situations.

In addition to the element of cultural exchange, voluntary service also includes the aspect of networking. As a general rule, young people come into contact with other dedicated people who have the same issues close to their hearts and who share their interests. They meet like-minded people, which enables them to establish a cross-border network. Together with other authors, Lough<sup>146</sup> examined this way of building up international social capital. They showed that former volunteers were convinced that they had developed international contacts during their sojourns, which could be used for professional, financial, campaigning or similar purposes. Voluntary service can therefore form the basis for further engagement and represents a resource of international relationships that can be drawn on as needed later in life.

### **Enabling factors**

Yashima's work (2010) presented empirically well-founded findings on the connection between voluntary service and intercultural competence. The author also pointed out the effect of general international experience, by showing that the impact referred to was strongest in those young people who had some international experience prior to their sojourn. This is one of many indications of the positive effects of international exchanges on intercultural competence.

The nature and organisation of a sojourn can also influence its impact potential. Lough (2011) showed that volunteers considered their growth in intercultural competence to be higher, the longer their voluntary service lasted. The same applies to living with a host family, which demonstrates the integrative effect of this form of contact and accommodation.

A further enabling factor is a guided reflection on what has been experienced on returning home.<sup>147</sup> At this point, particular reference should be made to the increased effect that group reflection can have on the development of intercultural competence. This finding highlights the important role of the facilitating organisations in the development of competencies in the young people they send on volunteer projects. Sufficient support before, and particularly after, the voluntary service can help draw out more fully the potential for personal development offered by voluntary service.

Lough's findings on the ways in which volunteers come into contact with representatives of a foreign culture are particularly noteworthy. When the contact is characterised by reciprocity, taking place in a cooperative environment and on equal terms, this has a significant effect on the increase in intercultural competence. Working together on issues that are important to both parties can therefore create the ideal environment in which to expand and intensify intercultural skills. Voluntary service provides the ideal framework for this.

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<sup>146</sup> Lough, 2011; Lough et al., 2014.

<sup>147</sup> The importance of a debriefing meeting for facing the challenges presented on returning home is covered in greater depth in section 10 "Returning home".

## 9.6 Biographical impact

An altered perspective on life, as reported by Lo and Lee (2011) following volunteering experiences, is likely to trigger a number of changes and developments that may benefit young people throughout their lives. However, it is difficult to determine the specific causality of any individual experience, however far-reaching, on a person's overall biographical development. Nevertheless, the nature of the experience gained during a period of voluntary service may strengthen or reduce existing tendencies, or open up new opportunities in life.

It may be assumed that the increase in social capital found by Lough et al. (2014) has an impact on the course of former volunteers' lives. The results presented by the authors indicate a sustained effect that is still felt years after the experience itself. According to Powell and Bratović (2007) and Lo and Lee (2011), these long-term effects also have an impact upon the study and career paths of former volunteers.

As voluntary service often takes place against a background of poverty and underdevelopment, it gives young people an insight into the realities of lives that are in stark contrast to anything they knew before. Such confrontation with difficult circumstances may lead them to reflect on their own lives and compare them with the living conditions of others. Consequences of this can include increased gratitude and a more realistic positioning of their own society.<sup>148</sup>



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148 Harlow/Pomfret, 2007; Lo/Lee, 2011; Pan, 2014; Simpson, 2004.

10

RETURNING HOME





## 10.1 Chapter summary

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- **Literature:**

There several detailed studies on the subject, on the return of university students in particular, and some have surveyed a large number of returnees. They have generally focused on the challenges presented by returning home. A large part of the literature is extremely context sensitive, and only very limited generalisations can be made.

- **Youth exchange as W-curve:**

In its central aspects, returning home is similar to entering the host culture. Both contain the stages of euphoria, culture shock, adjustment and normalisation.

- **Personal challenges:**

- Grief at the loss of social connections and cultural experiences.
- Reverse culture shock.
- Social isolation and difficulty communicating one's experiences.
- Support (from the exchange organisation) and communication with former sojourners are of central importance in overcoming difficulties.

- **A new inward-looking perspective:**

- A more critical, reflective perspective on the returnee's own culture; greater appreciation for it.
- 

## 10.2 Definition

It is in the nature of exchange visits that they come to an end sooner or later. However long the time that lies ahead of sojourners might appear as they leave their own country, it is certain to end in a return trip home. But the question is whether a youth exchange actually ends at this point. Most of the literature described above implicitly answers this question in the affirmative as it assumes that no more new experiences are made after the return home, and that the "only" further occurrence is the perception and processing of the experiences made abroad. However, the time spent abroad can also be seen as simply one part of the exchange. The return and reintegration in familiar structures form a further part of the exchange, in which substantial experiences can quite definitely still be made.

This is precisely what the extensive literature does that focuses on the return of the participants in exchanges. While we use the word "return" here, the term "re-entry", with its sense of reintegration, is probably more accurate. After their exchange, young people find themselves confronted by numerous challenges made all the more difficult by the fact that the returnees have to reintegrate into a familiar context.

The literature does not share a common definition of return. Young people who take part in short-term projects are just as much covered by this term as university students who have completed a Master's degree abroad. What they have in common is the return to the environment that was identified as their home before the exchange. Nevertheless, although not necessarily the case, the literature generally looks at returnees from a sojourn that has lasted several months, or even years.

### 10.3 Literature review

The research into the dynamics of the return after an exchange visit focuses strongly on the experiences of university students and to a lesser extent on those of secondary students. After employees working abroad, who are referred to as corporate expatriates<sup>149</sup> and generally fall into a high income bracket, university students are the most highly researched category of people returning home.

In contrast to the subject areas discussed so far, the literature on the return home is principally concerned with the potentially negative aspects of youth exchange. To put it very simply, it investigates what psychological, emotional and socio-cultural difficulties young people have to face after their return, and how they deal with them.

The challenges that young people have to confront after their return can be very context specific. For instance, the phenomenon observed in Japan of the social rejection of both young people and adults who have spent time abroad cannot simply be transferred to other cultural environments.<sup>150</sup> The same is true for female Taiwanese students, who have talked of the difficulty, as women, of (re-)engaging with a strictly regulated role within the family after their return from the US.<sup>151</sup>

A large part of the literature examines precisely these types of context-dependent experiences and can therefore only be applied generally, or specifically to Switzerland, to a very limited extent. The following therefore primarily presents those studies that concern a return to a Western cultural area and thus show greater similarity to the challenges that can arise when returning to Switzerland.

Some of the available statements on a return after a youth exchange have a relatively wide empirical basis. For instance, there are several large-scale research projects that focus exclusively on issues to do with returning home. However, there is no escaping the fact that those studies that survey large numbers of people are limited to the English-speaking countries, in most cases the US.

Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) polled 669 students from a US university on demographic characteristics, negative emotions<sup>152</sup>, alcohol and medication use, re-entry shock<sup>153</sup> and academic fatigue after returning home. Around half the respondents had

taken part in an exchange lasting from three weeks to a semester, while the others had stayed in the US.<sup>154</sup> The survey was carried out at just one point in time, allowing correlations to be established, but not causal relationships.

Chamove and Soeterik (2006) added to the research on exchanges with a survey of young New Zealanders coming home after a year-long school exchange with the AFS. The authors collected data on feelings of grief and loss three to six months after the respondents' return,<sup>155</sup> and the answers were compared with those of a peer group that had stayed at home.<sup>156</sup> The same methodological reservation expressed about Wielkiewicz and Turkowski's work (2010) also applies to this study.

Gaw (2000) provided a further contribution to the literature on re-entry with a survey of 66 US students who completed their secondary education outside the US. The author collected data on a possible reverse culture shock and its connection to psychological well-being and the willingness to ask for help.<sup>157</sup>

In their study, Brabant et al. (1990) addressed the issue of potential difficulties in reintegration into family and social circles after a sojourn at a US university. They collected data from 96 students using a questionnaire they devised themselves.

In addition to the studies referred to here, there are numerous other studies that examine in detail the experiences of a relatively small number of returnees.<sup>158</sup> These studies provide important findings on the dynamics and realities that confront young people after their sojourn abroad. They put a face to the correlations of large masses of data and contribute to a better understanding of the complex facets of youth exchange.

What is missing from the literature on the subject of returning home after an international youth exchange is an investigation into the question of what developments people can achieve through overcoming the challenges identified. It can be assumed that the majority of the difficulties described do not continue to exist unchanged for an indefinite period after the return. The first large culture shock and the adjustments required by it clearly lead to a series of significant developments in young people's abilities and personality traits. There is no reason to assume that the same should not hold true for the challenges after their return.

149 The frequently found distinction between corporate expatriates, or expats, and migrants seems to be based both on income and on latently racist categories that are, for the most part, adopted uncritically (Koutonin, 2015). The literature is primarily dedicated to the former category.

150 Fry, 2007; Kanno, 2000.

151 Pritchard, 2011.

152 The authors combined questions they designed themselves with those of Hakistan and McLean's (1989) Brief Screen for Depression and the Significant other Scale (SOS) by Powers et al. (1988).

153 The magnitude of a possible re-entry shock was measured using Seiter and Waddell's (1989) Reentry Shock Scale.

154 The numbers the authors have given for the students polled are contradictory. They have given an overall total of 669. In the differentiation between the exchange group and the control group, however, they indicated 239 students in the former group and 420 in the latter.

155 In their survey, the authors used a questionnaire of their own design inspired by Profile of Mood States – Short Form and by Sanders et al.'s (1985) Grief Experience Inventory.

156 The authors analysed answers from 205 exchange students and 71 students who remained at home.

157 The author used the Personal Problems Inventory and the Reverse Shock Scale in his surveys.

158 Allison et al., 2012; Butcher, 2002; Christofi/Thompson, 2007; Haines, 2013; Kartoshkina, 2015; Thompson/Christofi, 2006; Ward et al., 2001. For a comprehensive overview of the literature prior to 2009, see Szkudlarek (2010).

This is a fundamental weakness in the existing literature on international youth exchange. While the impact research is concerned almost exclusively with the positive effects of the experiences in the host country, the literature on the return home is mostly limited to problematic experiences. The research would do well

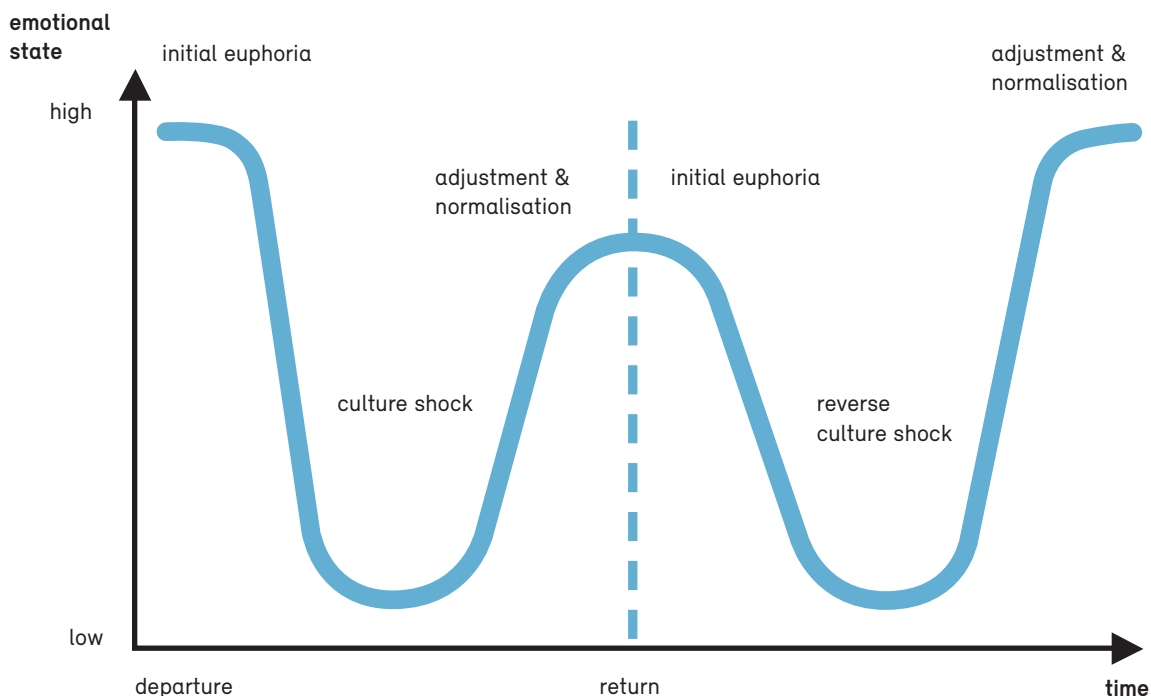
to combine the two perspectives and view youth exchange as a phenomenon that does not end with the first reunion with friends and family. Integrating into a foreign culture can lead to serious difficulties, and the challenges encountered when returning home can be a chance for personal growth and development.

#### 10.4 Youth exchange as a W-curve

The view, referred to at the start, of the period after the return home as an integral part of a youth exchange corresponds to the reverse culture shock model proposed by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), which sees the course of an exchange experience as a W-curve. When they enter the host culture, participants in the exchange are confronted by cultural differences that require an intercultural adjustment before they can find their bearings in the new environment. This process can be represented as a U-curve, with initial euphoria over the new environment replaced by the much-described culture shock, triggered principally by negative experiences in an unfamiliar environment, and followed by adjustment and then normalisation once the adjustment process has been successfully completed.<sup>159</sup>

With the return home, a process begins that is entirely comparable with that of integration into a foreign culture. This, too, follows a U-curve, with euphoria, (reverse) culture shock, and adjustment and normalisation. To fully understand the effects and challenges that an international youth exchange involves and/or exposes participants to, both of these processes must be considered together. Only then can the full scope of this life experience be appreciated.

#### Youth exchange as a W-curve



<sup>159</sup> The representation of cultural adjustment as a U-curve comes from Lysgaard (1955).

## 10.5 Challenges relating to self-skills

### Returning from an exchange can hold in store personal challenges that have to be overcome.

A central question in the literature on returning home concerns re-entry trauma and its possible development. In their study of New Zealand secondary students, Chamove and Soeterik (2006) received mixed answers to this question. The authors found that two thirds of the respondents felt the return to New Zealand to be frustrating, while the remaining third had no problems worth mentioning with it. This assessment was also reflected in the returnees' psychological well-being: those who felt their return was easy exhibited significantly higher scores in this area than those who described it as difficult. It is worth noting that those secondary students who described their return as problematic exhibited a level of grief comparable with that felt for a deceased person.

Ward et al. (2001) and Kartoshkina (2015) also wrote of mourning processes that sojourners went through after their return. Ward et al. saw this as not very surprising since young people form strong social ties during an exchange that are lost as a result of their return home. According to the authors, grief is a normal reaction to this loss. In some cases, however, psychological distress was observed that reached clinical levels.

Butcher (2002) extended the understanding of grief over lost connections and cultural experiences in the host country to include a social component. He described the feeling of loss experienced as "disenfranchised grief". With this, he meant that the grief felt is not a socially supported form of grief and thus cannot generally be openly acknowledged or expressed. On their return, young sojourners are expected to be happy about being reunited with their family and old friends; they are not expected to mourn the loss of new friends and their host family.

Such strong emotional reactions demonstrate, on the one hand, the great importance that a school exchange can have in the life of the participants; on the other, they underline the vital role played by the exchange organisations in supervising the students and supporting them after their return. The organisations responsible can only recognise extreme reactions and offer suitable support if they respond to the potential difficulties of the return home appropriately.

In addition to the loss of social connections in the host country, the above-mentioned phenomenon of reverse culture shock represents a further challenge. Gaw (2000) found that there was a greater probability of returnees who exhibited a higher degree of reverse culture shock reporting difficulty adjusting and problems with shyness than there was for returnees with relatively low levels.

The question of re-entry trauma has in no way been answered conclusively, however. In fact, Brabant et al. (1990) came to the conclusion that a trauma of this type is by no means unavoidable when sojourners return to their own country. Only a few of the university students polled by the authors reported difficulties and those who did only reported them in one of three themed areas of their social life.<sup>160</sup>

Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) came to similar conclusions in a large-scale study of returning university students. The authors found no significant indications of re-entry trauma and observed no appreciable difference in the incidence of symptoms of depression when compared to the students who had remained at home.

A further challenge for returning youths highlighted in the literature is the possibility of social isolation. Loneliness is identified in a number of studies as a problem that is frequently described.<sup>161</sup> One possible explanation for this is the difficulty of communicating to friends and family experiences made during the exchange. The frequent lack of interest in the returnees' experiences aggravates this situation. It is often difficult for friends and families who stayed at home to establish a connection with experiences that have taken place in a context that is entirely alien to them.<sup>162</sup>

With regard to the returnees' own families, Haines (2013) mentioned the "laps of silence" that can occur once the initial euphoria over the return home has evaporated. Like Wilson (1993), he observed a tendency in the families to quickly return to their daily routine, leaving the returnees too little space to talk of their experiences. Problems may also arise in connection with parental expectations and the family conventions that previously applied.<sup>163</sup> Butcher (2002) noted that this does not necessarily indicate a deterioration in the returnees' relationship to their families. The time spent abroad can actually lead to a greater appreciation of one's family and thus lastingly improve the relationship.

<sup>160</sup> The authors surveyed returnees about potential difficulties with their own families, with friends and with everyday situations. Problems were only mentioned in the sphere of family life and then mainly by female respondents.

<sup>161</sup> Allison et al., 2012; Gaw, 2000; Ward et al., 2001.

<sup>162</sup> Allison et al., 2012.

<sup>163</sup> Butcher, 2002.



**Enabling factors**

Given the many challenges that young people can find themselves facing after returning to their own country, the question is what factors can contribute to a successful reintegration. The relevant literature produces a remarkably strong consensus on this and points to two measures in particular: support, and communication with former sojourners.

Preparing appropriately for the return home even before it takes place can mitigate possible negative aspects. Butcher (2002) found that the opportunity to reflect on one's own changes during the time spent abroad can make the return home much easier. Walling et al. (2006) shared this assessment and underlined how important it is to prepare oneself for a change in one's own cultural identity. They also said that returnees need to be told that social isolation and negative feelings can be completely normal after returning home. Being prepared for these aspects helps returnees to understand these dynamics and deal with them better.

One possible way of being prepared for a potential re-entry shock is through communication with former sojourners. Thompson and Christofi (2006) emphasised that young people can particularly benefit from the experiences of their predecessors as this can establish a direct link to their own. In this, associations of former sojourners can contribute enormously to preparation before the return and follow-up afterwards. They also provide an outlet where participants can talk about any difficulties both before and after their return.<sup>164</sup>

“Debriefing” sessions can offer returnees an additional platform where they can deal with the challenges that arise after the exchange experience.<sup>165</sup> In case of more serious reintegration difficulties, Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) saw focus groups as appropriate in which returnees could go into detail about specific difficulties in order to process these under professional guidance. In addition, Christofi and Thompson (2007) suggested considering calling in social support to help with problems in reintegrating into the family and circle of friends.

The great importance of both support and communication with former sojourners in successfully overcoming the challenges faced after returning home indicates the key role played by exchange organisations. Not only can they prepare participants appropriately for entering a new culture but they are also ideally placed to support young people during their time abroad, to make them aware of relevant changes before their return, and to enable them to communicate with former sojourners in their own country. Therefore, it is immensely important that the organisations responsible be aware of these tasks and demonstrate the corresponding experience and quality in their work.

Experiences made in the context of an international youth exchange take on an enormous significance in young people's lives. To ensure that these experiences do not assume overwhelming dimensions, preparation, support and follow-up by professional exchange organisations is an important factor in the success of this potentially life-changing experience.

## 10.6 A new inward-looking perspective

### Returning from an exchange can stimulate reflective processes on participants' own cultural environment.

The intercultural component of international youth exchange has already been examined in great detail. It is responsible for a whole series of far-reaching developments triggered by the intensive engagement with foreign cultures. These include a new perspective on sojourners' own cultural context.

Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) found sojourning university students showed a significantly higher scepticism towards their own culture after their return than was the case for their peers. While the authors attributed a negative connotation to this fact

without any further explanation, critical scrutiny of familiar cultural norms and realities can be seen as an important quality in educated and self-analytical young people. This assessment was shared by Walling et al. (2006), who linked personal growth with questioning unconditional allegiance to one's own culture. In addition to stimulating a differentiated view of participants' own origins, an exchange also has the potential to make them feel more grateful for the familiar, as Walling et al. (2006) and Kartoshkina (2015) reported.

In connection with this, Pritchard (2011) spoke of multiple cultural identities experienced by young people following an exchange. This can definitely be equated with their developing their own cultural sensitivity: the integration of cultural attitudes and mentalities into one's own behaviour is clearly an indication of a marked development of this intercultural competence.

<sup>164</sup> Butcher, 2002; Christofi/Thompson, 2007; Walling et al., 2006.

<sup>165</sup> Kartoshkina, 2015.

11

HOST FAMILY



## 11.1 Chapter summary

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- **Literature:**

The research is very limited. With just one exception, there are no explicit studies on the impacts of youth exchange on host families.

- **Intercultural competence:**

- An intensive, lengthy contact leads to the reduction of prejudices and stereotyping in the host family.

- **Integrating effect of the host family:**

- Social integration in the host country improves the self-esteem, personal development, creativity and emotional stability of the young participants once they return home.
- Host families can contribute to the social integration in the host country.

- **Sources of social friction:**

- Social differences between the host family and the young sojourners are an often-overlooked potential for conflict.
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## 11.2 Definition

All the exchange programme impacts presented so far refer to the young participants. This is hardly surprising, since it is they who are the main focus of the corresponding programmes. However, many forms of exchange would be scarcely feasible on a large scale in their current form without families ready to take in a young person for a not-insignificant period of time and to integrate him or her into their daily lives.

The studies that look at host families offer no definition of what constitutes a host family. It can, however, be assumed that it is less the concept of family that is the defining characteristic here than the willingness to house young people during their sojourn. As a result, “host family” is taken to mean a household that accommodates young people during their exchange. Host families are an integral part of various forms of youth exchange, even though the known research restricts itself to host families in school exchanges. However, there is no reason to assume that the impacts described are limited to this programme format.

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## 11.3 Literature review

The research on host families, and the impacts that their experiences have on day-to-day family life, is extremely limited, with the consequence that there are only three publications to mention here. First of these is a study by Vollhardt (2010) that examined the question of host families’ cultural sensitivity development following their experiences in the context of an AFS school exchange. For the study, 96 German families were surveyed, half of whom had already housed an exchange secondary student for a full academic year. The other half had already been accepted as host families by AFS and were about to take in a young person.

Both groups received descriptions of situations in which the behaviour of people from another culture led to misunderstandings or conflicts with representatives of their own culture, and were asked to describe this behaviour. The answers obtained were analysed by Vollhardt for their sensitivity towards foreign cultures.

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The second study is an evaluation of 20 narrative interviews of German-speaking host families. Here, Weidemann and Blüml (2009) focused on the experiences and problem-solving strategies of host families and on their expectations before the arrival of a young person in the family.

And, finally, Lohmann’s (2008) published dissertation examined findings on dynamics between host families and guest children. Using interviews with 88 German host families from an AFS exchange, the author analysed issues of social equality and inequality in international school exchanges.

## 11.4 Intercultural competence

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**Welcoming in a guest child increases the intercultural sensitivity of host families, while their acceptance of stereotypes and prejudices decreases.**

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A sojourn abroad during their youth is a unique experience in the lives of young adults. But the experience of welcoming a young person into one's own family and integrating him or her into daily life for an extended period of time can be just as profound.

The findings described in chapter 4 on the impacts of intergroup contacts on prejudices towards members of unfamiliar groups suggest that it is not only the young participants in an exchange who can benefit from a sojourn abroad and are able to overcome prejudices: this also applies to the host family. Vollhardt's (2010) results clearly show that intercultural contact in the form of taking in an exchange student can contribute to cultural understanding.

Families who took in an exchange student demonstrated a greater ability to recognise behaviour with potential for conflict in representatives of foreign cultures and to describe it in a culturally sensitive way than families with no exchange experience. After the "guest child experience", behaviour with potential for intercultural conflict was more likely to be explained with cultural and structural factors than by resorting to cultural stereotypes. This type of behaviour was also less often confused with personality traits. This capacity for an external and culturally sensitive behaviour assessment opened up the possibility to behave appropriately in potentially conflictual intercultural situations and thus prevent misunderstandings. Furthermore, this effect proved to be not just limited to the adolescent exchange student's culture, but also applied to members of other cultures. The experience of opening up one's own home to a young foreigner for an academic year consequently offered an enormous potential for interacting more sensitively and avoiding conflict with people of different cultures.

### ***Enabling factors***

According to Vollhardt (2010), the length and intensity of the contact with the representative of a foreign culture in one's own home are the factors that enable the hosting experience to generate the effect of fostering understanding. They also permit the in-depth exchange that makes intergroup contact a means of mutual understanding and elimination of prejudices.





## 11.5 Integrating effect of the host family

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**Host families offer a bridge to the society in the host country and can thus make an essential contribution to important social integration during an exchange.**

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The fact that participants in a school exchange perceive the time spent as so important and unique is in large part thanks to their experiences with their host family. Bachner and Zeuschel (2009a) and Weichbrodt (2014) underlined the importance of the guest child role taken on by the youngsters. It is not only experienced as the most important and most influential aspect of the exchange, it also forms the context for successful integration into the host community. It therefore contributes significantly to the young participants' positive group relationships.

A number of studies point to the immense importance of social integration in the host country. Hutteman et al. (2014) emphasised the close interaction between self-esteem and social integration in the context of a school exchange. Closer integration into social networks improves the self-esteem of young people during their exchange, and, in turn, greater self-esteem contributes to better social integration.

Furukawa (1997) found that the challenges that young people may face after their return home are also connected to their experiences during the exchange. In particular, an unsuccessful attempt at social integration in the host country can lead to difficulty adjusting emotionally after they return to their own country.

The experiences that life in a previously unknown family generates can also include a large number of occasions where events do not match expectations. These are the experiences that Thomas (2005) saw as being key to changes in young people's theory of reality. They can trigger chain reactions that have a long-term positive effect on the participants' personality and way of life.

Statements taken from creativity research also support the conclusion that host families play a significant role in creativity facilitation through experience abroad. Both Leung et al. (2008) and Maddux and Galinsky (2009) came to the conclusion that the more people immerse themselves in the foreign culture, the more impact the multicultural experiences have on creativity. There is no doubt that this is best accomplished by integration into existing family networks in the host country.

## 11.6 Sources of social friction

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**Social differences between guest child and host family are often misinterpreted as cultural differences, something that creates a potential for conflict, albeit an avoidable one.**

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Sojourning in a previously unknown family also holds risks and challenges. Lohmann (2008) alluded to the often-overlooked sources of social friction between host families and teenage exchange students. During their exchange, the young participants live with a family that is not only culturally different from their own but potentially also different in terms of its socio-economic circumstances. However, as school exchange programmes focus on cultural differences in the preparation stage, according to Lohmann, social differences in the participants are often not noticed or confused with cultural differences, which can lead to avoidable tensions and conflicts. This aspect is overlooked in the research on youth exchanges in general – and on school exchanges in particular.

### *Enabling factors*

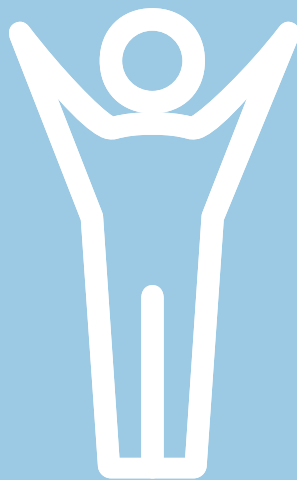
With regard to potential socio-economic differences between the young participants and the host families, Lohmann (2008) called for a better awareness of this conflict area. Smaller social differences tend to lead to a smoother exchange experience, easier integration and a reduced formation of prejudices towards the host culture.<sup>166</sup> As a result, Lohmann saw it as the duty of exchange organisations to prepare secondary students for the possibility of encountering not only cultural but also socio-economic differences.

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<sup>166</sup> Lohmann's statement that large social differences can contribute to the formation of prejudices relativised the statements in the literature on the contact hypothesis. However, her work does not contain any large-scale empirical research in this area.

12

OPPORTUNITY IN LIFE



## 12.1 Chapter summary

- Social barriers make it more difficult for young people who are from socio-economically more disadvantaged families and/or educationally underprivileged to access exchange experiences and the competence acquisition associated with them.
- It has been shown that the young people who benefit most from an exchange are primarily those who had relatively limited personal and/or intercultural competencies prior to the experience. However, it is precisely these young people who often have more difficulty accessing exchange programmes.
- A exchange offers young people from an environment with no international experience a unique opportunity for a more cosmopolitan life.
- Young people who are educationally underprivileged and/or from socio-economically disadvantaged families can derive the greatest possible overall benefit from a youth exchange.

The numerous positive effects of the different forms of youth exchange say it all: whatever form an exchange might take, it is an immense opportunity in a young person's life. It contributes to the acquisition of important skills and competencies; it imparts knowledge and strengthens important positive personality traits.

It also contains the potential to influence not only the youngsters' biography but also the life of future generations. At the same time, there is reason to believe that the full potential of youth exchanges is far from exhausted. Socio-economic barriers prevent the benefit of international youth exchanges being fully realised.

## 12.2 Access restrictions

### Access to exchange experiences is subject to socio-economic restrictions.

A youth exchange is an experience that is principally enjoyed by people from an educated background. The data in the LifE study, in whose collection and evaluation the University of Zurich is also involved, clearly shows this trend through the example of Germany. More than half the young people surveyed who had completed a sojourn abroad had successfully completed their final school exams<sup>167</sup>, while this was true for fewer than a quarter of young people with no exchange experience. Furthermore, almost half the sojourners had a university degree or equivalent. In comparison, only a little more than a tenth of people with no exchange experience had one.<sup>168</sup>

But, even with the same level of education, there are differences in access to exchange experiences. In the German context, Carlson et al. (2014) pointed out that the probability of taking part in a school exchange is also shaped by the socio-economic circumstances of the students' parents. Children from the lower social classes, in particular, very seldom take part in school exchange programmes. They often lack the necessary financial means.

"Particularly for lower-middle-class parents, it is [...] not easy to offer their children a sojourn abroad, because, in comparison to the upper middle classes, they lack the necessary material resources, the information and certainties transmitted through their social capital, and, above all, a specific form of cultural capital, that is to say their own transnational experiences."<sup>169</sup> This is the other side to the reproductive nature of international mobility mentioned by Weichbrodt (2014), and which Hansel and Chen (2008) also found across the generations.

Previous exchange experience raises the probability of further sojourns abroad, leads to a more international (social) life, and increases the likelihood that the person's own children will themselves have international experiences. Conversely, the lack of international experience within young people's own families is an obstacle to their participation in an exchange. This can be seen particularly clearly with apprentices, whose families often play an inhibiting role.<sup>170</sup>

Youth exchange can also be a mechanism that contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities, by making competence acquisition through an exchange more difficult precisely for those young people who already come from less privileged social backgrounds. Thus Gerhards and Hans (2013), in their analysis

<sup>167</sup> The German final school exam is the equivalent of the Swiss Matura or Passerelle.

<sup>168</sup> Compare to Bruggmann, 2009.

<sup>169</sup> Carlson et al., 2014, p. 127.

<sup>170</sup> See also section 8.7 "Obstacles".

of Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) data,<sup>171</sup> came to the conclusion that “the probability of a school sojourn abroad [is] strongly determined by the material environment in the family home”.<sup>172</sup> Bruggmann (2009), too, spoke of the development potential of the family home, which reflects social differences in the participation in exchange programmes. This assessment was confirmed by Büchner (2004).

The data presented here comes from the EU countries and to a large extent from Germany. Social mobility naturally depends in part on national factors, and statements concerning it cannot simply be transferred from one national context to another. Nevertheless, there is no reason to assume that the situation in Switzerland does not have certain similarities to other European countries.

### 12.3 Big impact potential

The unequal access to exchange experiences and to the competence acquisition associated with them is a regrettable fact. It is exacerbated by the fact that young people from an educationally underprivileged and/or socio-economically disadvantaged environment could benefit disproportionately from an exchange. In fact, young people from disadvantaged groups could experience a “big impact” in the context of an exchange, but often do not because their social circumstances make access more difficult for them. In other words, international youth exchange holds an enormous potential that is not being exploited.

Bruggmann (2009) clearly showed that young men with strong xenophobic tendencies, in particular, can drastically change their tolerance towards foreigners through a sojourn abroad. Obviously, a low education level should not be equated with an intolerance of foreigners, but the connection between the level of formal education and xenophobia is a repeatedly replicated finding.<sup>173</sup> In an analysis of educational expansion in Germany, Rippl (2006) even noted that “in comparison to other predictors, education is often the strongest indicator for xenophobic tendencies.”<sup>174</sup> Cross-border experiences in the context of a youth exchange present an ideal opportunity for young people with little formal education to develop their attitude towards foreigners in a positive direction.

In the US context, Stebleton et al. (2013) found a similar potential for members of under-represented minorities and economically disadvantaged families. Following a sojourn abroad, university students from these backgrounds showed the greatest developments in the application of disciplinary knowledge, the development of intercultural and linguistic competencies and the ability to work with people from other cultures.

In the context of a year-long school exchange, too, mention has already been made of the tendency for those young people to make greater progress who had more limited intercultural skills before the exchange.<sup>175</sup> Considering the tendency for people with international experience in their youth to enjoy increased intercultural social contact and further sojourns abroad, it seems reasonable to assume that a connection exists between secondary students’ intercultural skills before their exchange and the international experience of their family environment. In other words: those secondary students who can disproportionately benefit from an exchange tend to come from an environment that encourages and/or enables a school exchange less because it contains no experiences of this type.

The findings presented regarding access to international experiences and their biggest possible impacts lead to a simple yet far-reaching conclusion. In order to be able to exploit the full potential of international youth exchanges, the opportunity for an exchange experience must above all be given to those young people who currently have more difficulty accessing it. They are the ones who derive the greatest overall benefit from an exchange. By participating in an exchange programme, these young people are offered a unique life chance to enrich not only their own future life by improving a variety of competencies but also that of generations to come.

Social differences have the tendency to reproduce from generation to generation, but the same also holds true for cross-border mobility, and the competencies, attitudes and life choices influenced by this. In Switzerland, therefore, international youth exchange should be principally encouraged for young people who come from a socially and/or economically disadvantaged environment. In this way the full social potential of this form of cultural understanding can be exploited and young people can be given a unique life chance.

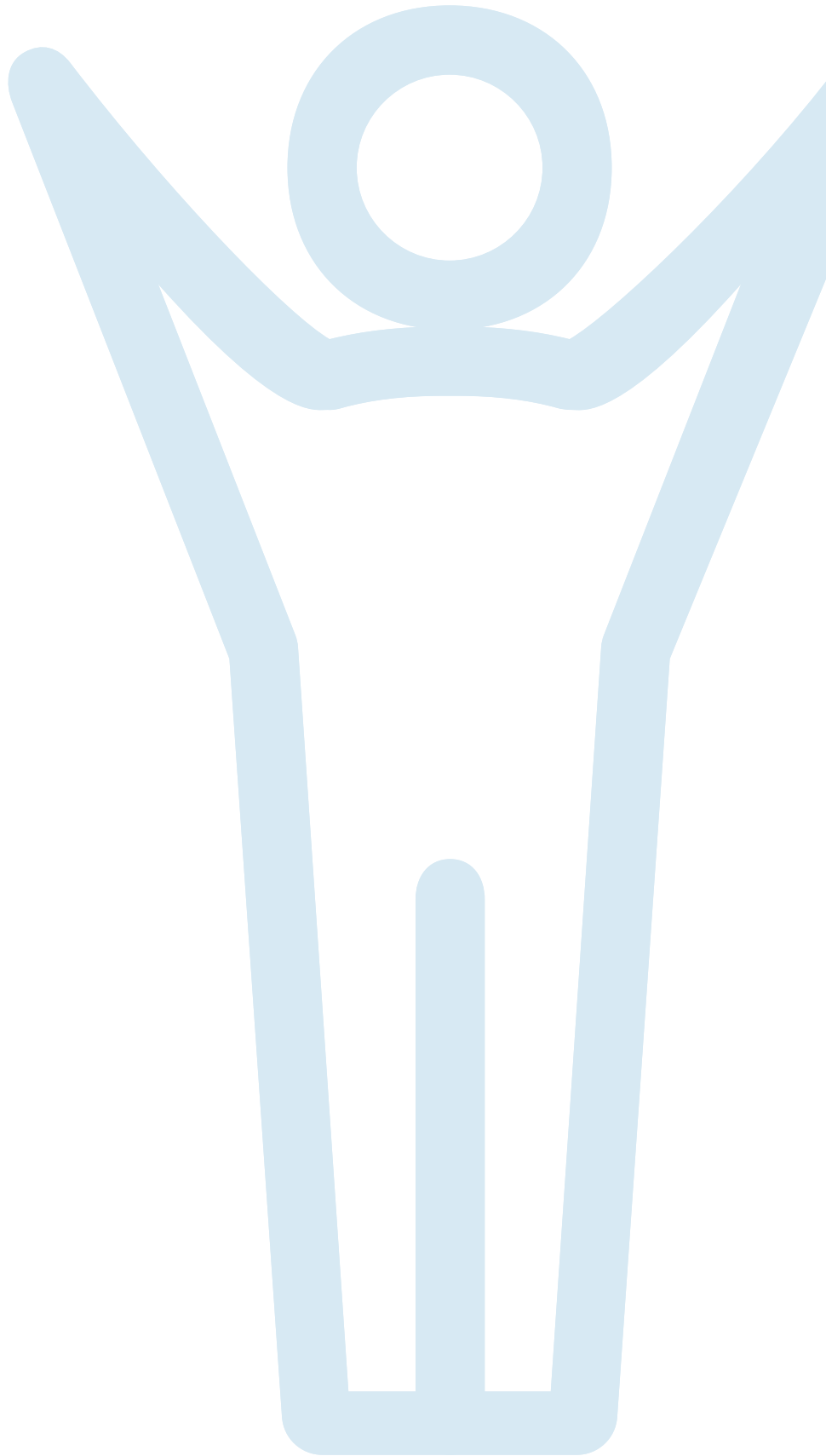
171 The SOEP collects representative longitudinal data from German households. Every year, about 25,000 persons in nearly 15,000 households are surveyed on their social and economic characteristics.

172 Gerhards, 2010, p. 99.

173 Fend, 1994; Fritzsche, 2006; Wagner/Zick, 1995; Wahl et al., 2001.

174 Rippl, 2006, p. 231.

175 Compare to section 5.5.1 “Intercultural sensitivity”, and Hammer, 2005.



# 13

## CONCLUSION



**Youth exchange works!** It triggers the development of important personal and intercultural skills, it has the potential to contribute to a successful professional career, and its effects can be visible across the generations. Furthermore, it gives young people equipped with comparatively limited competencies, in particular, a substantial opportunity to improve a number of different skills. These findings are the fruit of an enormous abundance and variety of research dealing with questions on the effects of exchange experiences in different disciplinary approaches.

For instance, research shows that following a school exchange, secondary students can increase their self-esteem, face unknown challenges more calmly and return emotionally strengthened from their experiences abroad. However, the relevant research focuses on the development of intercultural sensitivity and associated competencies that can increase significantly as a result of a school exchange. Furthermore, former exchange participants demonstrate a higher probability of spending time abroad in their later lives and of motivating their children to do the same.

The literature on short-term programmes demonstrates that these developments can also be triggered in relatively short exchange formats and that children, too, can potentially benefit from them. International youth encounters can thus represent a possible alternative for youngsters for whom an entire academic year abroad appears too long, too expensive, or not feasible for some other reason.

During university studies, too, personal and intercultural skills can be considerably increased. The research concerned with mobility in the context of the ERASMUS programme, in particular, indicates the development of personality traits that are very useful for a successful career. University students are also most often the respondents in the research projects that demonstrate the positive effects of multicultural experience on creative abilities. It can be assumed, however that this effect is not limited to university students alone, but is rather a general effect of many different types of intercultural experience.

While school exchanges and student mobility have long been established practices in the secondary schools and universities of many countries, trainee mobility programmes and internships are still relatively less widespread formats of youth exchange. This is particularly regrettable as they offer young people who are already working the opportunity to acquire self-skills, which can be extremely important for lifelong learning and thus also for professional success.

Professional mobility also represents a remarkably little-researched exchange form. A better understanding of the benefits of trainee mobility programmes and internships, both for the young participants and for the businesses sending them, could be an important step in convincing hitherto sceptical companies of the advantages of an exchange.

Voluntary service is another a relatively little-researched form of youth exchange, whose potential impacts on participants have principally been revealed through selective and very context-specific studies. Former volunteers have spoken of a changed perspective on their own lives and seen the contact to people with similar values and issues as enriching and useful for their further career. Systematic research that includes different programmes and focuses specifically on the acquisition of relevant competencies would be a necessary next step, to be able to better evaluate the potential of this exchange format.

The findings on the individual forms of exchange are supplemented by extensive literature on the return home. This focuses on the challenges that young people often face after returning home from an exchange. It can be seen that mourning processes, social isolation and communication difficulties are not uncommon following a sojourn abroad. However, there is very little in the research on what overcoming these challenges means for young people's personality. This is similar to the impact research, which focuses very narrowly on positive developments.

It would be well for the research to take into account both perspectives, in other words to explicitly ask about any challenges during the sojourn abroad and also to investigate the additional development opportunities created by sojourners successfully overcoming difficulties when they return home.

In contrast, the literature on the role of host families in international youth exchanges is still in a very early stage. Although host families play a central role in certain forms of exchange, little is known about them or about the impacts that taking in a guest child can have on them. However, the existing research makes it clear that hosting young people from a foreign culture can lead to the reduction of prejudices and stereotyping on the part of the host family. Host families also take on the role of bridge builders and facilitate the sojourners' social integration in the host country.

A significant aspect of youth exchange is a recurring theme in all the available literature and is referred to in different formats and with respect to different impacts: it is those young people who have limited competencies before the exchange who most benefit from their experiences abroad. However, the same people often participate less in exchange activities as a result of social barriers and economic circumstances. Action should be taken here to specifically encourage these people's access to exchange programmes, if we are to achieve the greatest possible overall benefit from international youth exchange.

Irrespective of the magnitude of competence growth achieved and developments triggered, an exchange is without a doubt an incredibly rewarding and enriching experience. The great number of positive influences on the youngsters taking part, above all in personal and intercultural skills, make a youth exchange an exceptionally worthwhile investment in their future. Youth exchange is a life experience that contributes to the profound and lasting growth of all participants.

# 14

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