

Open the Door to the World

VIEWS ON MOBILITY GUIDANCE FROM UP NORTH



euro | guidance



Erasmus+

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Why Mobility Guidance?

With the new Erasmus+ Programme, the numbers of people in Europe studying and training abroad for a period of time will more than double. What do career guidance counsellors have to do with that, one might ask. From the EU's point of view, the answer is "everything". Not only can they participate as individuals in this great wave of learning mobility, but they are also seen as catalysts to encourage others to seize the opportunity. Promoting this idea is one of the Euroguidance centre's main *raison d'être*. The main roles of the network are twofold: to promote the European dimension in guidance and to provide quality information to counsellors on guidance development and mobility in Europe.

In this publication the Euroguidance centres in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden contribute to the debate on advantages and challenges that this mobility scheme has opened up for counsellors. The focus is mainly on four aspects:

- **Hidden competences**
- **Mobility counselling**
- **Disadvantaged groups**
- **Open-mindedness**

These themes are highlighted through articles by internationally recognized experts in guidance and mobility and interviews with guidance practitioners, employers and mobility participants. The writers of this compendium would like to express their sincere thanks to all the external contributors who made it a reality.

The Nordic and Baltic Euroguidance centres

DENMARK: www.ufm.dk/en/euroguidance

ESTONIA: www.innove.ee/en/lifelong-guidance

FINLAND: www.cimo.fi/services/euroguidance_finland

ICELAND: www.euroguidance.is

LATVIA: www.viaa.gov.lv/Euroguidance

LITHUANIA: www.euroguidance.lt

NORWAY: euroguidance.eu/centres

SWEDEN: www.uhr.se/euroguidance



So Much to Gain

It is easy to identify obvious skills people acquire while living in another country, starting from a better knowledge of the local language, understanding different cultures, and strengthening character. But research reveals that there are other benefits as well, some of them skills that employers are asking for with growing force, without necessarily realizing that they can be gained while staying abroad.

Productivity, Curiosity and Resilience:

The Extended Understanding of International Experience

Competences, such as tolerance, language skills, and cultural knowledge, are learning outcomes that have traditionally been linked to international mobility. Curiosity, productivity, and resilience are attributes that employers are looking for when recruiting skilled employees. However, in a recent study on international mobility conducted in Finland¹ it was discovered that many employers are not able to link these competences and people's international experiences at recruitment. Therefore, they recognise only a small amount of the competences that new employees who have studied or worked abroad might bring to their companies.

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HIDDEN COMPETENCES

We assume that skills and competences developed through international experiences are an asset on the labour market. But is this true? In 2012–13, the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) and the think tank Demos Helsinki examined how employers rated the skills and knowledge acquired through international experiences within their recruitment procedures. The research studied international experiences in relation to working life and suggested new ways of defining their learning outcomes. The main findings of this project are that employers do not necessarily value all learning mobility experiences when recruiting new employees.

Employers' views and expectations regarding international experiences were investigated. How do employers value international skills and competences at recruitment? What skills and competences are associated with international

Piilotettu osaaminen (Hidden Competences). Available in English at www.cimo.fi/services/publications/faktaa_-_facts_and_figures_1_2014.

experiences? How are international experiences defined? And what are the qualities driving working life now and in the future? A large number of individuals from education, start-up businesses, and cultural fields as well as representatives of large Finnish companies were involved in this project. The results of the study are based on workshops, interviews with experts, and a survey of students and employers, which resulted in 283 responses from employers and 1,770 responses from students.

TOWARDS A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF INTERNATIONAL COMPETENCES

Many of the key competences required from new staff members are the same that employers who operate internationally link with international experience, such as creativity, networking ability, and general interest in new things. These competences clearly differ from the ones traditionally associated with international experience, such as language skills and cultural understanding, tolerance and broad-mindedness. International mobility produces the kind of competences that the employers seek for, but they are not able to link these competences and people's international experiences at recruitment.

Thorough analysis of the research data can add three new attributes to the hidden aspects of international competences: productivity, resilience, and curiosity. Productivity can be understood as efficiency, analytical ability, problem-solving ability, and credibility. Resilient employees are able to adapt, they know their limits and strengths and are confident and persistent. Curiosity forms the basis for many attributes linked with international experiences: the urge to learn, search, and experience; interest towards new issues; intercultural knowledge; and networking ability. These factors help us understand the value



TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE



- Language skills
- Wide networks within one's field
- Understanding of international business
- Ability to work with multiple people
- Having lived or studied abroad

EXTENDED UNDERSTANDING OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE



- Ability to think outside one's sphere of experience
- Broad networks also in different fields
- New abilities and skills during free time
- Work with diverse groups of people regardless of language or location
- Follows global media

Illustration from CIMO report *Hidden Competences*

of international experience. Productivity, resilience, and curiosity can help to gain competitive advantage in the working life in general, not only in international organisations.

Curiosity – the fuel of motivation irrespective of the field of study or education level of an individual – can be considered the most interesting of these traits. While productivity and resilience have been discussed in the labour market context, curiosity has not. An employee's curiosity is beneficial to all organisations. The world needs people who can create successful businesses, and curiosity helps identify what drives the future. Most likely, curiosity will continue to rise in status as a social strength, and it will also have an impact on the job market.

The research calls for employers to develop a better understanding of the new skills and competences needed in workplaces. They must also come to understand the key role international experiences play in developing these skills and competences. Young people and students face a similar challenge: how to articulate the skills and competences acquired while studying or working abroad?

NEW TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCES

It was obvious that tools were lacking for a better understanding of the international key competences that young people and students might have. In order to get fresh ideas directly from the target group, the task of creating such tools was given to the summer trainees of CIMO. They designed a web-based test that helps young people understand their international competences². The trainees also collected some good ideas for expressing international competences when searching for a job. It is not enough just to mention the period abroad in one's CV; one has to be able to show clearly the learning outcomes acquired. The new tools for guidance practitioners include exercises that are designed for individual and group guidance sessions. ■

2) The test is aimed at young Finnish people, and it is available in the official languages of Finland – Finnish and Swedish: www.maailmalle.net/piilotettuosaaminen.

EMPLOYERS AND INTERNATIONAL COMPETENCES: A NEW UNDERSTANDING



Illustration from CIMO report *Hidden Competences*



Speed and Tolerance – an Employer’s View on International Competences

When evaluating the relationship between business development and internationality, Kostas Noreika, the executive of EVP International, is very specific: “The conclusion I came to thanks to my own international experience is that if you want to develop a business abroad, you have to work with the local people. Only then you will be successful.” According to Mr Noreika, one can never have enough international experience, and especially the time needed to gain it, to feel equal to the local people or companies.



“International experience provides competence, which helps achieve goals quicker,” says Mr Kostas Noreika, executive of EVP International, Lithuania.

Mr Noreika is one of the people who know most about contemporary finance and different types of electronic payment. His company, established in 2004, now manages the *Paysera* brand; the company has 68 employees and offers electronic payment services worldwide.

“I myself have limited international experience,” admits Mr Noreika. His experience consists of previous employment in an international company, participation in exhibitions abroad, business trips and personal journeys. However, the executive of EVP International sees it this way: “I think this is not real international experience, just a mild exploration.”

THINKING FASTER

The biggest benefit of international experience, according to Mr Noreika, is speed. “International experience provides competence, which helps achieve goals quicker,” he says. There are different kinds of competence. Sometimes it is difficult to measure how much persons have been influenced by international experience and how much by other factors. However, it is not that important to employers. They are looking for individuals with overall competence – professional employees who can help achieve the goals of the company quickly.

64%

64 % of employers say graduates with an international background are given greater professional responsibility.

Erasmus Impact Study, 2014



Proficiency in a foreign language is closely associated with international experience, and EVP International requires it from the individuals applying for Business expansion and Customer service positions. The candidates are required to be fluent in at least two foreign languages. "Foreign business partners interact with you differently if you speak their native language," acknowledges Mr Noreika, "but there is no essential difference if this proficiency is cultivated through an international experience or otherwise. The candidates have to exhibit their fluency during an interview."

The experience in working for an international company in Lithuania is also singled out. "It may be even more important than working for an international company abroad. The candidates who have worked at such companies in foreign countries often come back full of ideas that are hardly adaptable in Lithuania. At the same time, work experience in an international company in Lithuania changes people tremendously – it provides a deeper understanding of organizational principles, expands proficiency and fluency in a foreign language."

GREATER TOLERANCE

Mr Noreika has no doubt that international experience influences one's personal qualities as well. In his opinion, such employees are more tolerant towards people of different cultures and races. It is easier for them to adapt themselves to an international team. "However, personal qualities develop in an individual and complex manner, and I believe that there are no such qualities that can be gained only from an international experience," claims the executive of EVP International.

"Do I need more international experience? At my current job, probably not, but if we plan to expand abroad, then yes, without a doubt," Mr Noreika summarizes. Keeping in mind the speed of international development of business today, any remaining doubt about the importance of international experience in the business and job market is eliminated. ■

Monika Rajeckaitė
Euroguidance Lithuania



Identifying Skills Acquired Through Mobility

It can be difficult for someone who has studied or worked abroad to pinpoint the acquired skills and demonstrate their value to a potential employer. To help with this, a mobility skills grid was developed by the COMPASS project³. This useful tool arranges skills on a grid along the lines of the European Language Portfolio, with six levels of proficiency from A1 to C2. The grid has now been adapted by the Euroguidance Centre in Latvia and is being used all over the country with success.

The grid, which you will find on the following pages, covers both “hard” and “soft”, or professional and social, competences. Professional competences include language, mathematics, ICT and technical skills. Social competences include integration in group settings, teamwork, problem solving, awareness of social context, showing initiative, achieving goals, recognizing and complying with social norms as well as defending one’s personal rights and the rights of others.

Before going abroad, participants carry out a self-assessment to determine their initial level of skills; this is done with the assistance of a mentor to ensure objectivity. It is important to remind the participants that the grid refers to activities performed in a foreign environment, not at home. Such mental preparation is very useful since individuals can get frustrated when they cannot perform in the same manner as usual when faced with language and cultural barriers. Knowing what to expect can reduce the stress.

SETTING REALISTIC GOALS

When the initial skills level is determined, learning objectives for the exchange or placement can be set, depending on the length of the mobility period and the planned programme. At this point, it is useful to discuss concrete activities that the participants can take part in or arrange for themselves in order to exercise and develop specific skills. The initial and intended skills levels should be marked on the grid and notes added

about skill-building activities. It is easiest to do this in the electronic version of the grid. The completed grid can be used as a tool for the sending organization to negotiate the content of the placement or exchange and to inform the host about the skills level and ambitions of the participants. During the mobility experience, participants can refer to the grid to check and to remind themselves of their learning objectives.

WHAT HAVE THE PARTICIPANTS ACHIEVED?

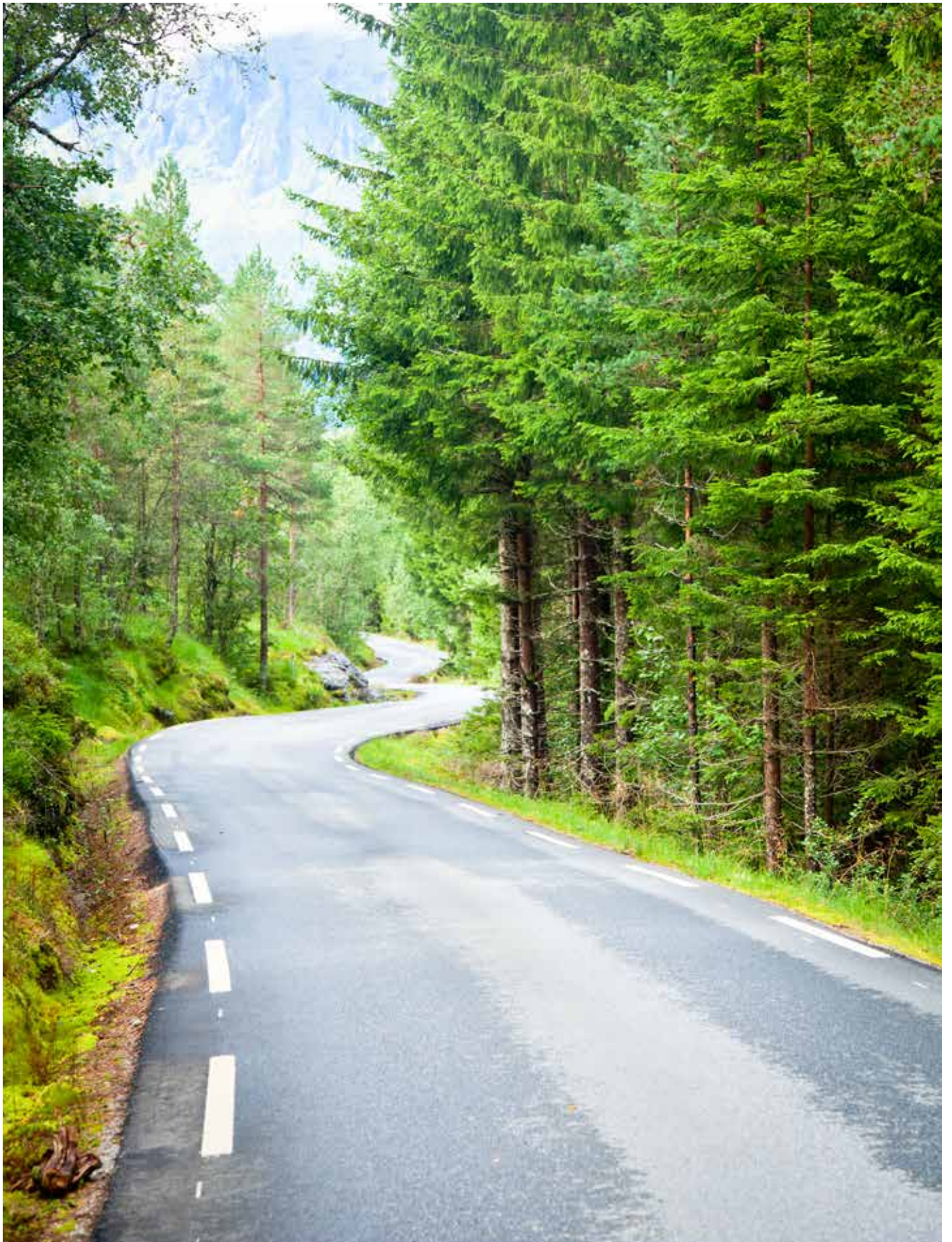
The grid can be used at the end of the mobility period to assess the participants’ achievements and to discuss their unmet goals, should there be any. The skills descriptors provide useful vocabulary when completing the Europass mobility passport and can also be used when preparing a CV or getting ready for a job interview.

The best feature of this tool is that it is motivational for the mobility participants. They have a visual aid, a sort of a map that can lead them to achieving their learning objectives. It lets them see how far they have come and what they have gained from their experience; it also helps them to explain their new skills to potential employers.



Ilze Jansone
Euroguidance Latvia

³) Project No. DE/08/LLP-LdV/TOI/147166.



COMPASS MOBILITY SKILLS GRID

"Spider-Web"	ABILITY TO USE A FOREIGN LANGUAGE, INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGIES IN A DIFFERENT CULTURAL SURROUNDING						
Area of competence	Competence in foreign languages				Job-related abilities and competences		
Context	Ability to use a foreign language, symbols and texts in a different cultural surrounding				Ability to use knowledge, processes, media, machines and tools in a different cultural surrounding		
Sub-category	Listening	Speaking	Interaction		Mathematical-scientific competence	Media competence	Technical competence
Level	A	B	C		D	E	F
1	I can understand and use familiar, everyday expressions and very simple sentences aimed at satisfying concrete needs.	I can introduce myself and ask others questions regarding themselves – e.g. where they live, whom they know and what they have – and I can give answers to such questions.	In a foreign country, I can communicate on an easy level if my partner speaks slowly and clearly and if he/she is ready to help.	A1	I can carry out simple calculations to solve tasks.	I can apply common computer programs and the internet for text and table calculations to carry out – under guidance – work tasks and look for information.	I can – under guidance – work with tools and machines.
2	I can understand often used expressions that are related to areas of direct context (e.g. information regarding persons and family, shopping, closest surrounding, orders and explanations regarding work tasks).	I can describe in an easy way, my own origin and education, the direct surrounding and things connected to direct needs and work tasks.	In the host country I can interact in simple, routine every-day and work situations if an easy and direct exchange of information regarding familiar and common things is needed.	A2	After introduction, I can carry out simple calculations to independently carry out tasks and solve problems in my own work area.	I can selectively look for information using the internet to carry out tasks in my own work area and to solve routine problems.	After introduction, I can operate tools and machines as well as use work procedures to carry out agreed tasks independently.
3	I can understand the main points if a clear basic language is used and if it refers to familiar things from work, school, hobbies, etc.	I can express myself in a simple and consolidated way regarding familiar topics and personal interests, carry out work tasks with colleagues, state problems and describe possible solutions.	I can report on experiences and results, describe dreams, hopes and aims and give short reasons or explanations for plans and opinions.	B1	I can selectively use procedures for calculations and error diagnoses to independently carry out tasks in my own work area and to solve problems.	I can use the computer and the internet to independently: – carry out tasks and solve problems, – look for information, analyse and forward data.	I can select tools, machines and work procedures to independently carry out tasks in my own work area and solve problems.
4	In my own area of expertise I can understand main topics of complex texts regarding concrete and abstract topics as well as experts' discussions.	I can express myself clearly and in detail in a wide topic spectrum and communicate spontaneously and fluently so that a normal dialogue with a native speaker is possible without a bigger effort for both parties.	I can give my opinion to a current question and state pros and cons for different options.	B2	I can use mathematical procedures and analyse scientific data to find errors or to reach a decision based on facts to find a solution to special problems in my work area.	I can selectively use the computer and the internet to: – analyse and present data, – find creative solutions for special problems.	I can selectively use tools, technical machines and work procedures to solve even unforeseeable and special problems in my own work or study area.
5	I can understand a wide spectrum of demanding, longer texts written in a foreign language and gather profound relevance.	I can express myself spontaneously and fluently without a clearly visible constant need to look for words. I can state my opinion on complex topics clearly, structured and in detail using different means of text-linking in an appropriate way.	I can use the language in the social and work life or in educational or university matters effectively and in a flexible way.	C1	I can use comprehensive mathematical and scientific knowledge to develop creative solutions also for abstract problems in my own work or study area.	I can critically check information regarding the host country and scientifically analyse them to solve special and abstract problems in my own work area	I can explain the functions of tools, machines and work procedures to others and use them in a flexible way to find solutions for unforeseeable and special problems in my own work area.
6	I can virtually understand everything I read or hear without any efforts.	I can express myself spontaneously, very precisely and summarise information from different written and oral sources stating reasons and explanations in a consolidated way.	I can clarify finer nuances and subtleties also in complex topics under discussion.	C2	I can use mathematical and scientific knowledge to develop innovative solutions for unforeseeable and special problems in my own work or study area.	I can use information technologies to develop and present innovative solutions for unforeseeable and special problems in my own work or study area.	I can use comprehensive knowledge and abilities in the utilisation of tools, technical machines and work procedures to find innovative solutions for special problems and to further develop the own work area in a conceptual manner.

ABILITY TO INTEGRATE ONESELF IN A DIFFERENT CULTURAL SURROUNDING AND TO ACHIEVE SET GOALS

Social competences			Personal competences		
Ability to cooperate with others in a different cultural surrounding			Ability to reach one's own goals in a different cultural surrounding		
Ability to integrate oneself in a group	Cooperation ability	Ability to solve problems	Ability to act in a larger context	Ability to realise one's own initiative and goals	Ability to comply with limits and defend others
G	H	I	J	K	L
I can identify behavioural patterns that differ from my own culture.	I can participate in groups even if the rules of behaviour differ from the ones known to me.	I am able to identify my own support needs.	I can recognise the importance of my own doing within a larger task and estimate the consequences of my actions for others.	I can organise my own day and budget, keep appointments, comply with agreements.	I can estimate my own strengths and weaknesses in other social and cultural surroundings in a realistic way.
I know how to act trustfully in a foreign culture.	I can actively support others to carry out set tasks in a group.	I am able to organise help to solve my problems.	I can sense cultural and social conditions and compare them with my own experiences.	I can adapt in a foreign surrounding and independently reach the set goals.	I can respect different behavioural patterns and work procedures.
I can take over responsibility for partial tasks in social activities.	I can align my actions with others in an intercultural group.	I can independently look for and use required information while handling problems.	I can comply with set rules and directives while working on tasks.	I can independently carry out complex tasks (e.g. doctor's visit, authorities, bank businesses, rental matters).	I can align and use my strengths and weaknesses in a new surrounding in a variable way.
I can constructively participate in the planning of social activities.	I can consider suggestions and objections made by others while planning tasks in every-day and work situations.	I can consult others in solving problems.	I can use gathered knowledge of cultural and social conditions for solving problems and setting tasks.	I can take the initiative, react flexibly to unforeseeable situations and evaluate options for action.	I can defend my position, accept other opinions, adequately react in conflict situations and make compromises.
I can take over the management of intercultural teams and groups.	I can guide people of different cultures while carrying out tasks.	I am able to plan solutions for complex problems in a different country.	I can convey the meaning of cultural and social conditions, rules and directives in the host country to others.	I can develop alternative problem solutions to reach my own goals even against objections.	I can actively participate in the socio-political life in the host country and stand up for the rights of others.
I can motivate people of different origins to participate in groups and teams.	I can, together with people from different cultures, initiate and plan a common execution of tasks.	I can take over decision-making responsibility for complex problems in other countries.	I can estimate the importance of cultural and social tendencies at planning and developing tasks and problem solutions.	I can convince others to follow the set goals developed by me.	I can moderate interest conflicts between people of different socio-cultural origins.

14 Helags



Vålådalen



Vålåsjön



Dunsjön

6 Ljungdalen

Ljungris 5

0,5 Postvallen

5 Kesufallet

1 Bäckeullen

Guidance for Mobility

What should counsellors do and not do when assisting those who plan to go abroad, are away, or have returned from a stay?
Who else is there to assist?

Mobility Counselling – from Information Provision to Motivation and Quality Assurance

Over the last decades, we have been witnessing an accelerated proportional shift in mobility activities away from individually conceived “adventures” to more institutionalised programmes, involving new target groups, actors and modes of organisation and execution.

Many institutions and programmes now offer a stay abroad as an integral part of the learning trajectory. Often it is a “package” where practical issues are settled in advance and do not trouble either the participant or the guidance counsellor. This does not mean that the guidance counsellor has become superfluous in connection with learning mobility; rather the focus of the work is being moved to other aspects of these activities.

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Søren Kristensen
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At a very general level, the shift in the nature of mobility has to do with its acceptance as a pedagogical tool in a broader context of education and training. It is indicated by the fact that in the last few years we have started using a term “learning mobility”, thereby positioning mobility squarely in the pedagogical landscape (rather than, for example, “transnational mobility” which relates it to geography).

Now we have evidence from research which has proved its versatility not just as a means of acquiring “intercultural skills” but also in connection with the development of personal competences, like innovation and entrepreneurship, adaptability, and self-reliance, as well as more hard-nosed educational and vocational learning outcomes. As a result, the formal recognition of knowledge, skills, and competences acquired during stays abroad has been made considerably easier.



WHERE GUIDANCE COUNSELLING CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Until recently, mobility counselling has primarily been perceived as information provision – identifying opportunities and clarifying details about practical issues, like funding possibilities, accommodation, or insurance. With the internet and the increased acceptance of learning mobility as a pedagogical tool, this has changed radically. Mobility counselling, therefore, has shifted its focus to other concerns which fall into two major categories.

The first one is the *motivation of potential participants for a mobility experience*. The adventurous and the career-conscious will come to the guidance office themselves to enquire about the possibilities, but by a surprisingly large part of the population a stay abroad – especially for an extended period of time – is not perceived as a realistic option. It is seen as a leap into the unknown and associated with all kinds of fears and threats that the imagination can conjure up, and consequently rejected. Of course, nobody can (or should) be forced into participating, but we know from evaluations that the learning and developmental potential inherent in this activity can be astounding, especially for the so-called young people with fewer opportunities who can experience a widening of their horizons, which is at times life-altering. Opening up these minds to consider a stay

abroad as a realistic possibility is a challenge that requires concerted action between several actors. Guidance counsellors can play a crucial role both as front-line staff, pro-actively suggesting participation to those who may not even have considered it, and as experts in a more downstream position, helping them to clarify options and lessen their concerns.

The second important field of intervention is connected with the *quality assurance of the learning process*. This springs from the realisation that in a stay abroad learning does not necessarily come itself to the participants. If this were the case, all it should take to secure a meaningful learning experience would simply be to get them out and see to it that they return alive – a purely practical task where guidance counsellors do not need to get involved. However, we know from evaluations of mobility activities that this is not the case – participants may return (sometimes prematurely) without having explored the full learning potential of the experience or, worse, with feelings of dejection and defeat that leave them worse off than before departure. In order to minimize these risks, we need to work consciously with the qualitative aspects of learning mobility – not only during the actual time spent abroad but also before departure and after returning home which, from a learning perspective, is almost as important as the stay itself.

COUNSELLING BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE STAY ABROAD

The pre-departure phase concerns preparation that enables the participants to cope better with some of the challenges they will encounter during the time abroad. This involves linguistic and cultural preparation, practical preparation, pedagogical preparation (defining and agreeing on learning objectives), and psychological preparation (how to deal with homesickness, isolation, culture shock, etc.). This does not necessarily have to be guidance counsellors' work – in many projects and programmes these tasks are partly or entirely assumed by other staff members – but often guidance counsellors are involved in one or more functions, either consciously or by default. The same can be said about the time abroad when guidance counsellors may offer just “a shoulder to cry on” when the going gets tough, or liaise with foreign colleagues to solve more practical problems that the participants may have encountered. This also works the other way round, as dealing with the challenges of incoming mobility (i.e. participants from abroad) may become a significant task for guidance counsellors in their home institution.

with others who can help them formulate, digest and evaluate their immediate experiences and put them into perspective with regard to their continued educational trajectory or career. Even negative experiences may hold valuable lessons that will only emerge in structured discussions with guidance professionals who can spot their potential relevance. Another issue where the involvement of guidance counsellors can make a difference is avoiding the so-called shoebox effect when participants do not act on the outcomes of their experience but merely relegate them to the back of their mind and revert to the situation and mind-set they had prior to their departure; thus they fail to reap the rewards of their investment. Also – especially regarding long-term stays abroad – participants may experience a reverse culture shock and need assistance to reintegrate properly into the home environment that suddenly has become foreign.

THE NECESSITY OF OVERVIEW

Mobility counselling now covers a much larger and more diffuse area where boundaries among different types of professionals dealing with mobility are both flexible and highly permeable. Very rarely – if ever – a guidance counsellor is required to become involved in all the aspects of mobility. The precise content of the counselling process has to be negotiated in the particular context where some aspects will be something the mobility participants “need to know” and others – something that would be just “nice to know”. However, an overview of the individual phases of learning mobility as a holistic process is essential for every participant. ■

“ *Until recently, mobility counselling has primarily been perceived as information provision.* ”

The debriefing phase is often neglected or is restricted to writing a short report on the basis of some pre-defined questions, or participating in an informal meeting. But the time immediately after the stay abroad is crucial for the retention of learning outcomes. Participants – especially those who encountered difficulties while abroad – need to talk the stay through

85%

More than 85% of Erasmus students study or train abroad to enhance their employability abroad.

Erasmus Impact Study, 2014





Be the Captain of Your Ship

"When asked the question: 'What should I do?', I sometimes use a metaphor: 'Be the captain of your ship, you are the responsible person, in charge of the compass and the navigation equipment. I could possibly help you read the maps, but this demands that you know where you want to go.' The career and guidance counsellor can help the client add lines and colours to the map, making it more in line with reality, with a clearer career goal, but he or she does not take over the process."



"The most important aspect of going abroad for studies, in my point of view, is to have a holistic view of the journey" says Jónína Kárdal, career and guidance counsellor at the University of Iceland.

Jónína Kárdal is part of a group of seven career and guidance counsellors who serve the 14,000 students at the University of Iceland, along with four other members of staff, one of them a psychologist. Annually they conduct around 6,800 sessions, including booked interviews, walk-in hours, workshops, and other services.

FITTING THE STAY ABROAD TO YOUR OVERALL GOALS

"The most important aspect of going abroad for studies, in my point of view, is to have a holistic view of the journey, which means to foresee what your steps can be after the period abroad. Do you plan to stay abroad or return home, and in what context will the period abroad fit into your study plan at your home university? In some cases, people do not seem to be very clear about what it is that they want or where they want to go. That perspective, in itself, can be adventurous, and there's nothing wrong with a good adventure, but it is always good to have a backup plan. Counsellors can assist students to form a clearer picture of what could possibly await them. There needs to be a certain goal with studying abroad; it could be that the studies in question are not available here, that the student wants to broaden his or her horizon, or that he or she sees it as a valuable part of the planned career. Studies abroad are not a good way to run away from one's problems, whatever they may be."

For Icelanders, access to studying abroad has changed in the last decades. More exchange agreements have been made with foreign

Young people who study or train abroad are half as likely to face long-term unemployment; 5 years after graduation, the unemployment rate of Erasmus students is 23 % lower.

Erasmus Impact Study, 2014



Jónína Kárdal originally graduated as a teacher but later studied career and education counselling. In 1999, she completed an MA degree in educational psychology, with a specialisation in counselling and student personnel psychology, at the University of Minnesota. That same year, she started working at the University of Iceland where she has worked since then.



universities, and the internet has made it much easier to find information about available learning opportunities. The financial crisis has however made it more difficult for some students to finance studies abroad, but study grants, such as Erasmus+ and NordPlus, even for a short period, make it possible for many students to take part in their studies abroad.

THE SHOCK OF RETURNING HOME

“Counsellors are becoming more aware of what is called a reverse culture shock – a cycle people can go through when returning home after studying or working abroad. They become more aware of the changes they have gone through while abroad as well as changes in their own society. Things have not been at standstill, life goes on whether you are home or abroad.”

Jónína adds that it would be informative to know how well clients use the information they get in the guidance counselling sessions and what impact career and guidance counselling has on them. “Usually we do not get to hear their ‘shipping news’, whether students have sailed into safe harbour. It is always our hope that they reach their end goal in studies and career.” ■

Dóra Stefánsdóttir
Euroguidance Iceland

Mobile Counsellors Are the Best Ambassadors

“Career professionals in different countries do more or less the same work even if they come from different settings and use different tools.” This was one of the conclusions of the Estonian and Swedish guidance professionals who met in Stockholm in May 2014 to take part in a joint training event organized by the Euroguidance centres of both countries.

The objective of the training was to learn more about each other’s system as well as to look closer into how guidance practitioners can work more actively with mobility for their clients. A hidden agenda was also to motivate guidance practitioners to include more mobility related topics in their everyday activities, by showing them how being mobile can be beneficial both on a personal and professional level.

MOBILITY EXPERIENCES

“I discovered a lot about myself and my motivation to work as a guidance professional during this mobility period,” after the visit says Yulia Sharapova from the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund. “After a personal mobility experience, I have realized how much one can gain even from a week abroad. Now it is much easier to introduce this possibility also to our clients who would probably not think of this as an option for them.”

At the training, theoretical parts were mixed with different kinds of group work and exercises to show the participants methods that can be used for counselling on mobility. Apart from lectures and presentations, the training

week included a job shadowing day. During this day, Yulia visited Gun Nilsson at the Job Centre of Stockholm municipality’s Labour Market Administration.

DIFFERENT BUT STILL THE SAME CHALLENGES

Both Yulia and Gun believe that an important task for them is to broaden the perspectives of their clients.

“From a career counsellor’s point of view, the work that we perform is similar – we recognize each other’s tasks,” says Gun. “For example, we both meet people who are not fluent in the official language of our respective countries. There are certainly lots of challenges when trying to get to know each client, making sure that the information about alternative ways of studying gets through, and creating a sense of empowerment towards taking decisions regarding the future.”

“I really liked the national websites and tools that Gun used in her work,” says Yulia, “especially all the forecasts that are made for the labour market!”

64%

64 % of employers think international experience is important for recruitment.

Erasmus Impact Study, 2014





Yulia Sharapova from the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund in discussion with Gun Nilsson from the Job Centre of Stockholm Municipality during a job shadowing session.

“Yes, and for me it was interesting to hear about Yulia’s work – it gives a better insight in our role as guidance professionals. Now I would like to visit Estonia very much to get the whole picture,” says Gun.

INFLUENCES OF THE JOINT TRAINING

What effects will the joint course and the job shadowing day have on Gun’s and Yulia’s work practice in relation to their clients in future?

“I will educate myself with regard to laws, regulations, and possibilities of a mobile labour market and international study paths,” says Gun. “We can bring up the issue of working and studying in other countries in our group activities where I will call on support from the immigrants in the group to boost the discussion.”

“Having an overview of the possibilities of work and studies in Sweden makes it easier to communicate them to our clients,” says Yulia. “Besides that, making an effort at speaking a foreign language was also a trigger for some colleagues to concentrate more on their long-forgotten language course,” Yulia reflects on her Estonian colleagues.

A conclusion easily made by the organizers when listening to Yulia and Gun is that mobility for guidance professionals stimulates guidance for mobility. ■

Kadri Eensalu, Euroguidance Estonia
Nina Ahlroos, Euroguidance Sweden



Include!

It seems easy enough to encourage people who find it uncomplicated to travel from one country to another to study or work as volunteers abroad. But what about those who struggle with physical, mental, or social challenges? What special service and support do they need?

Opening up Mobility as a Real Opportunity for Disadvantaged Groups

Participation in transnational learning mobility has traditionally been the privilege of the most resourceful, adventurous, and/or career-conscious young people, and most mobility activities have consequently been designed with this target group in mind. But in 2008, as a response to the rising level of youth unemployment and the alarming levels of early leaving and drop-out of the school system, the Ministry of Labour of Germany launched the programme “Integration durch Austausch” (Integration Through Mobility). The programme finances work placements abroad for disadvantaged young people, with a view to facilitating their insertion into the labour market or motivating them for formal vocational training. It is not merely some small scheme of relevance only to a few; rather, the ESF-funded⁴ programme has a total budget of € 145 million for the period 2008–15, and it aims to sponsor at least 10,000 stays abroad. Neither is it a uniquely German phenomenon: in the coming ESF-period (2015–2020), 10 other European Member States, including Sweden, have announced their intention of setting up similar schemes at a national or regional level and have established a European-level network to support the activities⁵.

Author:



Søren Kristensen
PhD, Techne, Denmark

“Disadvantaged young people” are persons with a lack of formal qualifications, often combined with other problems of psycho-social character and/or perceived negative issues related, for example, to health, gender, or race. The arguments for including this target group in transnational mobility projects are often motivated by notions of equity and representation: they should have the same opportunities for participating as the mainstream youth has. However, involvement solely for the sake of involvement seems a risky proposal, unless we

4) ESF – the European Social Fund.

5) See www.tln-mobility.eu.

have a clear expectation of a beneficial impact and are prepared to make a special effort. Rather than a concern for equal opportunities, our primary motivation should be reflections about mobility as a pedagogical tool and about the “added value” that we can achieve for this particular target group. Key questions are: what outcomes in terms of learning and personal development can we achieve; is it realistic to accomplish this; what mechanisms promote the acquisition of such skills and competences; and what organisation and support is needed to underpin this process?

Skill-acquisition and personal development – both of a cognitive and affective nature – can be very hard to observe and measure, and even with observable changes it can be difficult to establish the chain of causality, especially in a long-term perspective. We can thus never objectively “prove” this like in a mathematical equation; we need to work with probabilities and cumulative evidence. A recent evaluative research project, financed by the Federal Agency for Vocational Training in Germany and directly targeting learning outcomes of mobility for disadvantaged



groups (Becker et al., 2012), concludes that these experiences do confer added value to the participants. First and foremost, the added value is in the shape of personal development: increased self-esteem, self-confidence, independence, adaptability as well as social and communication skills. In addition, the development of more hard-nosed skills, like increased foreign language proficiency and improved vocational skills, is observed. The mid-term evaluation of the IdA-programme (2011) comes to similar conclusions, and there are several other studies and evaluations as well as masses of anecdotal evidence that all point in the same direction – enough to allow us to conclude that a structured stay abroad can be a very powerful tool for learning and

personal development. Yet, as with all other tools, there is also evidence to the effect that it can do harm if not handled in a proper manner – it is by no means difficult to find examples of participants who return home prematurely or with a negative experience because something went wrong along the way.

LEARNING BY LEAVING

“Learning by leaving” is a complex process, but the main dynamics spring from the experience of what the American theoretician and researcher Jack Mezirow (Mezirow, 2000) has called a “disorienting dilemma” when meeting with another culture, or “experiences of disjuncture” in the words of the English researcher Peter Jarvis (Jarvis, 1999). Aspects of



life that have hitherto been taken for granted are challenged by other ways of seeing and doing things, and this provokes a reflection process in which participants must adjust and rearrange their mental frameworks to try and come to terms with this “new reality” that they have become part of. Mezirow (without actually having transnational mobility in mind) has called this process “transformative learning”. To accomplish this, both practically and mentally, the participants must develop new insights, skills and competences. The intensity of this learning process is, of course, directly proportional to the length of the stay and the degree of integration into the environment of the host country. It is perfectly possible to come out of a short-term stay with little or no learning, but properly planned and executed stays abroad represent a rich potential for learning and personal development. Yet learning through these “disorienting dilemmas” is not a painless process, as it feeds, so to speak, on the existence of problems and barriers. Instances of premature return due to a failure to cope with these are known from all mobility schemes, even when dealing with mainstream youths who are not in the “disadvantaged” category. Subjecting fragile young people with few resources to such an experience is not without risks and pitfalls, and it certainly requires a high degree of professionalism of the organisers.

A 2004 Cedefop study on the participation of disadvantaged groups in mobility projects (Kristensen, 2004) focuses on the development of mobility projects as a pedagogical tool for this target group. It is a qualitative study which is based on data obtained from document analyses and interviews with organisers from 8 different European placement schemes. In the conclusions of the study, the following aspects of the learning potential of these experiences are highlighted as especially relevant for this target group. One of the aspects is concerned with the use of the stay abroad as a “free space”, as an environment where the participants may be free of the expectations which surround them in their daily life. Many of the disadvantages are to a large extent social

“ *I am more extrovert, 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.*”

A student from Finland quoted in Erasmus Impact Study, 2014

constructions, and many of the disadvantaged young people are being continually reaffirmed in their status by the (negative) expectations arising from their surroundings. Placing them in a new environment – risky as it might be – also gives them a possibility to act being free of many of the constraints they experience in their daily life: to experiment with those aspects of their personality which are normally suppressed and, to a certain extent, “reinvent themselves” without fearing the disapproval of their peers. The other aspect hinges on the motivational value of a stay abroad for persons who are often very little mobile in their daily lives and for whom the thought of moving even to a neighbouring town to pursue opportunities for education or employment represents an insurmountable barrier. For such people, the experience of a successfully accomplished stay in a foreign country may provide an impetus to cross other borders, which now suddenly appear less formidable in comparison with what they have achieved.

REACHING BALANCE AND A HOLISTIC VIEW

Taking the cue from the practical experience gained so far, along with the theoretical framework, two messages concerning a successful involvement of disadvantaged groups in mobility activities seem to appear.

1: Strike the right balance between the challenges of the experience and the resources of the target group. At the very core of the use of mobility as a pedagogical tool lies the idea of employing “disorienting dilemmas” as a launching pad for the learning processes. If organisers consistently try to eliminate all problems for the participants to give them as pleasant an experience as possible, they have misunder-

“ More than 90 % of Erasmus students perceived a gain in their confidence through studying abroad.

Erasmus Impact Study, 2014

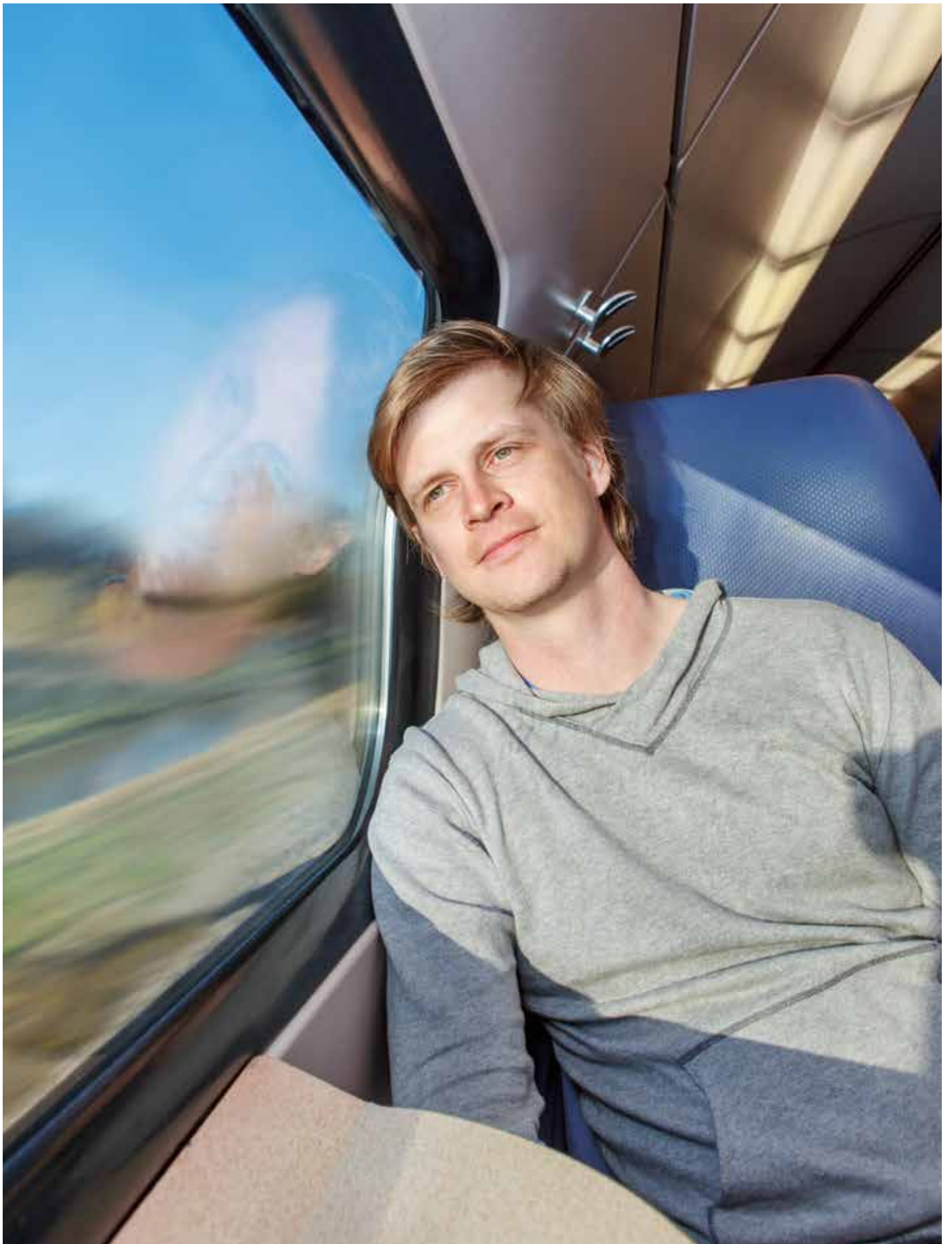
stood what it all is about (Reichel, 1999). But it makes sense to try to help the participants by removing the trivial, practical problems, which can take the focus and energy away from the ones that are crucial to the learning processes; to prepare the participants by giving them knowledge and competences that can help them solve these crucial problems; and to monitor the stays so that it would be possible to intervene if things threatened to fall apart. Generally, when dealing with the target group of young people with few resources, it is essential to ensure that the challenges they encounter are of such a nature and scope that they – maybe with a little help – can realistically overcome them. The term “scaffolding” from social constructivist theory is appropriate here: the organiser should provide just enough support to allow the participants to reach heights they would not have been able to scale alone, but the ownership of the process belongs to the participants.

2: Adopt a holistic view on all the phases of the project – before, during, and after. Adequate preparation for a mobility experience ideally contains linguistic, cultural, practical, psychological, and pedagogical aspects. During the stay, monitoring and possibly mentoring must be provided. In the debriefing phase, participants must be helped to discuss and reflect on their experiences; learning outcomes (both intended and unintended) must be evaluated, documented and possibly recognised; and guidance must be provided to help them act on the acquired knowledge, skills, and competences. All of these phases are in themselves of a vital importance to the project, but even more important – as argued by La Brack (1993) and Stadler (1994) – is the totality of the three: without adequate preparation, the stay may disintegrate; but without provisions for monitoring and/or mentoring during the stay, even the best preparation may be of no avail. Finally,

if outcomes are not properly followed up, the whole experience may be stored away in a remote attic in the heads of the participants from where it has no impact on their future lives. Interventions in all the three phases must be geared to the target group and consistent with one another. This is true for all mobility experiences undertaken for learning purposes, but whereas one may get away with little when dealing with resourceful young people and still register a positive impact, a careless attitude to this with disadvantaged target groups is likely to produce a disaster, with participants ending up with a negative experience and even worse off than before. ■

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I Am Disabled: A New Way of Being in the World

At Fremtidslinjen (the Way to the Future) teachers, counsellors, and pedagogues work with pupils to fulfil their dreams of leading independent lives. This is why everyone is offered to take part in the youth education centre's mobility project, no matter what the severity of one's affliction is.

A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Shortly after having been opened in 2011, Fremtidslinjen, an STU* youth education centre located in the city of Køge southwest of Copenhagen, ventured into a mobility project called Poseidon. Despite leading a very young organization, the head of institution, Morten Ellehaug, knew from the start that he wanted mobility to be an option for his pupils.

"Our pupils want to see themselves as ordinary. They compare themselves to ordinary young people, and it is a great sorrow for them that there are certain things they have not been able to do," says Morten Ellehaug.

It was a precondition that the receiving institution in Germany matched Fremtidslinjen in terms of struggles the young people are dealing with. "We found that in Koppelsberg when we first visited the school in Plön in the early spring of 2012. We had instant chemistry and a shared understanding of our target group and challenges."

A great challenge for the institution is bringing staff on board the project. "You need fiery souls to start something like this," Ellehaug smiles, noting that convincing all staff members that mobility brings outstanding results was difficult.

EVERYBODY IS INCLUDED

Young people with special needs want to live close to home, to what they know, to where they feel safe. This makes travelling all the more difficult. But the offer must be open for



"Our pupils want to see themselves as ordinary", says pedagogue Morten Ellehaug, STU youth education centre, Denmark.

everybody: the pupils are used to being excluded, and this must not happen at Fremtidslinjen. Even the severely afflicted are therefore offered to take part in the mobility project.

WHAT IS AN STU?

In Denmark, young people under 25 who cannot complete a regular youth education are offered an STU; an individually designed youth programme that looks at the pupil's special needs in a pedagogical way and aims to enable disadvantaged youngsters to take charge of their future.

“To a great extent, it is about our pedagogical approach, which is shared by our German colleagues. The word ‘failure’ is not in our terminology. We plan so as to prevent it. We follow a way of doing things that allows even the immensely disadvantaged to stay in the situation without experiencing defeat.”

Knowing well that troublesome situations might occur, five staff members (teachers, counsellors, and pedagogues) have travelled three times with eight Danish pupils on a one-week exchange to Koppelsberg.

“You can’t get only the good parts. You must also take in the challenges. And in the end, there are so many advantages that you can hardly believe it. The young people gain incredibly much, and the development of competencies that the staff has experienced is priceless.”

What the pupils gain, among other things, is the discovery that youngsters in other countries are facing obstacles similar to theirs.

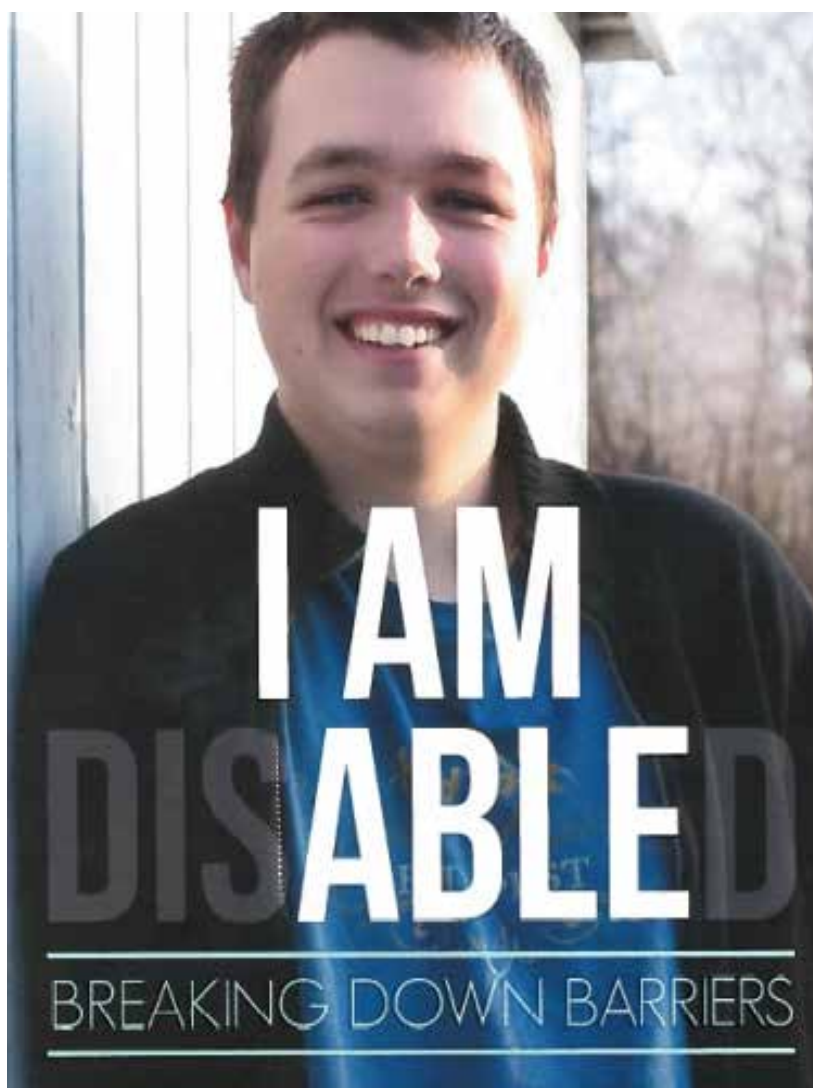
“It’s a pleasure to see them working together, in spite of the language barrier. It brings them a whole new way of being in the world,” says Ellehaug. He finds that the mobility project has been a way for some pupils to learn how to tackle their handicap.

“They visibly grow as persons; their personal as well as scholastic development has undergone a boost. And in the process they’re actually producing something together with the German pupils. In this way, there are no limitations as they realise what factors need to be present for them to succeed.” ■

Denise Rose Hansen and Birtha Theut
Euroguidance Denmark

THE POSEIDON PROJECT

It aims to overcome difficulties of learning-disabled young people in the Danish and German Fehmarn Belt regions. Supported by INTERREG under the European Regional Development Fund. Partners: Fremtidslinjen (Løge Municipality) and Das Jugendaufbauwerk Plön-Koppelsberg. The project includes mobility periods in Denmark and Germany, testing language apps and implementing tools that help introduce the pupils into the mainstream market.



A Youngster Went Abroad – an Adult Returned Home

Volunteering abroad can lead to surprising results. Distance from home gave Samuel Hanttu perspective to his life and reinforced his motivation to study. The European Voluntary Service (EVS) provides young people with a unique chance to express their personal commitment through voluntary work in a foreign country.



"I needed the distance from home to understand that I was going in the right direction", says student Samuel Hanttu from Finland.

"Absolutely!" 19-year-old Samuel Hanttu spontaneously answered the surprising question about his interest in volunteering in Portugal asked by Heidi Elo, the outreach youth worker at the municipality of Lieto, South-Western Finland. That moment, during a basketball game they were watching, became a huge turning point in his life, as he understood later.

Samuel highlights the importance of the role of guidance in his decision-making process: "This experience would never have come true without the help provided by Heidi. I didn't

even know about the possibility of volunteering within the EVS programme before she told me about it."

LEARNING LIFE MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Samuel spent three months as an EVS volunteer at Peniche, Central Portugal, at a children's day-care centre. His duties required a lot of initiative and responsibility: "I took care of babies and small children: changed diapers, played with them and was a team member of the adults. I think that the best way to learn is by actively doing something." Samuel felt that he grew

up as a person as well: "I am now much more self-confident and open-minded. Without this experience, I would have stayed the same quiet and shy person that I used to be."

EVS is a meaningful and effective way of learning basic life management skills: "I learned to take care of myself and the children and even some cleaning tips of Portuguese grandmothers," Samuel proudly says and continues: "I think that the most important learning outcome was that I found the joy of learning new things and developing myself. I am now more curious and not afraid of talking to strangers." Heidi Elo saw a clear difference in Samuel's presence before and after the volunteering period: "Samuel went to Portugal as a youngster and came back as an adult."

DISTANCE FROM HOME LED TO DROP-OUT PREVENTION

Samuel was a first-year textile artisan student at a vocational college, but before his EVS period in Portugal, Samuel was planning to drop out of the school. Before he started his studies, he was unemployed for one year. "I was not sure if my field of studies was right for me. I was suffering from lack of motivation."

During his stay in Portugal, Samuel was inspired by the Portuguese lifestyle and atmosphere. He found himself thinking of textile design and handicrafts, creating new ideas based on the colours and shapes he saw around him. Samuel realized that he has an intrinsic need for making handicrafts. "I needed the distance from home to understand that I was going in the right direction. Now I am more confident about my steps for the future." ■

Linda Tuominen
Euroguidance Finland

“Open-minded, self-sufficient, evaluating the real value of money they learn to cope with problems on their own; working under pressure, teamwork, all the soft skills that are needed are part of learning abroad; friendships that last forever, how the other works and lives is very important for the youngster... a picture is worth more than 10,000 words...”

An employer from Belgium quoted in Erasmus Impact Study, 2014





Sowing Seeds for Tolerance

The general belief behind the EU's decision to allocate considerable resources for mobility within the Erasmus+ programme is that it will open people's minds towards different cultures and this will, in the long run, increase the likelihood of a peaceful and harmonious coexistence in Europe. Is that really the case, and, if so, how can it be seen?

Tolerant Together – Mobility as a Tool for Fostering Open-Mindedness

In 2012, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights published worrying results – different forms of violence, motivated by racism, xenophobia, religious intolerance, or by a person's disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity, are still a daily reality across the EU Member States. All such crimes harm the victim, challenge human dignity, and put the EU at stake in all its diversity.

So, how do we foster non-discrimination, tolerance, and respect for fundamental rights in our everyday life? Could international mobility contribute to this?

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THREATENED BY THE UNKNOWN

The European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights (2010) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, and belief. In addition, detailed EU legislation addresses discrimination in various areas of life. Still, the fear factor can occasionally provoke intolerance in each of us. When something is not known to us and we do not understand it, or when we are not familiar with something and we do not personally relate to it, we may become intolerant as we feel threatened by the unknown. This is fully human, but we can definitely do better. By nurturing open-mindedness, curiosity and respect for those whose thoughts, customs and cultures are at variance with our own, we will create opportunities for ourselves and society as a whole.

Nevertheless, learning how to live together with other people across the planet is one of our greatest challenges. In the global society of today, we are not solely citizens of our own country – above all we are citizens of a much wider world. And while we happen to be situated in this or that country or located in this or that culture, we must not forget that after all we are sharing this world with people from



other countries and cultures. This makes each of us a global citizen regardless of our worldview, skin colour, or place of origin.

TOLERANCE IS NOT INDIFFERENCE

Needless to say, tolerance cannot be taken for granted. Tolerance has to be taught, nurtured, and communicated as it is the basis of mutual acceptance and understanding. Real tolerance is based on the profound conviction that diversity is a blessing, not a curse. Tolerance is a means to combat hatred, ignorance, and stereotypes as well as to make the dividing line between *us* and *them* disappear. The true essence of tolerance lies in awareness of and respect for universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Active tolerance begins in each of us every day, but it does not mean that we accept just

“ *I feel very positive about international mobility, it is important to students nowadays. After the course, I understand different cultures and people from different cultures better.* ”

Student from Finland in Erasmus Impact Study, 2014

anything and reject absolutely nothing. No, that would be called indifference. For example, accepting a person's right to hold a belief is one thing and accepting the belief as true is another. Tolerating people and tolerating their ideas is different. We always have the due right to openly question other people's unethical or morally ambiguous thoughts and opinions, and, in doing so, to set an example of correct and preferably tolerant behaviour to them.

For cultivating tolerance, the role of parents and adults is to instil in children and young-



27%

27% of former Erasmus students met their life partner during their stay abroad.

Erasmus Impact Study, 2014

“ I found it most exciting to see that we are all the same and that there is not much that differentiates us. People lump stereotypes together, the Spanish are like this, the Germans are like that, but in the end we are all alike. . .

German student in Erasmus Impact study, 2014

sters a sense of empathy and responsibility – to oneself and to others – as well as the appreciation that every human being is valuable. Tolerance is the act of building bridges between communities, connecting with others and seeing differences as invitations for dialogue, sharing and learning by doing. In brief, the need for tolerance is more essential than ever before in our world with increasing globalization, greater interdependence of countries and higher mobility of people.

INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY TEACHING TOLERANCE

For some decades already, the European Union has been actively promoting various types of mobility (and currently does so with the Erasmus+ programme 2014–2020). Outstanding results have been achieved across Europe as young, adult, and senior citizens from all walks of life have engaged themselves in a mobility period in another European country. For one thing, these mobility periods have served for lifelong learning and acquisition of new professional skills; for another thing, they have contributed to broadening the mental horizons, deepening the soft skills, and expanding the social networks of the participants. Furthermore, many Europeans are now convinced that the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and ideas between the Member States contributes to mutual development.

There is scientific proof of the significance of educational exchange in promoting European attachment and developing a European identity. Research shows that the extensive transnational interaction that occurs during the stay abroad contributes to attitudinal changes regarding Europe among the participants. It also illuminates significant differences between the mobile and sedentary students in terms of support for the EU and the extent of identifying oneself as a European. For example, a recent EU-wide study carried out among Erasmus students reveals that studying abroad has made them more interested in other European countries (91 % of respondents) as well as in other European people and cultures (93 %); a solid majority of them have become more interested in the EU (66 %) and have a stronger feeling of being Europeans (73 %) as a result of studying abroad. (Mitchell, 2012)

According to other national (e.g. CIMO and Demos Helsinki, 2013), European (e.g. Sigallas, 2009) and international studies (e.g. QSL, 2014), the majority of students participating in cross-border mobility report an increased openness towards and better understanding of other cultures, enlarged social and professional networks, improved communication and language skills, and a better awareness of what it takes to be living abroad. They also report a higher sensitivity to coping with multiculturalism and the moral controversies that such diversity may generate in one's everyday life and in all human interaction. This shows that there is a strong positive impact of mobility on people's attitude and overall mindset. We can only assume that all this has led to a raised level of tolerance and mutual acceptance, at least among those who have already benefitted from studying, training, or working



93 %

93 % of former Erasmus students can easily imagine living abroad in the future.

Erasmus Impact Study, 2014

abroad. Having your own experience of being a stranger in another country also contributes to the understanding of the experiences of immigrants at home.

TOLERANCE WITHIN REACH

The fact that there are several thousands of Europeans of all ages participating in mobility activities each year will hopefully create a feeling of belonging to this community shared by more than 500 million people. In the long run, as the EU and national policymakers say, a European citizenship will probably grow to a European identity, which in turn will become something that really unites us, Europeans. Getting used to regular cooperation across borders will eventually lead to a more global perception of the international community

and oneself. So, if the European Union continues to promote mobility and aspire to an open tolerance of all sorts of people and all kinds of life phenomena, a desire for us to live peacefully together in mutual acceptance one day will be a reality. ■

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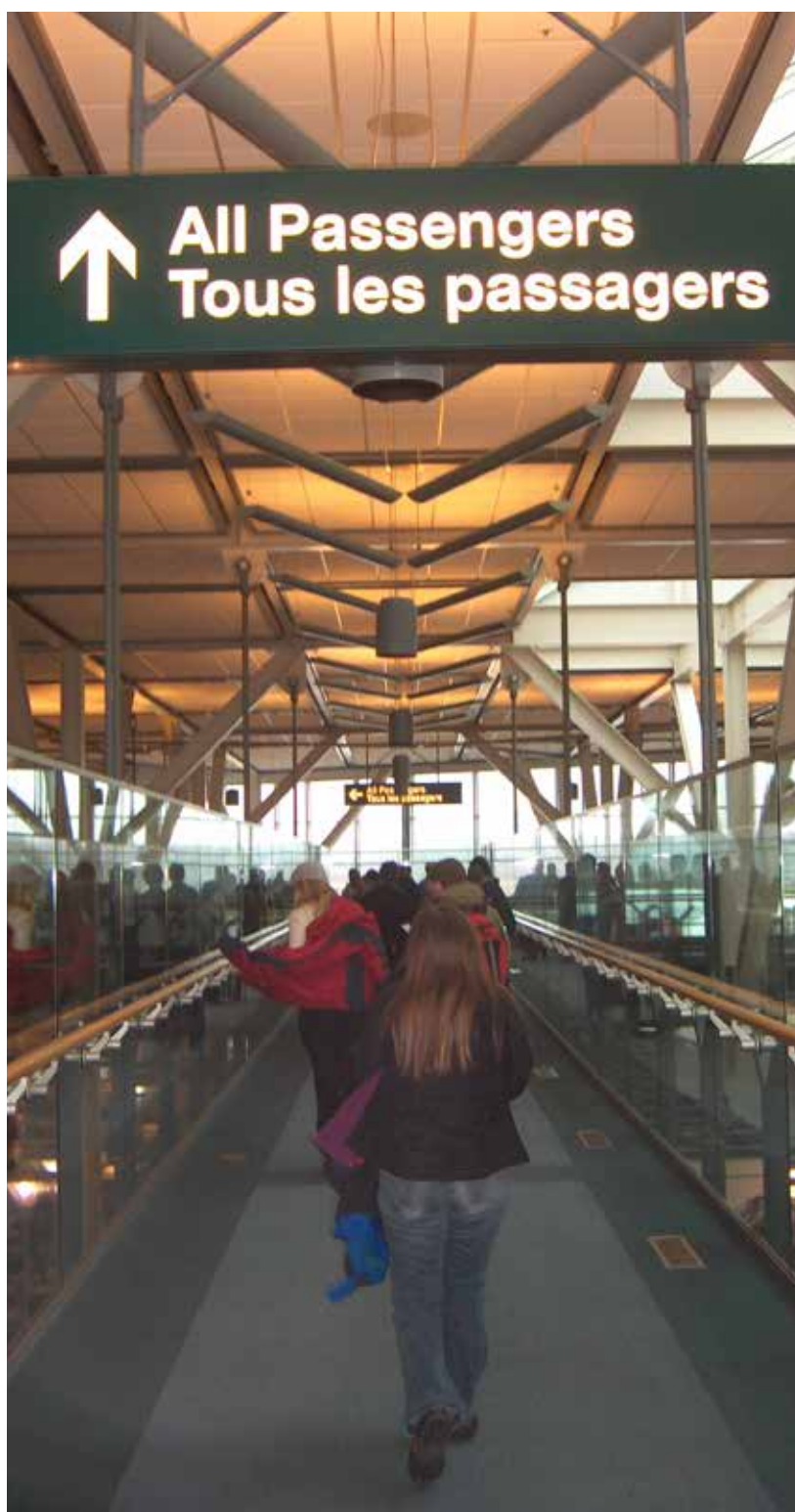
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Searching for Unity in Diversity

In the summer of 2012, 23 students and 14 teachers from Turkey, Spain, Italy, and Germany visited Liepaja City Upper Secondary School No. 5 in Latvia as part of the Comenius multilateral partnership project "European Vision of the Teens – Get Ready for the Future". Similar project meetings have been held in Turkey, Spain, Germany, and Italy.

Before each meeting, the students had prepared special homework. The student teams presented their countries as well as a common occupation and an ancient but still popular profession in their country. They debated about how young people spend their free time and how hobbies help or interfere with the choice of one's future profession; they discussed positive and negative trends in young people's habits and searched for solutions to problems. At the last project meeting, the joint work on the brochure "TOP 10 professions in each country", introducing training opportunities, was presented.

"For me, the school principal, and the school team there has always been the desire to continue learning and also offer broader educational opportunities to our students. The meeting in Liepaja was a precious experience for the young people involved in the project, and no less important is the fact that more than 20 students could go abroad. The students had the opportunity to get to know other young people's daily lives, improve their knowledge of foreign languages, learn new ways of communicating, live in host families and get to know so many traditions and cultures, which helps learn tolerance and accept differences," says Inta Kornejeva, the project coordinator and Liepaja City School No. 5 director.

FAR-REACHING SIGNIFICANCE

"We were very interested in exploring the Turkish, German, Spanish, and Italian experiences, so we were not surprised that the young people from these countries also

participated enthusiastically throughout the meeting in Liepaja. The meetings and the two years of project activities have had far-reaching significance. Our students remain in contact with project friends in the partner countries. They communicate in social networks and visit each other. Teachers involved in the project are still sharing their experiences. Young people have said that the events that take place in the home country of friends are no longer perceived from a distance; this is one of the major benefits of the project," reflects Inta Kornejeva.

"There are more than 300 students in our high school, so we also carried out a survey on the possible future profession and criteria for choices. Young people were interested to learn that the future visions of youths in other countries tend to be different from the ones their peers in other countries have. This was a basis for further analysis and discussions. Our school has a career consultant, and I know that the materials created in the project are still being used in discussions with young people about the importance of continuing training, the choice of a profession and finding your place in the job market," says the project coordinator.

"During the project, I changed my views about important issues, such as education and the role of traditions in a person's life. Furthermore, I revised my continuing education path and choice of profession," says project member Andrejs. Sintija in turn reveals: "People think about the future, challenges, and development opportunities every day. A real barrier to opportunities of communication may be the

language of communication. In this project, we all spoke English with our own accent, but if someone did not immediately understand, s/he asked the person speaking to repeat the words slowly. We found a compromise, we listened to each other. Another important thing in transnational projects is that young people can enjoy cultural differences. Useful experience is living in host families, which have their own habits. It is good to learn about different traditions, even cooking and serving,

as it is possible that in the future some of us will study in another country, or perhaps only travel, but we will know more than ordinary tourists. But most importantly, in this project we met new friends, extended horizons and gained experience.” ■

Ilze Jansone
Euroguidance Latvia



Meeting Challenges with Curiosity

“To my mind, being curious changes the way you meet challenges profoundly as there is always an interest in learning new things and having new experiences. Combined with the robustness you develop being abroad alone, it is almost a competence of its own.”



“Having international experience is a valuable asset in both my private and professional life,” says Elin Bakkelorentzen from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training.

During the last few years, Elin Bakkelorentzen has been pivotal in the Directorate for Education and Training’s initiative on learning environment at school, being in dynamic interaction with a variety of stakeholders in the Norwegian educational sector. She knows what she is talking about: not a day of work without something new to learn or reflect upon, something challenging one’s views.

“Having international experience is a valuable asset in both my private and professional life. I studied one semester at the University of Essex, England, in an international environment with students from the Middle East, China, Mexico, European countries, and more. It was like a dive into a mini version of the world where you had a bit of everything: culture, society, interpersonal relations, politics, religion, you name it.”

Elin Bakkelorentzen (41) works as a senior adviser with the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training in Hamar, Norway. She has an MA degree in sociology from the University of Bergen, and she studied in England for a semester during her Master studies. After university, she has had several jobs in her professional career. Based in Norway, she has been involved in several international projects through her work.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

“Apart from the obvious competences that are built and strengthened through international experiences, I find that knowing people in other countries personally makes a lot of difference to how I relate to the news and people from that specific country. Generally, it makes me more interested in and curious about social and economic developments, people’s working and everyday life as well as more open towards new experiences in general,” she maintains.

“To my mind, being curious changes the way you meet challenges profoundly as there is always an interest in learning new things and having new experiences. This ability to be curious grew stronger during my stay in England, and it has helped me substantially in my professional life making my attention and initiative more focused when meeting new tasks. But I would also like to highlight another effect I believe was developed abroad, which is often ignored when discussing these transversal skills, and that is being more robust. I don’t

fall apart when meeting obstacles; I continue, I climb over the obstacles or go around them. Having had opportunities to reflect on this over a few years, my conclusion is that this resilience was strengthened considerably abroad through being on my own, sorting things out myself, relying on my own resources.”

DESIRABLE BUT HIDDEN COMPETENCES

After a short reflection, Elin adds: “I have often been asked how competences related to my international experiences have been acknowledged by employers. Beyond any doubt, these unique competences influence my work

and help me do a better job. On the other hand, I don't think it is easy for an employer to isolate specific competences as resulting from international experiences or to look specifically for them in potential employees. They are definitely desirable but, in a way, hidden competences. Looking for future employees with international experiences is perhaps the best way to recruit these competences for an organisation.” ■

Halvor Gillund Knudsen
Euroguidance Norway



33 %

Among former Erasmus students 33 % have a life partner with a different nationality (13 % among non-mobile students).

Erasmus Impact Study, 2014

Useful Links

LIFELONG GUIDANCE

Lifelong guidance is a policy area of its own within EU's education policy. One of the most important pillars is the European Council's Resolution on lifelong guidance adopted in 2008. There, it is stressed that "The enlargement of the European Union has increased the potential for mobility in education and training, as well as in the labour market, thereby creating the need to prepare Union citizens to develop their learning and professional pathways in a broader geographical context". For the full text, see www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/104236.pdf

There are two main networks supported by the European Commission, related to guidance:

The **Euroguidance Network** which has two main roles: to promote a European dimension in guidance and to provide quality information on lifelong guidance and mobility for learning purposes. The most important work of the Euroguidance centres in Europe is to draw counsellors' attention to the learning possibilities which exist in Europe for their clients. For further information, please visit euroguidance.eu/ and euroguidancemobility.wikispaces.com/.

The **European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN)** which aims to assist the European countries and the European Commission in developing European cooperation on lifelong guidance in both the education and the employment sectors. For further information, please visit www.elgpn.eu/.

OTHER EU ACTIVITIES RELATED TO GUIDANCE AND MOBILITY

Europass consists of five documents to make skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe, europass.cedefop.europa.eu/.

EURES (European Employment Services) aims to facilitate the free movement of workers in Europe, ec.europa.eu/eures/.

Eurodesk provides information on European policies and opportunities for young people and those who work with them: www.eurodesk.org.

The work on the **European Qualification Framework (EQF)** aims at creating a common reference framework which will help compare qualifications across Europe. Download this leaflet for more information: ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf

Portal for Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe: ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en.

The **Erasmus+ programme** supports learners and school staff (teachers, administrators, guidance counsellors and support staff) who want to learn more from other countries. The seven year programme (2014–2020) will provide opportunities for over 4 million Europeans to study, train, gain work experience, and volunteer abroad: ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index_en.htm.

The **Nordplus programme** is a similar support programme but only open to the Nordic/Baltic countries. It offers grants for all school levels, a horizontal grant, and a language grant: www.nordplusonline.org/.

REPORTS ON MOBILITY

Effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions was investigated in the **Erasmus Impact Study** of 2014; ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf.

In 2012–13, the Finnish Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) examined how employers rated the skills and knowledge acquired through international experiences in their recruitment. In the first chapter of this publication you can read about the results. The report is called **Hidden Competences**, and a summary in English is available here: www.cimo.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/cimo/embeds/cimowwwstructure/32427_Faktaa_1_2014_Hidden_Competences.pdf.

In 2009, the European Commission published a **Green Paper on Learning Mobility**, which stated that one of the most important ways in which individuals, particularly young people, can increase their employability and develop as human beings is to travel to another country for a period to acquire new skills: www.eurlall.eu/filebank/COMGreen%20paperMObility.pdf.



Euroguidance is the EU network that promotes the European dimension in career guidance and provides quality information to counsellors on guidance development and mobility in Europe. In this publication the Euroguidance centres in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden contribute to the debate on advantages and challenges that the Erasmus+ mobility scheme has opened up for guidance counsellors. The articles and interviews highlight the following aspects: hidden competences, mobility counselling, disadvantaged groups and open-mindedness.

