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Mobility advice interview



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European Network to Support
Guidance and Counselling



Erasmus+

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Mobility advice interview:

THEORETICAL CONTEXTUAL ELEMENTS

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THEORETICAL CONTEXTUAL ELEMENTS.

An analysis of mobility and the consequences for guidance before, during and after a stay abroad

Introduction

Mobility and the intercultural exchange of young people are not new. Already after WW II the exchange of young people in Europe was encouraged to bring countries together and promote international understanding. It was youth work that took the first initiatives, followed by voluntary work not only in Europe, but also in the rest of the world. In the mean time schools, universities, cities, NGOs, peace movements and others followed with mobility initiatives.

However mobility is not always successful.

Research from Hansel (2005) shows that:

21%	Have not experienced any problem during the stay
20%	Had problems with adapting to traditions and daily life abroad
17%	Reports an (intercultural) problem linked to their autonomy
17%	Had difficulties with the style of communication
15%	Experienced problems as a result of a social-oriented or political discussion
13%	Experienced the new culture as cold and non-communicative
13%	Reports problems with certain social relations (host family,etc)
11%	Experience a troubling situation that is difficult to understand or accept
6%	Issues related to misunderstandings because of the language

What lessons can be learned from these problems? How can we improve mobility for young people? And as guidance counsellors, how can we contribute to these improvements?

In order to respond to these questions we should get insight into the guidance mobility process. What are the determining elements that make a mobility-experience a success for all involved?

Based on literature, research and our experiences as guidance counsellors on mobility in the EUROGUIDANCE network, we will exploit theoretical concepts that can help us to better understand what is happening in the minds of young people undertaking a stay abroad.

A lot of inspiration and useful information has been found in the study commissioned by the cooperation platform “Colourful Flanders” by Carla Bracke “Onderzoek naar de omkadering voor Vlaamse jongeren die naar het Zuiden trekken” (2008). More on “Colourful Flanders” can be found in appendix 1.

The importance of triggers.

The fact that mobility in all its forms can have a positive effect on the personal development of young people is widely accepted. The International Youth Exchange and Visitor's Service of the Federal Republic of Germany (2005) and the AFS centre for the study of intercultural programmes in New York (1993) have carried out research on the long-term effects of intercultural youth projects. It is clear that a short exchange of less than 4 weeks (already) has a positive effect on the personal development of young people.

Whether the experience abroad is perceived as positive or negative is largely depends on so-called triggers. Triggers are specific situations, positive or negative, which during the mobility conflict with the expectations of participants and will be remembered by the person years after the exchange. In most cases triggers are related to differences encountered during the exchange (food,etc), contacts with the 'significant other' (other participants, local responsible manager of the programme,etc), the group dynamics (conflicts, feeling of solidarity,etc) and hospitality (host family,etc). Positive triggers will have a positive effect on the personal development of young people; negative triggers will have an opposite effect.

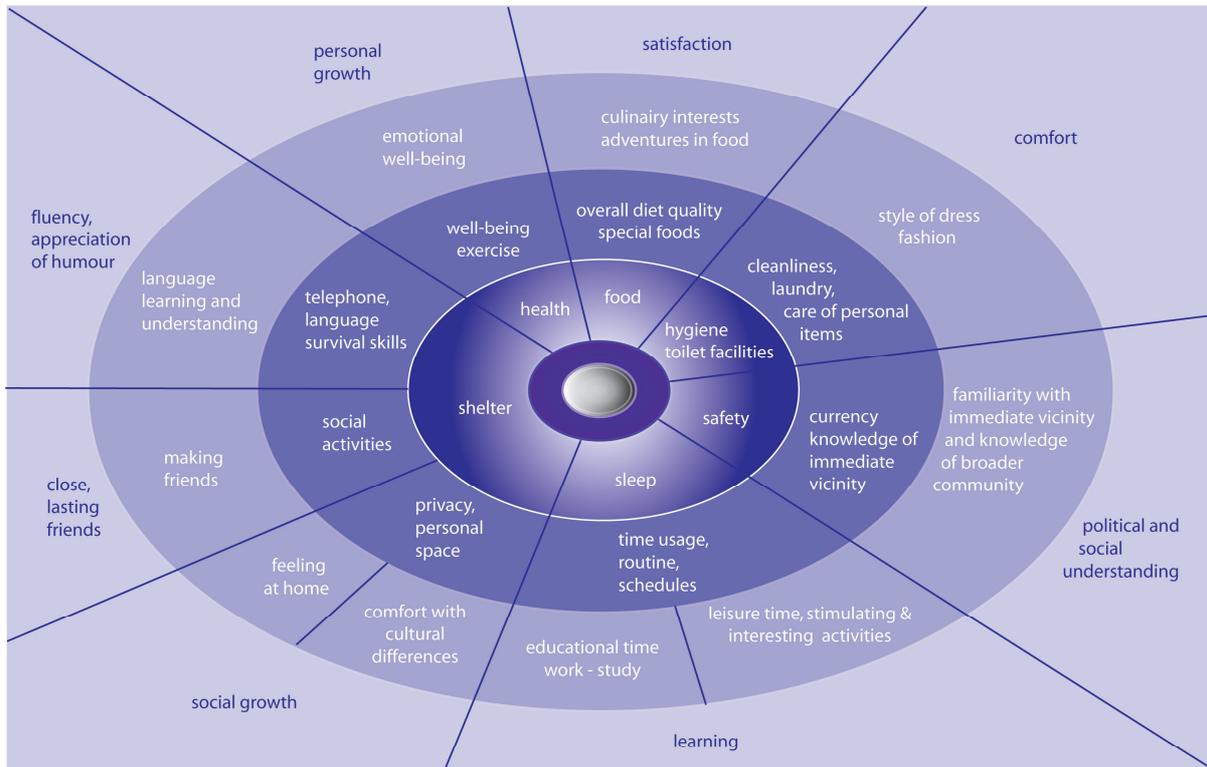
According to the same research participants have to be prepared for the whole range of triggers they will be exposed to. The support abroad should be directed to create situations with positive triggers and learning to cope with negative triggers. After the mobility the follow-up should focus on interpreting and explaining the triggers.

This also makes clear that guidance is not limited to good preparation, but support during and follow-up after the mobility experience are equally important.

Mobility preparation

Research by JINT (2006) shows that young people need first of all practical information and intercultural training. This is not surprising if we take a look at the '*Concentric-Circles approach*' of Beulah Rohrlich (1993). We know from research that practical information linked to travel, food, health, shelter, sleep, safety and hygiene toilet facilities (the inner circle) must be met first. Once these needs are met, the next ring of needs should be addressed.

Concentric-circles Approach to Helping New Sojourners



The needs of the inner circle are those that are most immediate to the student sojourner and must be met first. Once these needs are met, the next ring of needs should be addressed.

Adapted from Cornelius Grove, Orientation Handbook for Youth Exchange Programs (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1989, p. 124)

Figure 1: the Concentric-Circles approach by Rohrlach (1993)

The 'Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity' (DMIS) of Milton Bennett (1993) is another useful and interesting concept that can help us counsellors to better prepare young people for mobility.

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS):

- Explains how people or groups tend to think and feel about cultural difference
- Is the basis for effective coaching and development to work more effectively with people from other cultural backgrounds

DMIS was created by Dr. Milton Bennett. It is based on years of direct observation and research. DMIS provides a structure for understanding how people experience cultural difference. Six stages of perspectives describe how a person sees, thinks about, and interprets events happening around them from an intercultural-difference perspective.

Since DMIS indicates what a person sees and thinks, it also suggests what they do not see or think. DMIS, therefore, highlights how a person's cultural patterns both guide and limit their experience of cultural difference.

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- **Reversal** is the opposite of Defence. The person feels that some other culture is better and tends to exhibit distrust of their own culture.
- **Minimisation.** People from other cultures are pretty much like you, under the surface. Awareness that other cultures exist all around you, with some knowledge about differences in customs and celebrations. Not putting down other cultures. Treating other people as you would like to be treated.
- **Acceptance.** Being aware of your own culture(s). See your own culture as just one of many ways of experiencing the world. Understanding that people from other cultures are as complex as yourself. Their ideas, feelings, and behaviour may seem unusual, but you realize that their experience is just as rich as your own. Being curious about other cultures. Seeking opportunities to learn more about them.
- **Adaptation.** Recognising the value of having more than one cultural perspective available to you. Being able to “take the perspective” of another culture to understand or evaluate situations in either your own or another culture. Being able to intentionally change your culturally based behaviour to act in culturally appropriate ways outside your own culture.
- **Integration.** To varying extents, having integrated more than one cultural perspective, mindset, and behaviour into one’s identity and worldview. Being able to move easily among cultures.

The first three stages are considered “ethno-centric” in that one’s own culture is seen as the only culture or to varying extents the “better” culture.

The last three stages are considered “ethno-relative” in that one’s own culture is seen as equal among many other cultures.

The ethno-relative stages are characterised by a positive mindset about cultural difference. These stages are indicative of a person who will tend to make more inclusive decisions.

The DMIS approach gives us an insight into the different phases during a stay abroad towards a more complex approach of cultural differences. It is important to pay attention to these different phases during preparation, during the stay and during the follow-up.

The DMIS can also be used as a scale (in combination with –the IDI see next entry) to measure where the youngster could be situated during preparation, stay and follow-up, and thus observe the progress individuals and groups make.

The impact seems to be greater for people situated in the first three phases before going abroad. Young people who are already in the minimisation phase are more culturally aware and so have less progress during their experience abroad.

The DMIS approach should also be used in the training of guidance counsellors who work with ethnic minorities and international mobility.

The *Intercultural Development Inventory* (IDI) (Hammer 2005) measures how a person or a group of people tend to think and feel about cultural difference.

The IDI was designed by Dr. Milton Bennett and Dr. Mitchell Hammer. Based on Dr. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, the IDI is a scientifically valid and reliable psychometric instrument. More information on the IDI can be found in appendix 2 of this chapter.

Also some interesting *self-assessment instruments* (Paige et al; 2002) are available that help youngsters reflect on learning and intercultural learning and which strategies they are using. Those instruments can be used and evaluated individually and in-group. These tests are:

- Learning Style Survey: Assessing your own learning styles by Andrew D. Cohen, Rebecca L. Oxford, and Julie C. Chi
- Language Strategy Use Inventory by Andrew D. Cohen and Julie C. Chi
- Culture-Learning Strategies Inventory by R.M. Paige, J. Rong, W. Zheng and B. Kappler

Support during the stay

In most cases support during the stay is only available if the youngster has a problem, if it is available at all! Some thinking is needed to see how this support can be best organised and delivered and the following elements can contribute to this thinking.

Monitoring and evaluation can play an important role in detecting problems and help youngsters to reflect and change their behaviour and attitudes. Modern ICT can be used here in the form of blogs, Internet diaries, etc. Also the use of SKYPE or MSN can help to bridge the distance between the youngsters and those at home. The above mentioned self-assessment instruments and the DMIS of Bennett (1993) can also be used in the evaluation process. These instruments will help young people to map for themselves their own competences, growth and intercultural learning during the stay abroad.

Not only the preparation but also the support during the stay abroad should be directed to deal in a positive way with *triggers*, and to learn from crises which will inevitably take place during the stay. Conflicts and crises could be seen as positive challenges if faced by the youngster and not avoided.

In most cases the support of the '*significant other*' or '*peer group*' is crucial in dealing with crises and triggers.

Practical problems can mask deeper problems like homesickness, cultural shock, etc.

Culture shock and adaptation (Shaheen 2004)

People who live in a new culture often experience difficulties while adapting to a new way of doing everything. This is also the case for students who are studying abroad and might be adapting to a new educational system, style of communication and mindset. Culture shock has been defined by Oberg (1958) as "shock precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols or social intercourse". P. Adler's (1977) definition is more descriptive "Culture shock is primarily a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences. It may encompass

feelings of helplessness, irritability, and fears of being cheated, contaminated, injured or disregarded”.

P. Adler (1977) has another definition which is “the frustration and confusion that result from being bombarded by unpredictable cues”. In 1955 Lysgaard developed the U-curve of adjustment to explain experiences that overseas sojourners could expect to go through in their time abroad.

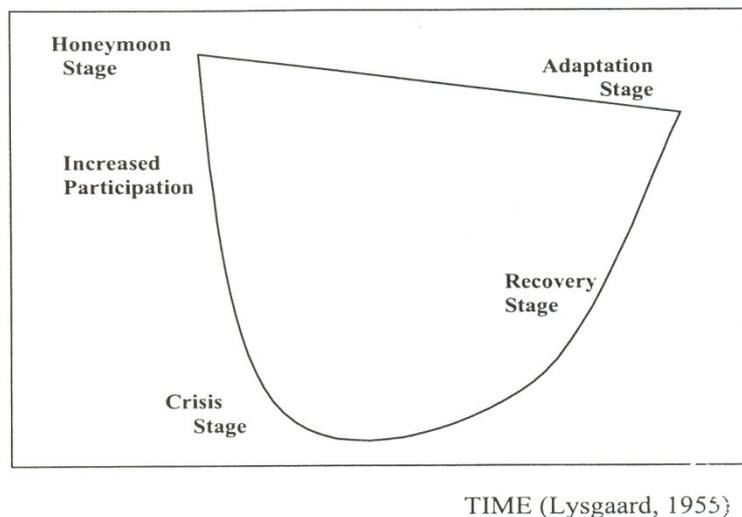


Figure 3: The U-curve of adjustment by Lysgaard

This curve starts with the initial euphoria of being abroad in a new and exciting place. It then moves to the increased participation phase, which can be more challenging for students. As they hit the crisis phase they are really struggling to understand and make sense of the cultural difference. Eventually most people get to the gradual adjustment phase where they literally either adjust or at least can compartmentalise the events happening around them so they can function without much frustration in the culture. Finally, the re-entry time comes and students often begin the whole curve again.

When the idea of culture shock is introduced, it is important to consider the following three ideas introduced by Bennet (2002). Culture surprise is a small thing that is noticeable, such as how the toilets work. Culture stress is handling the small events in the new culture such as how to wait in lines or cultural rules in social settings. Finally, culture shock is the overarching larger events such as realising that the ideas of values are different in this new place. Because many study abroad programs are very short in length and many students spend most of their time abroad with other American students, they may not ever experience more than cultural surprise or stress. One of the goals of the orientation sessions is to alert students

to differences in culture so that they are better prepared to notice the differences as well as learn more about the host culture and their own culture.

Culture shock is an important concept to introduce because if the problems that students experience overseas come from their difficulties in adapting to the new culture, then if the pre-departure preparation can give the students skills to handle these new challenges, perhaps their culture or adaptation shock will be less severe.

Qualitative monitoring and evaluation should not only map all problems, but also stimulate reflection, attitude- and behavioural change.

According to research by Hansel (2005) knowledge of and competence in the *foreign language* is the key to dealing with the mentioned problems. Also a negative correlation was found between the language level and the level of fear and problems showed by the youngsters.

Follow-up

Not only interpreting and explaining the triggers is important here. Attention should also be given to get rid of *reversion* (when the other culture is praised to the skies in relation to one's own culture) and *duality* (polarisation of cultural differences) on the one hand, and dealing with *liminality* on the other hand. Liminality occurs when participants returning after a stay abroad indicate not feeling at home either in the home culture or the foreign culture. This should be transformed towards a form of 'world citizenship'.

Also, on coming home, the U-curve of Lysgaard (1955) often begins again (see above). Some participants do experience a (*reverse*) *culture shock* when coming home, and need to adapt to their own culture and society again.

Mobility participants should also get the chance to *tell their story* and *exchange experiences* with others, and reflect on what they have learned. How do you give the stay abroad the right place in the life of participants? What are the opportunities and challenges for LLL? One's place on assessment instruments and the DMIS of Bennett (1993) can also be used in this context in order to 'measure' and make participants 'aware' of progress made in intercultural sensitivity, languages, learning styles, etc. This moment could also be seen as the start of a new phase in the DMIS of Bennett.

The evaluation moment can be repeated a couple of months later as the youngsters will be able to take some distance from what happened abroad and by consequence been more objective in their judgements. This will also be an opportunity to tell their story again at a point in time where there are no longer many occasions to do this and not many interested listeners either.

Efforts should be made to try to *involve the partner* (School, university, company, NGO, etc) *abroad* in the follow-up of the participants, this can give partners valuable feedback about the way in which they have dealt with foreigners in their organisation. However this is not always an easy task from the viewpoint of costs and human resources, although modern ICT-technology like video-conferencing, etc can help here.

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The participants and their rich experiences can *play an important role in the preparation of other people* who want to go abroad (peer learning). This can help to give new participants a more realistic view of going abroad. The whole *process* is not linear but *a continuous circular effort* from all those involved in mobility.

And last but not least all this information and all these experiences can feed the whole guidance process on mobility for continuous improvement.

Appendix 1: 'Colourful Flanders'

In 2003 the Flemish government launched an action plan called "Colourful Flanders". One of the action points was that every youngster should have the possibility to be mobile abroad. As a result a 'platform for cooperation' was set up with the following partners (and their networks,etc):

- Youth – Eurodesk (initiative)
- EPOS-agency (Leonardo, Grundvig, ERASMUS, Socrates and EUROPASS)
- EURES
- Wegwijzer
- Social partners
- VLHORA – ADINSA, VLIR-UOS
- EUROGUIDANCE

Aims:

- To detect the information needs of young people
- To better coordinate and improve information on international mobility
- To work together on certain concrete initiatives

Results:

- 'GO-STRANGE' fair on international mobility
- 'KAMIEL' website/database on administrative procedures in social security, child allowance, unemployment benefits, visas,etc.
- Study on 'The need for support of young people before, during and after individual mobility projects to developing countries'
- And a lot of (informal) cooperation between partners,etc.

Appendix 2: The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)

The *Intercultural Development Inventory* (IDI) measures how a person or a group of people tend to think and feel about cultural difference.

The IDI was designed by Dr. Milton Bennett and Dr. Mitchell Hammer. Based on Dr. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, the IDI is a scientifically valid and reliable psychometric instrument. Some characteristics of the IDI follow:

- In use globally since 1998
- Fifty items or statements, answered as the extent to which a person agrees or disagrees with the statement
- Available in many different languages
- Available in paper and on-line form

It measures how a person feels and thinks about, and thus reacts to, cultural difference. It therefore measures how a person construes and organises events, guided and limited by their cultural patterns. This is called one's "worldview" regarding cultural difference.

Equally unique is what the IDI does not do. Unlike many other instruments, it does not compare a person to typical behaviours and it does not analyse behavioural reactions. The IDI operates at the worldview level of how a person feels and thinks about cultural difference. This deeper level of one's cognitive experience is what guides and limits behaviour. Thus, The IDI helps answer the frequently-asked "so what" question stemming from use of other instruments, "So now that I know more about my behaviour and how I compare to others, what should I do next?" The answer is to understand and develop one's intercultural competence, which will generate cognitive and behavioural change.

Both the IDI and the underlying DMIS theory-based model are culture-general in nature. DMIS addresses cross cultural-difference independent of the type of difference. Cultural difference stemming from national, regional, societal, family, organisation, and individual characteristics all come within the scope of DMIS.

The IDI was correspondingly designed and validated in a cross-cultural manner to maintain this culture-general validity. Research shows that developing one's intercultural competence emphasising one aspect of cultural difference (e.g. national origin) will carry over to one's experience of all other types of cultural difference.

The IDI is developmental in nature. DMIS defines six stages with successively greater intercultural competence. The IDI measures both one's self-perceived and actual place on the DMIS continuum. The IDI results report is structured to encourage developmental thinking. Typical feedback conversations address:

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- How does one's current degree of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence affect or "show up" in one's interactions (e.g. cross cultural communication) with other people?
- What actions might help further develop one's intercultural competence?

Importantly, the IDI can be used with individuals, groups, and entire organisations.

The design of the current 50-item instrument followed rigorous scientific methods. People representing a global cultural mix were interviewed by expert interculturalists.

From the verbatim interview transcripts, 239 statements were identified in which each seemed to represent a particular stage of the DMIS model. Pilots and cross-cultural expert reviews were used to narrow this to a list of 145 statements or items.

Factor and reliability analyses were combined with correlation to other intercultural scales and validity tests for gender, age, and education. This led to the current 50-item instrument and a revised scale with very high levels of statistical reliability.

Full details about the design are available in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Special Issue on Intercultural Development*, Volume 27, Number 4, July 2003. The entire issue is dedicated to DMIS and the IDI.

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