

Hospitality and tourism students' perspective and experience with international immersion

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<p>This Bachelor's thesis studies the effects immersive international sojourn has on students who are in the hospitality and tourism field. The thesis was commissioned by the international services of Haaga-Helia in Haaga campus.</p> <p>The goal of the research was to find out students' experience going abroad and how they have noticed changes and developments in themselves. As a product-based thesis, the intent was to create material that future students could use for debriefing after their sojourn or in preparation before embarking on their voyage.</p> <p>The theoretical section discusses the topics of cultural intelligence, transformational experiences and personal development. These work as the base for the quantitative surveys which were created in Webropol. The first survey was sent out in late May and the next one was sent in late September.</p> <p>The survey gave insight into students' thoughts about their experiences, development in competences and skills, and possible other changes they encountered during or after their time abroad. The responses revealed that the students had developed skills that are useful in their field of studies, as well as the students themselves having noted changes that can be linked to one having a transformational experience. All respondents acknowledged important features linked with cultural intelligence and intercultural competence, as well as having developed in those areas.</p> <p>The research and results both support the goals of the thesis, and the material created does hold relevant information, for preparation and debrief purposes, about what a student can expect from their experience with international immersion.</p>	
Keywords Cultural intelligence, Intercultural skills, Transformative experience, Personal development, Hospitality and Tourism	

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1 Introduction

In this thesis, the first chapter will include some background for the thesis and the product that is created at the end. The chapter also has an introduction to the research topics, as well as the key concepts. The chapter is composed for the reader to have a general view and understanding of the thesis process, and to have a smooth transition into the theoretical framework and research methods chapters. From there, the research results are discussed and the conclusion is presented.

1.1 Background

The topic for this thesis was developed through the interests, previous studies and experiences of the author, as well as the possibility to create something of use for the commissioning party. Since the hospitality and tourism sector is greatly linked with globalization, it is not uncommon for students from this field to have experiences with international immersion in some form – some go for international internships, some choose to study as an international student abroad and some apply to be an exchange student. Although many students have the experience of international immersion, some might be apprehensive about leaving – the threshold might seem too high, or they might need a bit more concrete examples of how fruitful the experience can be. Therefore, the author wanted to research the hospitality and tourism students' perspectives and experiences with international immersion and create something useful for the students that are considering going abroad or for students after their sojourn.

The topic for this thesis and research is how the experience of being immersed in a different environment and culture has affected hospitality students, and how the possible changes can be useful for the student later on. The aim is to create material for students to study either before or after their departure, which would help the student to be aware and understand the effect their sojourn will have on them and recognize the potential that can be useful if utilized by the student e.g. in career advancement. With this, the hope is to make the experience abroad into a self-developmental and utilizable feature for the student.

The research investigates three different factors that influence students after or during their immersion in a different culture and country. In this thesis, it is assumed that the student will experience one or more of the factors studied after residing in another culture and country for an extended period of time.

1.2 Leaflet

As this thesis is product based, the aim is to create material for students, in this thesis referred to as a leaflet. To maximise the ability to reach as many students as possible who might need help utilizing their experience, the leaflet is not just aimed at the returning students, but also for the students considering or preparing to go abroad. If the leaflet is useful for students returning as debrief, that means it could also be good material for preparation as well. The leaflet discusses two topics: one focusing on students' experience with personal changes, and the other focusing on the self-developmental aspect - helping students recognise skills that they have developed, thus being helpful in future career advancements. The leaflet is not supposed to be a step-by-step guide, but rather be an encouragement and a reflection tool.

The leaflet could be useful for students who are contemplating if they can gain anything useful from going abroad, as the leaflet is aimed to guide students who might find it difficult to find any career-advancing reasons for their voyage. The leaflet could also act as a tool to lower the threshold of going abroad reducing the 'unknown' factor, or even give a reason for one to go, and thus act as a sales pitch and encourage students into the experience.

Besides being used as a briefing before departure, students returning should also find the leaflet useful. Especially once looking back and comparing themselves from before to the current version of themselves, the material could be a form of debriefing. Therefore, having a guiding leaflet would help said students organise their thoughts and be aware that they can in fact utilize skills that have developed during their time abroad.

1.3 Methods

The thesis is product-based and uses Harvard referencing. The leaflet will be curated with the topics of personal development, transformational experience and cultural intelligence in mind. Firstly, these topics will be dissected and used as a framework for the research. The research will be in the form of themed quantitative surveys. The surveys will be conducted with people who are considered suitable candidates to share their experience with being immersed in another culture in another country- such as students that have returned from their sojourn or international students.

To be considered suitable for the surveys, the respondent's history of living abroad should be considered. This is because the students usually stay abroad for a semester or similar period of time, which usually starts at around three months – thus shorter stays are not

included in this research. Getting information from the people who had a similar premise will increase the relatability and credibility for the students reading the leaflet, making the information as relevant as possible for the students.

After conducting the surveys, the information gathered will be analysed and transcribed. Once all the data is analysed and the findings are compiled, they will be presented as findings. From there, the findings are compiled into a useful leaflet. To limit the need for printing, the leaflet is made in digital marketing material form – which is assumed to be appropriate and modern compared to single-use printed papers.

1.4 Key concepts

Immersion is when one is surrounded or engulfed by something, deep absorption. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

Transformative experience is something that is life altering, something that modifies your own values, something so ground-breaking that you cannot experience from just learning about it, but something you have to go through to really internalize it. (Taylor, 2014)

Cultural intelligence - the higher the cultural intelligence one has, the higher their ability to fluidly adapt and work with other cultures in diverse situations is. (Farrell, 2020)

Personal development is the act of one trying to gain, or reach towards, personal growth by improving personal skills and other aspects of oneself. (Thum, 2012)

Globalization – phenomena where knowledge, culture, people, trade, technology spreads around the world over the country borders. Economic and social changes are also related to this phenomenon. (National Geographic Society, 2019)

2 Concepts

For the leaflet, three different topics were chosen to be investigated. Firstly, the topic of cultural intelligence is presented. In this part, the different lenses are discussed, as well as their connection with intercultural development. The second topic to be discussed is transformative experiences. This part includes basic information on transformative experiences and the different development aspects said experiences have on a student. The third topic presented is personal development. This part discusses the basics of personal development and hidden competences.

2.1 Cultural intelligence

Now in the 21st century, globalisation is no longer a new phenomenon. It has been reaching and making its way into every possible situation, from private life to business situations. “Globalisation is a powerful force comprised of various dimensions including the economic, the political, the sociocultural, the technological, and the environmental. Globalisation has helped expand international production and trade, facilitated advances in technology and brought people of diverse societies into contact with each other” (Pamoja, 2017). The phenomenon has been making work more competitive and diverse, requiring workers to have interactions with people who have a very different culture – which calls for the ability to adapt. (Damaschin, 2021)

Cultural intelligence (CQ or cultural quotient) is a term that describes one’s ability to adapt in situations facing other cultures. Much like with intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional quotient (EQ) – which are a way to measure the general logical intelligence level of a person and a person’s ability to recognize their own and others’ emotions and empathizing skills (Surbhi, 2017), respectively, CQ measures the capability to work with different cultural contexts and to be able to adapt oneself as needed in the situation. Even though CQ does revolve on the feelings side of the spectrum by utilizing empathy, just like EQ, it has must be noted that CQ cannot be measured and scored the same way as emotional intelligence. (Farrell, 2020) Even then, George (2021) points out that ” While CQ is the ability to relate to and communicate effectively with people from other cultures, it makes EQ an indispensable part of the process as it helps us to identify and manage our own emotions and the emotions of others.”

As mentioned before globalization will increase the competitiveness of businesses and this will be a big part of the hospitality field as well; forcing hospitality businesses to match competition in multiple areas such as “operations, including food, services, amenities,

staffing policies and training” (Wang & Wang, 2009). As the hospitality and tourism field is centre front dealing with customers from different cultures, it is inevitable that the businesses need to cater correctly to their customers. To deal with this, the staff also needs to be able to handle situations behind the scenes as well, as “conducting business in a globalised context this also comes with increased hurdles and potential barriers in terms of understanding how different cultures and customs operate” (Farrell, 2020). It is also very much common, that during the time of globalization the staff is multicultural, thus both scenarios on the floor and behind the scenes require CQ. (Damaschin, 2021).

2.1.1 Lenses

When discussing the topic of encounters between or with other cultures than one’s own, the situation can be interpreted through a few different lenses: multicultural, cross-cultural and intercultural. These terms are usually used as a prefix with terms like communication, interaction, or encounter. Even though the concepts do seem similar, if not identical, there are still a few key points which in turn change the narrative and attitude towards the situation – depending on which of the ‘prefixes’ are used.

When it comes to defining the aforementioned concepts, it has come more evident that there really is no one way to define them. This has been brought up in discussion and pointed up, e.g. with the term intercultural, that there is an absence of a uniform way to define such concept (Dasil 2017; Meer & Modood 2012; VanLandingham 2019). This understandably does explain why the terms are sometimes used interchangeably or in connection with one another.

When talking about intercultural situations, it involves more than one culture – can be argued if two or more, and their interaction together. This means the cultures are seen to be on equal stance, to have the same significance in the situation, and neither having a higher position over the other. A good example would be with the intercultural communication – two different cultures are actively cooperating, in sense, with each other and adapting and readjusting to one another with the attitude of “come together, interact and communicate.” (González, 2011)

An intercultural interaction example in the hospitality/tourism field would be a tour company bringing in tourists from country A to country B, and the staff of the company having a cultural background from both countries A and B.

Unlike with the interaction of cultures in intercultural, cross-cultural means the comparison of cultures. This term is thus used more often in research or study setting, when, generally, two cultures are inspected side by side to try and spot and point out the differences. This is a useful example with cross-cultural training. (VanLandingham, 2019)

It should be pointed out, that it can be highly useful to combine these two lenses with training since they can cooperate well and give a more complete picture of the interaction at hand. VanLandingham points out that (2019), “Cross-cultural training explains differences, intercultural training offers processes and tools to adjust to those differences. Intercultural studies help us build bridges, cross-cultural studies tells us where the bridges start and end.”

Multicultural as a lens is very similar to intercultural, as both are dealing with more than one culture, but removing the interaction portion. Most often multicultural is used as a description of a group, such as a work team or a society. A good case of a multicultural setting is given by Schriefer (2016), “For example, in a multicultural neighborhood people may frequent ethnic grocery stores and restaurants without really interacting with their neighbors from other countries.”

This brings up a point of cultures mixing. With multicultural situations, cultures are not really mixing, but rather cohabiting. A person in a multicultural situation would not greatly try to adapt to the other culture(s) present – the person might acknowledge the existence but will not try and mesh with it. (Vulture, 2021.).

2.1.2 Intercultural development

There are multiple different frameworks available to work with when it comes to measuring someone’s intercultural skills (and their development), but arguably the most well-known one is Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS, from years 1986, 1993, 2004, 2013.) The model itself is a linear scale, where one is able to shift back and forth at some points, but the general census is that the intercultural development one goes through is permanent. The idea behind the model is to describe how one experiences and engages with situations that deal with cultural differences. (Bennett, 2014)

From Dr. Bennett’s model, an adaptation was made by Dr. Hammer. In this, modified version called Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), there is a 50-part survey that creates a profile for the survey taker.

The IDI questionnaire includes contextualizing questions that allow respondents to describe their intercultural experiences in terms of (a) their crosscultural goals, (b) the challenges they face navigating cultural differences, (c) critical (intercultural) incidents they encounter around cultural differences during their study abroad sojourn, and (d) ways they navigate those cultural differences. Responses to these questions provide a cultural grounding for relating IDI profile scores to the actual experiences of the individual. (Hammer, 2012)

The results from the IDI survey are then exhibited with Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) “a theoretical framework that ranges from the more monocultural mindsets of Denial and Polarization through the transitional orientation of Minimization to the intercultural or global mindsets of Acceptance and Adaptation.” (Hammer, 2012)

Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC™)

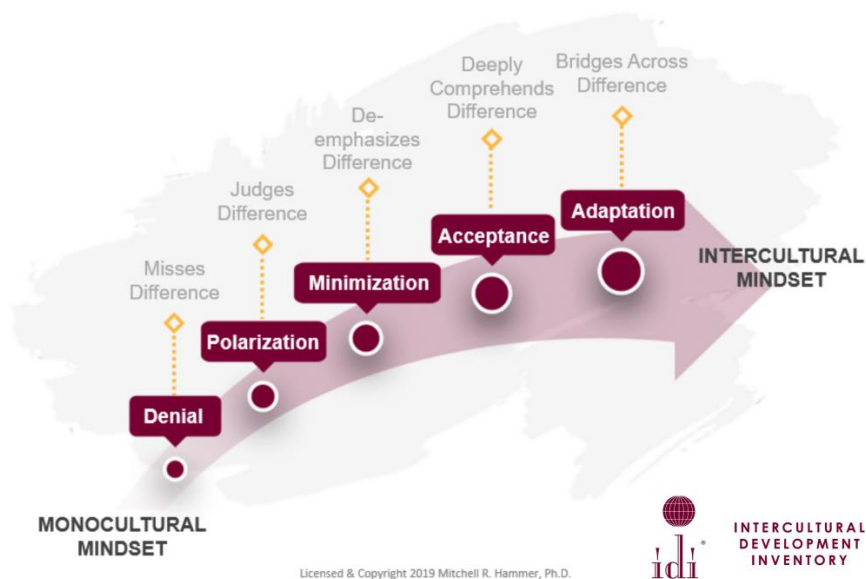


Figure 1. International Development Continuum (IDC) (Intercultural Development Inventory 2021)

Going step by step from the monocultural to intercultural mindset, it can be noticed that there is some correspondence with the abovementioned cultural lenses and phases of IDC. Each step through the framework has a different reaction to the cultural differences one is facing and it can be possible to point out a lens that is fitting for the mindset.

The first phase explained by IDC is the Denial phase. This phase showcases the discomfort of being in a different cultural setting/situation. It is stated that people in this category have a hard time understanding or responding to other cultures, to the point of actively avoiding said situations. Behaviour that showcases the lack of experience of cultural encounters and stereotyping other cultures is also highlighted. (Intercultural Development

Inventory, 2021) The mindset is seemingly similar with the multicultural lens, as the person does not wish to interact with the other culture – preferring to stay isolated.

The next level from the monocultural mindset would be Polarization phase. As the name suggests, this is a phase where one would differentiate and separate the cultures and their differences. In this situation the person feels like one culture in the situation is superior to the other – one culture being glamorized or shunned, whether it be one's own culture or the other culture involved. (Intercultural Development Inventory, 2021) With the comparing cultures, the cross-cultural lens seems fitting for this phase. In IDC there is a clear opinion stated on what is preferred and what is not, which is not the case for cross-cultural mindset – although arguably one might have preferences even when just inspecting differences with the cross-cultural lens.

The midway phase from monocultural to intercultural mindset is the phase of Minimization. In this phase, the reaction seems to depend heavily on whether the person is from the 'dominant culture' or not, as the two probable reactions are linked usually to this factor. It is most likely that the person from the dominant culture will be downplaying or ignoring the cultural differences and will try to find the common ground, which can indicate the lack of cultural intelligence. On the other hand, a person from the minority, when experiencing Minimizing phase, would be actively trying to point out the cultural common ground. (Intercultural Development Inventory, 2021) This could be seen as a method to blend in, in a similar sense as the saying 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do'. For this phase, it could be argued that the person is comparing cultures, but trying to avoid sticking out and thus adapting – meaning that this phase would be comparable to a mix of cross-cultural and intercultural lenses.

The second to last phase in IDC is Acceptance. This is the phase where the person will be comfortable with the presence of differences and common ground between the cultures at hand. The person might be more "curious to learn how a cultural pattern of behavior makes sense within different cultural communities. This involves contrastive self-reflection between one's own culturally learned perceptions and behaviors and perceptions and practices of different cultural groups" (Intercultural Development Inventory, 2021). Although this does seem very promising on the intercultural aspect, it should be noted that even though the person might have a strong understanding and acceptance of the differences, it can be hard to accept some differences that go against moral or ethical codes from their native culture. (Intercultural Development Inventory, 2021) The appropriate lens for this stage is the intercultural one, considering in this phase the person is aware of the cultural differences and is making showing signs of trying to adapt their own views.

The very last stage to achieving an intercultural mindset is the phase of Adaptation. This is definitely the case of owning an intercultural mindset and seeing things through that lens, as the key element of intercultural interaction (adaptability), is already stated in the phase name. In this phase, the person is ready to acclimate their own cues, reactions and outlook according to the situation's needs. This also means that the person has the skill set to work with varying cultures. Unfortunately, it appears that sometimes people who have reached this level might get too demanding when it comes to other people with their levels of adaptability, along with their views. This sometimes causes a person on the Adaptation level to be seen as arrogant by others.

Considering the objectives of the thesis, all of the aforementioned lenses do seem appropriate to use. When using the IDC framework and IDI study, the main focus when creating the thesis survey was shifted more into interculturalism. Since every student has their own views and attitude towards their experience – being on different levels on the IDC scale, it would not be surprising to see some students viewing their experience through the other lenses (multicultural or cross-cultural). This is also why the other two lenses were not discarded.

Interestingly enough, this chosen framework and study are comprehensive about the relevance of immersion and its duration with students' intercultural development. The findings reveal that the globality provided by universities, be it in almost any form – such as dormitory arrangements, programmes, or inclusiveness in university, do not in fact help the students' intercultural skills. It was also revealed that no matter how long the students were immersed the longer duration only slightly increased the development of intercultural skills compared to the shorter-term immersion. The conclusion was that the more reflecting the student does on their experiences and if the guiding is correctly designed to the student's mindset, intercultural skills can be attained. (Hammer, 2012)

To see if the thesis assumptions were in line with IDC, two groups were asked to answer the surveys – people with shorter-term immersion and longer-term immersion. This way the survey results could be compared to the framework and IDI.

2.2 Transformative experiences

The Transformation, as a term, itself can have many meanings depending on the context. A few synonyms to the term in everyday life could be such as transition, remodel or

change. These terms give us some inclination to what transformative experience as a concept beholds.

A simple yet comprehensive way to define transformative experience can be found in Paul's guide on teaching the topic, where she has explained transformative experience through three sections, each describing a different experience that is transformative in its nature. The first type of transformative experience, epistemic, means a situation where one can only verify something is by trying it – the example given here is tasting a new fruit. Second type of transformative experience, personal, transforms one's opinions or views. Third category is a mix of both epistemic and personal in a transformative experience - in this case meaning the experience changes your perception of things after you have gone through the experience yourself, such as life milestones or grand life events. (Paul, 2019)

Taking this into consideration, it should be possible to achieve a form of transformative experience from one's travels. Ross in their article has pointed out that transformational travel can be both intentional and/or 'accidental', depending on if the traveller has the correct mindset encouraging oneself into personal transformation. This is also evident as she claims that some purposefully seek a way to change through transformative travel, as it is a comprehensive way to face difference on multiple levels. (Ross, 2010)

2.2.1 Transformative experiences and travel

A study was made to see and pinpoint what triggers an experience to become a transformational one. It was revealed that an experience has a phase, namely 'peak' experience, which in the right conditions can step over the threshold and become a transformational experience. The definition given a 'peak' experience describes it as "a rare, emotionally charged moment of extreme happiness and fulfilment that extends beyond one's personal identity and is accompanied by a sense of harmony with the universe" (Kirillova, et al., 2017). It is to be noted, that not all such experiences make the cut and thus do not convert into a transformational experience.

For the experience to transition from just a 'peak' experience to a transformational one, not only is a trigger needed, but the mentality must be right. This view would agree with the previous point brought up by Ross. A person must go through a phase of understanding and internalizing of the experience, which then transforms the experience into a transformational experience, as visualized in figure 2 (Kirillova, et al., 2017).

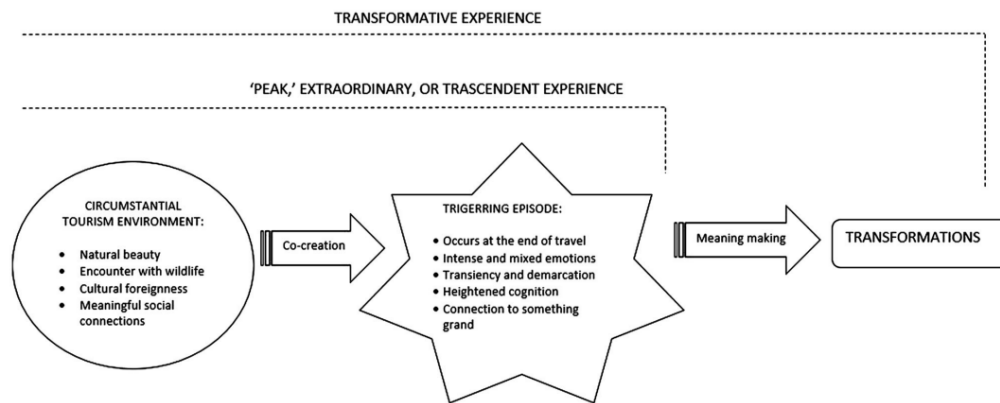


Figure 2. Mechanism of transformative tourism experience (Kirillova, et al., 2017)

Even though these frameworks have been targeted towards the travel aspect of transformational experiences, it does not mean that they are not a valid place to start observing and exploring the topic when it comes to longer-term travel/sojourn, in this thesis also referred to as immersion. It can be argued, that since the traveller's mentality is a key factor in the creation and internalization of a transformative experience when travelling, it should apply in a similar way to a person who is immersed in another country – if the person has a similar mindset.

2.2.2 Transformation from sojourn

It is an undeniable fact, that being out of one's routines, normal surroundings and social circle, the person will have to face change in some form. However, the degree of change on the transformational level might vary, considering that it is less likely that one would come into situations that trigger a change on shorter visits.

In Browns (2009) framework on transformation after a sojourn, the changes are measured after one year of the ending of immersion. The possible transformations in different areas are as follows:

- Challenging stereotypes
- Confronting the cultural aspect of self
- Intercultural learning
- Discovering priorities
- Protecting altered perspectives
- Finding a voice
- Becoming independent
- Testing reserves of strength
- Developing international perspective (Brown, 2009)



Figure 3. One Year Later: Altered Selves (Brown, 2009)

From Brown's Altered Selves framework (Brown, 2009), as shown in figure 3, it can be concluded that a person has the possibility to go through a lot of change when immersed in a new environment. There are elements of personal transformation – e.g. with altered perspectives, developing international perspective and discovering priorities, but some can be also linked with intercultural competences – such as intercultural learning and challenging stereotypes. This would mean, that a person is not only gaining transformational experience but also tapping into the field of cultural intelligence by trying to adjust.

2.2.3 The three Cs of development : Culture shock, Reverse Culture shock, Cultural intelligence

The changes one might have after their immersion abroad can also include development in cultural skills. Some people might find it hard to even think about returning to their previous norm; "So great is the change in the self that the return home can be a source of apprehension, as sojourners may face similar difficulty in adjusting to the home culture as they did upon arrival in the new culture" (Brown, 2009). The reason could be because one might find it difficult to readjust (back) to another culture after going through a transition phase already once. This could be viewed as reverse culture shock.

Reverse cultural shock is the lesser-known of the two culture shocks. Reversed culture shock most likely will appear heavier to people who have already accepted, acclimated

and adapted into their new surroundings. “Sometimes, heading back to your home country after several months overseas can be just as difficult, or possibly more difficult than initially moving away from home” (Bettles, 2016). What the person now finds as their norm, is not what they used to think as a norm. Just like with culture shock, every person has their own version of an experience with this natural phenomenon – for some it hits harder than the initial culture shock. It should also be noted that the phenomenon will be lighter for those who are more comfortable with cultural interactions. (Kagan, 2020)

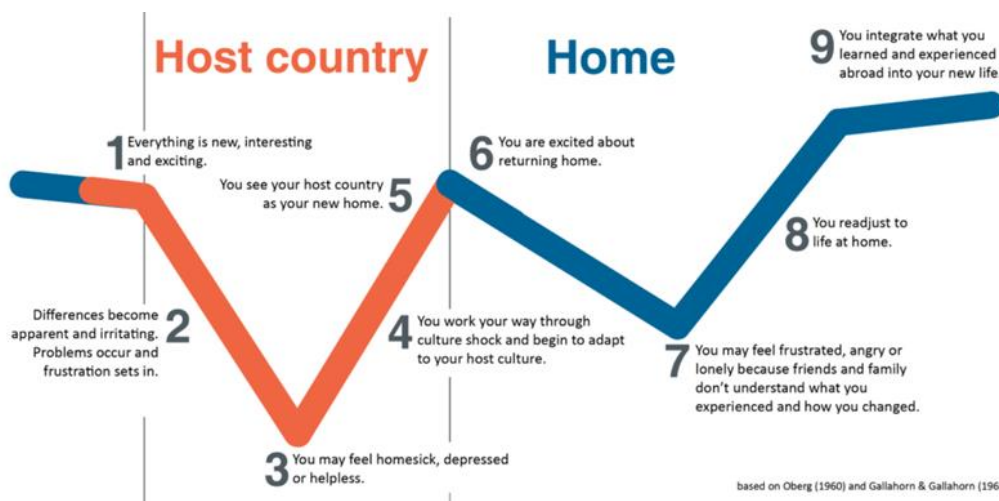


Figure 4. Phases of culture shock and reverse culture shock (Bettles, 2016)

The stages of culture shock and reverse culture shock blend in well together, almost like mirroring each other. The original four stages by Oberg (1960) are usually described as honeymoon, hostile, acceptance, and adjustment stages. These have been later altered to match the mirroring of reverse culture shock as a “1963 study by John and Jeanne Gullahorn suggests that culture shock follows a w-curve. When you travel somewhere new, it’s normal to go through a honeymoon phase followed by a period of crisis, recovery and adjustment. The cycle is repeated when you return home” (Preston, 2021).

Returning back to the Altered Selves framework, Brown (2009) mentioned the fact that a person after immersion might find it unpleasant to think about readjusting to the home culture, because one might be dubious about how the new changes would be accepted by the society, which then might cause tension. If the tension is coming from the person re-entering the original culture, this could mean that the person has reached the adaptation phase in the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) by Hammer (Hammer, 2012). The reason being: a person who is already reached intercultural mindset, will find it displeasing when others don’t reach the same level or share the same perspective. This is an interesting point, especially considering that Hammer’s studies claim that students who have experienced immersion don’t really gain much on the cultural intelligence side.

Whichever is the case, it can be argued that when it comes to going into another culture, it will have its effects on a person – one will have to face challenges being surrounded by something unfamiliar and adapting. In her post, Voigts (2008) points out how both culture shock and intercultural development can go hand in hand – as they both study the adapting one goes through when dealing with another culture.

2.2.4 Transformative experience and developing global skills

Although the IDC and its study does not find immersion to be useful for one's intercultural competencies, the other aforementioned studies would claim immersion to have some part in the intercultural skill development. Therefore the transformative framework was kept in mind when creating the survey. It seems like the keyword for transformative experiences and the three Cs is one's mindset in/after the situation.

When it comes to adaptability and cultures, it is important to point out that these two terms are very much linked with globalization – which then again is linked heavily to the hospitality and tourism field. In hospitality, there are high rates of diversity, which calls for good teamwork and flexibility (Griffin, 2017). These are skills that are directly related to emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence, both of which work best hand in hand complementing each other – creating better communication across the board. (Barile, 2021)

2.3 Personal development

Personal development is an act of trying to better oneself, whether it be in one or multiple different areas of life – a process of individuals growth. The growth itself needs actions, that can be viewed as markers, which then lead one to be closer to reaching what they want to achieve with said process. (Edema, 2021.;Thum, 2012)

It could be argued that there is almost no regressing when it comes to personal development steps, since the concept itself is built upon improving and enhancing one's skills.

In more of a business sense, the phenomenon is described by Cambridge Dictionary (2021) as “the process of improving your skills and increasing the amount of experience that you have in your job”. This further confirms that personal development can occur in and for one's career growth – that having competences in a career appropriate field will enhance your work experience and act as an asset.

2.3.1 Hidden competences

Hidden competences is an updated framework, which was concluded from a survey conducted to see if the international experience is valued in the labour market. Part of the conclusion for the project stated that “working life needs new kinds of internationally skilled professionals to solve the problems that arise as global megatrends change the business” (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.). It was also noted that it is important for students for themselves to realise and note their hidden competencies, which can be an asset in work life.

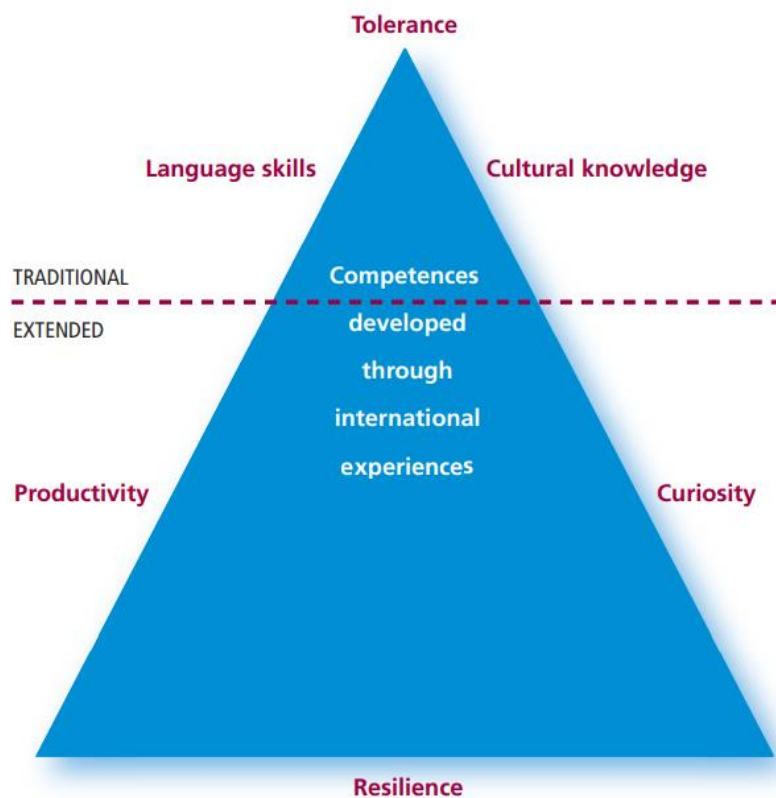


Figure 5. Hidden Competences (CIMO, 2014, p. 26)

The approach of hidden competences works as an updated version of what is generally considered the basic international skills (language skills, cultural knowledge and tolerance.) All the skills together create a frame, which helps us to understand what the modern recruiters value, as well as “form a concrete and coherent narrative for the necessity of international skills and competences in modern working life” (CIMO, 2014, p. 25). This frame is visualised in figure 5.

Since globalization and its importance in the hospitality and tourism field is evident, one must have the appropriate skill set to fit the demands (Griffin, 2017, p. 72). With

globalization comes more competition and the need for specialists who can handle multi-cultural environments (Sajavaara & Salo, 2017). Thus, it can be argued that knowing one's skill set and what are useful skills to either try and develop, or to endorse, is something students should take into consideration. Therefore it might be useful for students to consider their hidden competencies when entering the hospitality field.

3 Hospitality and tourism students' perspective and experience with international immersion

The target of this research was to see the effects of international sojourn and possible transformative experience has on one's cultural intelligence and understanding of competences. The main focus was to scope out how students view on their sojourn experience and the skills they feel are useful in the working environment in the hospitality and tourism field.

The objectives of the research were to gather information from students who have experienced international immersion through studies, to see how they currently view the international experience. These students can provide a good inkling of how students, in general, feel about the topic. This way it would be possible to recognize and find any themes that could be more highlighted in the leaflet for future students, who are thinking about embarking on a similar journey.

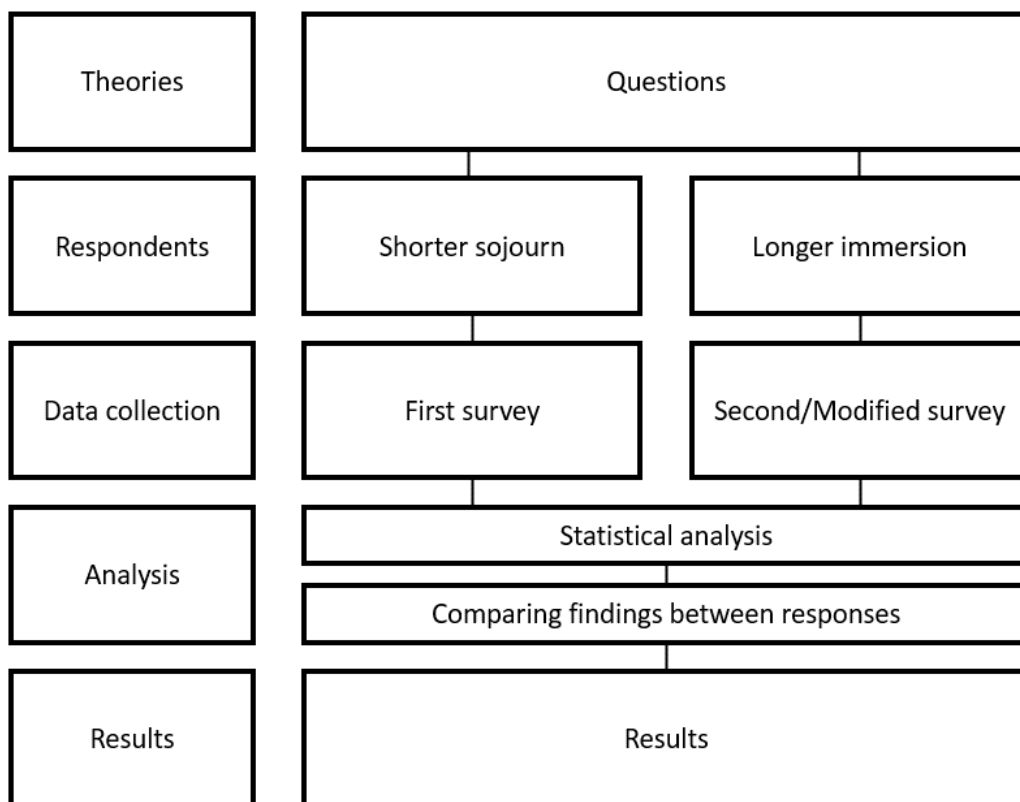


Figure 6. Phases of research

The research was constructed through a few steps, illustrated above in figure 6. Once the desired theories and frameworks were selected, questions were formulated to support or challenge them. The next step was to determine and select the appropriate respondents;

for this thesis this meant hospitality students who have returned from their international sojourn (exchange program) and ones who have been immersed in their international sojourn for a longer period time. The questions were compiled into a survey (modified for each group) which was the selected method of data collection. After sending the survey to the selected groups, the results were dealt through statistical analysis. The results from the survey were then compared in order to create end results.

Challenges were already recognized in the planning phase and some challenges arose during the process. The main concerns were collecting a sufficient amount of survey responses and reaching the appropriate respondents. Estimating the number of responses was nearly impossible. The first survey was sent to hospitality students who had been on exchange programmes, but the group yielded a minimal number of responses. Due to the number of responses after reaching out the first time, it was deemed necessary to make a modified second survey that catered to other students - this time hospitality students who had been immersed for a longer period. Creating the first survey was also challenging since the survey had to combine three different themes, but not have too many questions so that the survey would be finished by the respondents. In the survey multiple-choice questions were preferred over open-ended questions, as open-ended questions can make the research and data analysis messier; some open-ended questions were added into the modified survey in hopes that it could encourage answering, even if in the respondents' own words. Also, since it was predicted that the second round of surveying would not gather a big number of responses, it was determined that for these smaller respondent amounts/groups the 'freer' answering way would be more revealing and thus more beneficial for the research.

3.1 Data collection

Between qualitative and quantitative research methods, both seemed doable. Due to the concern of not getting enough people to be interviewed, not managing to find interview time that fit each individual interviewee, and the time to be spent on transcribing the interviews, it was deemed suitable to use a quantitative method for this research. This would hopefully help with time management and time limit.

The chosen method was to create a survey in Webropol since it is well known and easy to use. Editing and creating questions is a simple process, and the possibility to check how the survey worked helped to visualise how the survey would look. Webropol was also chosen for the fact that there is no need to sign-up or log in from the respondent's side. The responses are very accessible, which makes analysing them a straightforward process.

3.1.1 Background of survey

For the research, there were two target groups, each of which had the same survey but with modified questions to ensure the inclusivity for both groups' experiences and opinions. The first survey was sent out to Haaga-Helia students in Haaga campus (hospitality field campus for Haaga-Helia) who had taken part in an exchange programme. This was done through email via the international services, so that there would be no need to share respondents' information with the author – it was also hoped that the response rate would be higher since the email would come through the official international service. This meant that the email was sent to 310 students.

After coming across the issue with respondent rates, it was decided that the research should be opened for another, similar, target group. This meant that the survey had to be modified and fitted to the different stages of the new target group. After making the changes needed, the second survey was sent out via referral link, to appropriate international hospitality students who are studying abroad. This was done by an exchange university professor, so that the information of respondents would not be shared with the author.

Both surveys had a similar flow and division of questions: background information, general knowledge on the themes, personal experiences and opinions (in both open-ended and multiple-choice question forms.) Background information was asked to make it easier to compare the respondents answers later on, based on elements that could affect the respondents' experience, e.g. the length of their stay. General knowledge was added to make it easier to map out the respondents' earlier knowledge on the themes, but also to get the respondents into the mindset where they possibly start to reflect on them. Once this process had hopefully been started in the respondents, the questions surrounding their own experiences and opinions were introduced. All questions were made mandatory, except for the last two open questions which were added to give the opportunity to add their own notes, if respondents felt the need to add on.

3.2 Information collected

The information collected through the research surveys is introduced and studied in the following chapters. As there were two different surveys made, the surveys will be dissected under their own, separate subheadings. This is also to increase the readability and to make the dissection more comfortable to follow

3.2.1 Exchange student debrief survey

The first survey, Exchange student debrief, garnered 6 responses. The respondents were mainly from Finland, additionally, one student from Poland and Macao, and the destination countries included Austria, Finland, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan and South Korea.

2. What experiences were you aware of possibly having during/after your exchange experience? You can pick multiple of the choices given.

Number of respondents: 6 , selected answers: 12

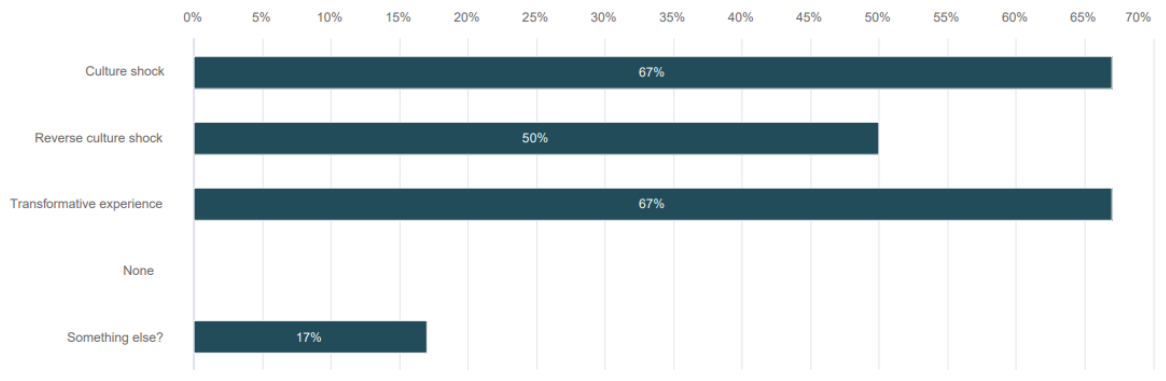


Figure 7. Awareness of experiences one might have during/after exchange experience (n = 6)

All respondents had heard of or had previous knowledge about at least one of the following experiences: culture shock, reverse culture shock, transformative experience. As figure 7 shows, transformative experience and culture shock were the most known ones, both getting picked four times (67%) whereas reverse culture shock was picked thrice (50%.) One open answer was given, which mentioned reverse homesickness.

3. From the following, please pick changes you feel you experienced during your time abroad. You can pick more than one answer.

Number of respondents: 6 , selected answers: 16

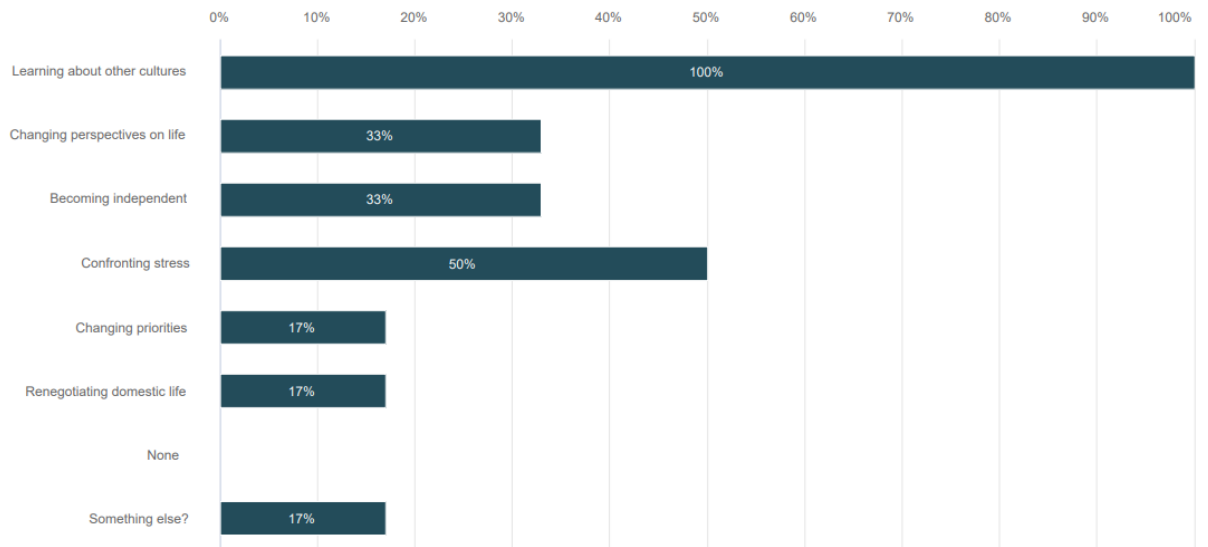


Figure 8. Challenges experienced during exchange (n = 6)

As seen in figure 8 above, respondents were unanimous voting learning about cultures as being part of their experience abroad. Half of the respondents also reported having to confront stress. Becoming independent and having a change in perspectives of life were both chosen twice (33%) and change in priorities and renegotiation of domestic life were chosen once each. One open answer noted being able to be independent instead of becoming independent.

4. From most (1) to least (10) , please rank these skills and competencies according to what you improved in the most : (note- the skills cannot share a rank)

Number of respondents: 6

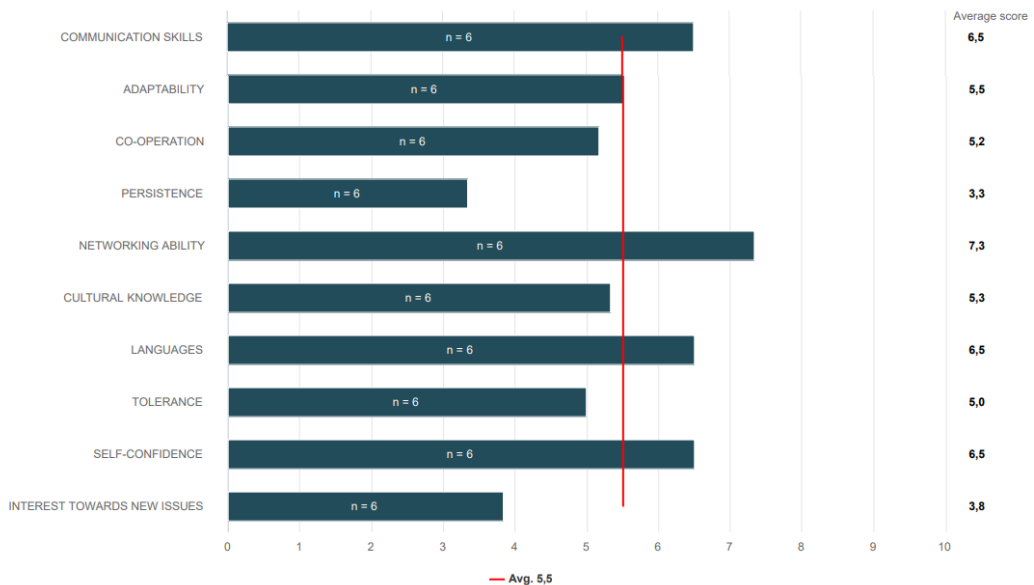


Figure 9. Rating competencies and skills one has improved in during exchange (n = 6)

When rating international competencies respondents had improved the most in, the results were more unique. Looking from the average scores, competencies that were rated highest amongst respondents were persistence and interest towards new issues, scoring 3,3 and 3,8 respectively. Tolerance (5,0), co-operation (5,2), and cultural knowledge (5,3) were the third to fifth most highly rated. Adaptability scored an average of 5,5. Self-confidence, language skills and communication skills are all tied with the average score of 6,5, leaving networking ability to be the lowest ranking with an average score of 7,3 (figure 9).

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to name five skills they felt to be most useful in their field of speciality. Keywords and skills mentioned most often were communication skills and cultural knowledge (four mentions each) as well as tolerance and adaptability, which were each mentioned thrice. Being understanding was mentioned by two. Other skills mentioned were networking, passion, knowledge, co-operation, emotional self-control, social skills, etiquette and marketing.

6. Do you agree with these statements?

Number of respondents: 6

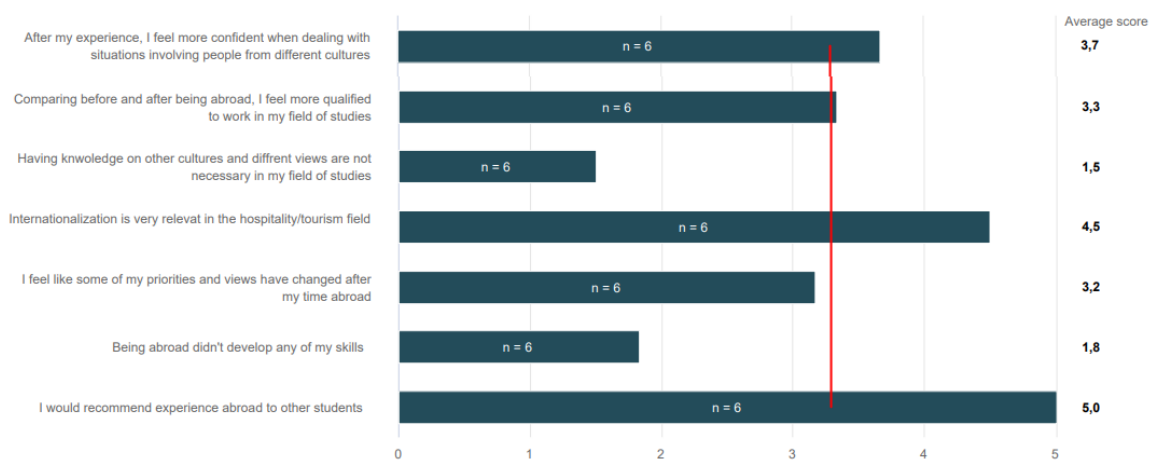


Figure 10. Statements for exchange students (n = 6)

Respondents were asked if they agreed with seven different statements. If all respondents strongly disagreed, the average score of the statement would be 1, whereas if everyone strongly agreed the score would be 5. As figure 10 above shows, when asked about confidence in multicultural situations most would agree to feeling more confident in said situations (3,7.) Compared to before studying abroad, respondents were agreeing but a bit undecided (3,3) if they felt more qualified to work in their field. Everyone disagreed (1,5) with the statement claiming that knowledge of other cultures and views was not important

in the field of studies. Everyone also agreed (4,5) that internationalization was relevant in the hospitality and tourism field. Statement about priorities and views changing after being abroad divided respondents, giving the statement an average score of 3,2. All respondents disagreed (1,8) with being abroad not developing any of the respondents' skills. Respondents were unanimous and strongly agreed (5) that they would recommend other students to have experience abroad.

In an open question, respondents were asked how they thought they had personally changed being abroad and what they had gained from the experience. Keywords and changes mentioned most often were confidence and cultural knowledge. Other changes and keywords were openness, motivation, self-awareness, independence, courage, appreciation of normal life and increase in mental health.

The third open question asked what respondents felt were necessary skills in cross-cultural encounters. Almost all respondents included skills in the realms of communication, adaptability, tolerance or understanding. Knowledge in languages and communication differences were also mentioned.

The last question asked if there were any tips for students going abroad. Future students thinking about going abroad were encouraged to research the destination and culture and to be respectful, kind and to act accordingly by the respondents. Respondents mentioned exploring and experiencing, as well as suggesting creating a friendly environment.

In voluntary add-ons, respondents encouraged the students also to enjoy the time abroad and to create memories.

3.2.2 Experience abroad debrief survey

The second survey, Experience abroad debrief, gathered 7 responses. Apart from one respondent, whose destination was Australia, the majority had studied abroad in South Korea. The respondents' origin countries were Nepal (2), Uzbekistan (2), Bangladesh, Rwanda and Vietnam. All respondents had stayed abroad for more than two years.

3. How long do plan on staying abroad?

Number of respondents: 7

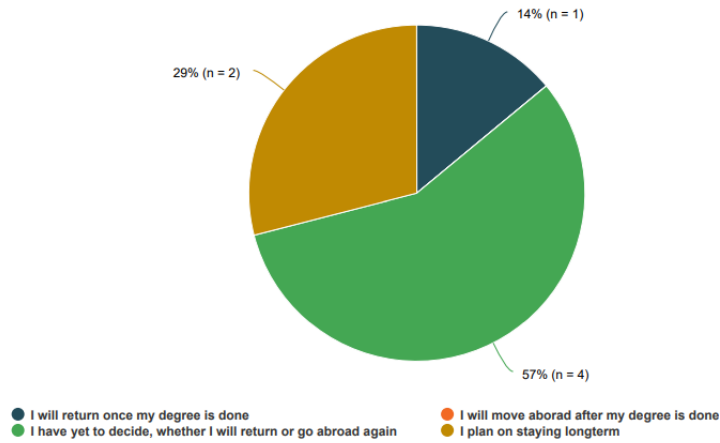


Figure 11. Plans on staying abroad (n = 7)

As shown in figure 11, most of the respondents (57%) had yet to decide if they were to stay abroad or to return to their origin country after their degree. Two respondents said they had planned on staying abroad long-term (29%) whereas only one student (14%) was to return to their origin country after their degree.

4. What experiences were you aware of possibly having during/after your experience abroad? You can pick multiple of the choices given.

Number of respondents: 7, selected answers: 13

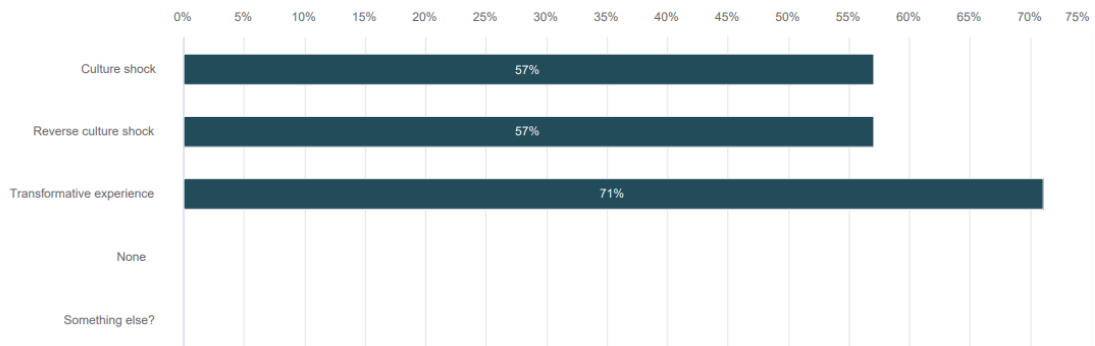


Figure 12. Awareness of experiences one might have during/after studying abroad (n = 7)

All the respondents had previous knowledge of some type of possible experiences they might face during or after their studies abroad. The most picked (71%) change was a transformational experience. Culture shock and reverse culture shock were both tied at 57% (figure 12).

In an open question asking about motives and expectations about going studying abroad, the keywords in respondents' answers most commonly revolved around the topics of being exposed to and learning new cultures and languages, as well as independence. Other

keywords and topics included adaptability, lifestyle changes, internationalization and facing exciting yet challenging experiences.

6. From the following, please pick changes you feel you experienced during your time abroad. You can pick more than one answer.

Number of respondents: 7 , selected answers: 30

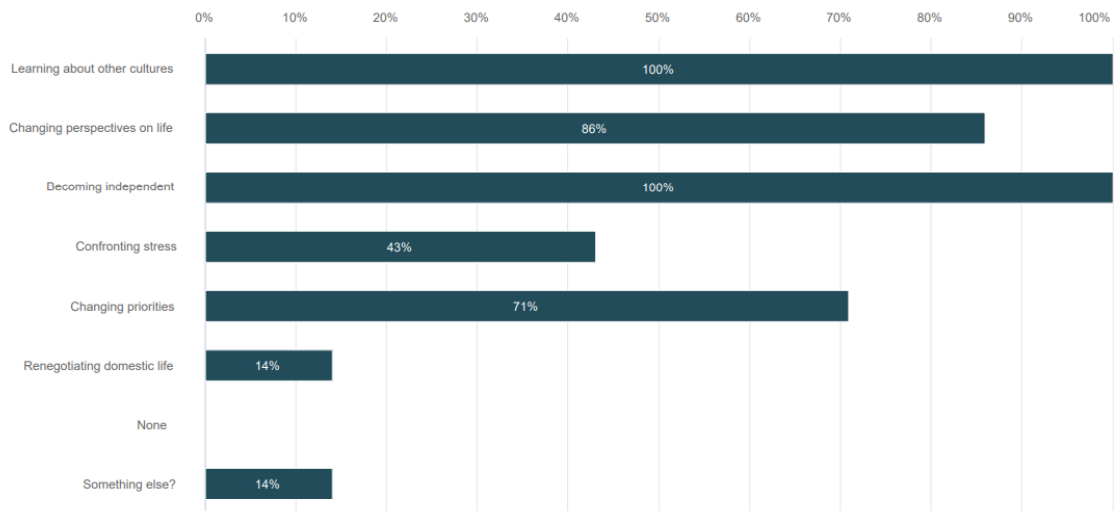


Figure 13. Challenges experienced during studies abroad (n = 7)

As seen in figure 13 above, respondents all noted that learning about cultures was part of their experience abroad as well as becoming independent. 86% of respondents also noticed changes in their perspective of life, whereas 71% noticed a change in their priorities. Three students reported having to confront stress and one respondent had faced renegotiations of their domestic life. One open answer pointed out experiencing a change in their confidence level.

With an open question, respondents were asked if there had been a situation or an experience that made the student aware of possible changes they might have had. Responses revealed that facing situations such as facing study/work-life balancing or financial struggles, were ones that made the respondents aware of changes. One respondent noticed a change after their first year of studies abroad and another respondent had no specific experience or situation that made them aware of possible changes. One respondent had noticed a change when faced with a situation where they showcased communication skills, another respondent noticed a change when facing a situation where they were presenting leadership skills.

8. From most (1) to least (10), please rank these skills and competencies according to what you improved in the most (note- the rank cannot be shared, each skill needs their own ranking) :

Number of respondents: 7

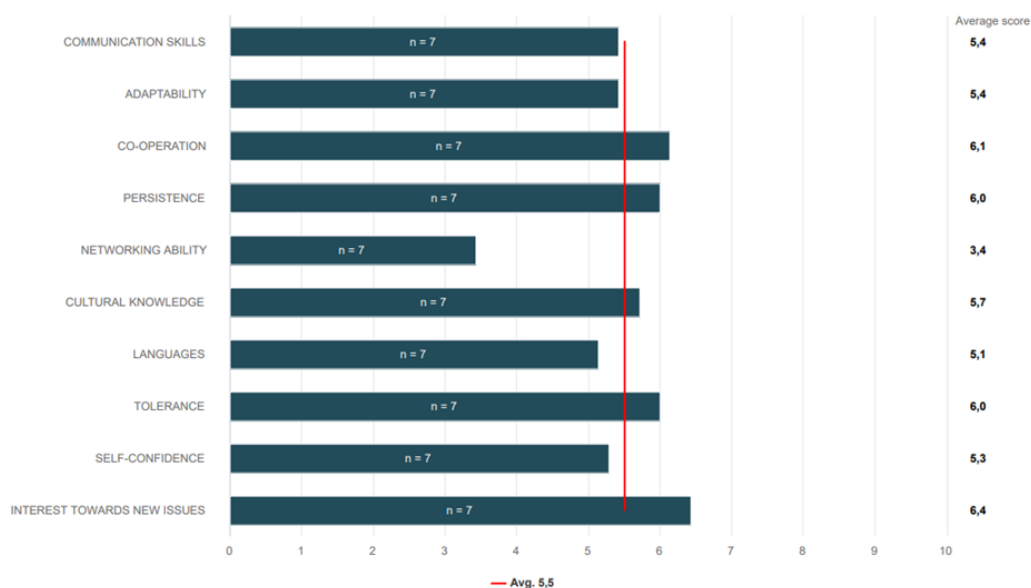


Figure 14. Rating competencies and skills one has improved in during studying abroad (n = 7)

Respondents were asked to rate international competencies respondents had improved the most in during their studies abroad. When comparing the average scores of the competencies, the one which was rated highest amongst respondents was networking, scoring a 3,4 average score. The second highest-rated competence was languages followed by self-confidence, rated 5,1 and 5,3 respectively. Communication skills and adaptability were tied in fourth place, both gathering the average score of 5,4. Cultural knowledge ranked fifth scoring 5,7. Persistence and tolerance were tied with both scoring of 6,0, followed by co-operation (6,1). Interest towards new issues got ranked the lowest with an average score of 6,4 (figure 14).

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to name five skills they felt to be most useful in their field of speciality. Keywords and skills mentioned most often were communication skills and teamwork (four mentions each.) Language skills and adaptability were each mentioned thrice. Time management, working under pressure, problem-solving, confidence and hospitality mindset were all mentioned twice. Other mentioned skills were multitasking, interpersonal skills, extraversion, social skills, humour, intuitive, tolerance, openness, responsiveness, grooming and cultural knowledge.

10. Do you agree?

Number of respondents: 7

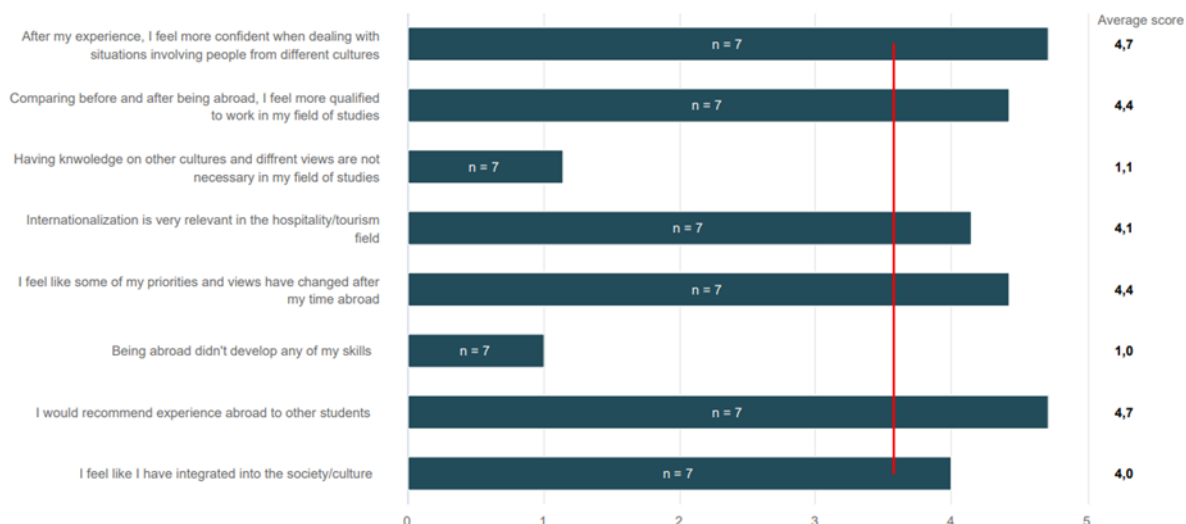


Figure 15. Statements for international students (n = 7)

Respondents were asked if they agreed with seven different statements. If all respondents strongly disagreed, the average score of the statement would be 1, whereas if everyone strongly agreed the score would be 5. When it comes to confidence in multicultural situations all respondents agree to feeling more confident in said situations (4,7.) Compared to before studying abroad, respondents were all in agreement (4,4) that they felt more qualified to work in their field. Everyone disagreed (1,1) with the statement calming that knowledge of other cultures and views was not important in the field of studies. Everyone also agreed (4,1) that internationalization was relevant in the hospitality and tourism field. The statement about priorities and views changing after being abroad was also heavily agreed upon (4,4). All respondents disagreed strongly (1,0) with studying abroad not developing any of the respondents' skills. Respondents heavily agreed (4,7) that they would recommend others to have experience abroad. Other than two respondents being undecided, others agreed on a varying intensity that they had integrated into the society/culture while studying abroad (figure 15).

Respondents were asked about personal changes they had while abroad and what had been gained through their experience in an open question. Keywords that were most used revolved around gaining confidence and communication skills. One's mindset being changed, such as becoming open-minded, was mentioned by two. Other terms that popped up were improvement with language and leadership skills, as well as knowledge about cultures.

With an open question, respondents were asked about skills they deemed necessary when in intercultural situations. Communication skills were highlighted along with adaptability and tolerance, being generally open-minded, accepting and understanding. Language skills and willingness to research other cultures were also noted.

In the last question, respondents were asked for any advice they'd give for students going abroad. The most common advice was to get acquainted with the destination culture beforehand and to stay open-minded. Respondents were also encouraging future students to be positive, confident and curious.

The last question was voluntary, asking if the respondents had anything they'd like to add. Balancing work and free time was noted to be difficult, but many pointed out that immersion into the new culture had been a positive experience – few wished that everyone had the opportunity to have intercultural experiences. The general census was that there are no right or wrong views, just different ways of thinking.

4 Findings

In this chapter the results from both surveys, exchange student debrief and experience abroad debrief, are compared. As the results have been gone through in detail in the previous chapter, this chapter concentrates more on the comparison of the results from the two groups.

As can be seen from the results of both surveys, both groups (exchange students and international students) were knowledgeable of possible changes they might encounter during their experience abroad. In the exchange student survey, reverse homesickness was mentioned – which can also be part of re-entry challenges one faces after reverse culture shock.

When abroad, both groups felt like the major change they encountered was learning about cultures. The difference between groups was highlighted with international students all experiencing a change in independence level, and almost all had noticed changes in both perspectives on life and priorities – this was not the case with exchange students.

When ranking international competencies, the average scores were very different. Where exchange students' rankings reported improvements most in persistence, interest towards new issues, tolerance, cultural knowledge and co-operation, international students' rankings showed the polar opposite. With international students networking, languages, self-confidence, communication skills and adaptability were the five most highly ranked. Networking was ranked the highest amongst international students, but it was ranked the lowest with exchange students. Similarly, exchange students ranked interest towards new issues high on their developed skills, whereas international students ranked it the lowest.

Similarities were found with skills deemed useful in the hospitality and tourism field. Both groups agreed that communication skills and adaptability were important. International students mentioned skills such as language skills, time management, working under pressure, problem-solving, confidence and hospitality mindset - whereas exchange students stated skills such as cultural knowledge, tolerance, adaptability and being understanding.

When it came to statements both groups were unanimous about recommending having experience abroad and found knowledge on different cultures and views to be a necessity in the field of studies. Both groups also agreed that internationalization was relevant in hospitality and tourism. Statement about being abroad developing skills got every

respondent to agree, except for one exchange student who disagreed. International students were more confident in their skills compared to exchange students when it came to dealing with situations involving different cultures. Exchange students were on the fence about feeling more qualified in their field after being abroad, whereas international students felt qualified to work in their field after being abroad. Unlike with international students agreeing with priorities and views changing after being abroad, exchange students were generally more neutral with the statement.

When it came to personal changes students noticed during their time abroad, and gains from their experience, the keywords most used by international students included communication skills, mindset changes and increase in confidence. Changes mentioned most often by exchange students also included confidence, but unlike with international students, also cultural knowledge was often mentioned.

Both international and exchange students found skills in communication, adaptability, tolerance and being open-minded/understanding to be very essential when dealing with different cultural encounters.

When giving advice to students going abroad, the general census from both groups was to be do ones research of the destination and to act appropriately, encouraging them to be open and to be tolerant.

4.1 Results

There were some noticeable differences and similarities when it came to certain parts of the survey answers. In this subheading, some suggested reasons behind the results are discussed.

The first case of differences in results came from changes respondents felt during their time abroad. Exchange students mostly did not experience changes with changing priorities or perspectives on life, which both are related to transformative experience, but these themes were very prominent in international students' experiences. The reason behind this could be that the amount of time the student has been immersed in the new environment has had a greater impact on the student- this also links back to having enough time for 'peak' experiences and to internalize them, creating a transformative experience.

Another case with drastically different answers came in the ranking of international competencies according to which were improved in the most. The two groups had no skill in

common in the top 5 ranked and had even ranked the other groups most ranked as their lowest. Taking both groups' top five ranked competencies, and referencing and comparing to the hidden competences element ratings (productivity, curiosity and resilience) it turns out that international students' highest-ranked competencies were almost all in the curiosity realm, except for self-confidence being in the productivity realm. Exchange students' highest-ranked skills were heavy on the curiosity as well, but also had co-operation and persistence, which are almost equally divided between two realms: productivity/curiosity and productivity/resilience respectively. The ten competencies all were on the list of attributes connected highly to international experiences. From these competences, all but cultural knowledge and language skills – the skills most connected to international experiences, are found to be valued in the recruitment process (CIMO, 2014).

When asking about personal changes after time abroad, skills mentioned by both exchange students as well as international students included competencies that were both heavily linked to international experiences, as well as valued attributes by recruiters. The main ones of these were communication skills and self-confidence.

5 Conclusion

This chapter further summarizes the key findings of the thesis as a whole. In this chapter the suggestions for further research are discussed, as well as the validity and reliability of the thesis. Lastly, a reflection on learning is included.

5.1 Key findings

It can be claimed that in general, experience abroad is considered highly advantageous for the student. According to the surveys and their results collected, whether it be an exchange or longer sojourn, one will develop their skills abroad. Some of the mentioned skills were linked to hidden competences, which further proves that skills enhanced abroad through international experience can be valued and useful in one's career after their time abroad. Even though the average rankings of competencies respondents felt like they've improved on abroad were different between the survey groups, it should be noted that the results will vary by the individual, depending on how they perceive their personal development with different competences. The survey results can be used as an example or tool to guide students into recognizing their possible hidden competences and making use of them.

The respondents all seemed to have varying levels of transformative experiences. As mentioned in the results, it seemed like the transformative experiences were more noticed or potent with students who had been abroad for longer. This does not mean that the shorter period sojourners, exchange students, did not notice any transformation at all. It should also be noted that transformation is a personal experience, and each individual will have a different level of transformation.

When comparing the two respondent groups, both had high levels of understanding of skills that would be considered useful in a multicultural environment. The results displayed that the respondents did acknowledge both adaptability and communication skills, as well as cultural knowledge to be important skills in the hospitality and tourism field, together with the importance of said skills with encountering situations with other cultures. The results also revealed that many had found that they had developed said attributes while abroad. This would confirm that intercultural experiences were experienced and that they were useful, and that everyone had developed their cultural intelligence and skills. Both respondent groups seem to have a similar experience with achieving and developing intercultural skills, thus confirming that the duration of immersion did not affect the attaining

of intercultural skills. The results showed that respondents in both groups seemed to recognize or acknowledge their development towards an intercultural mindset.

As a conclusion, the results from surveys revealed that both international students and exchange students had generally a similar experience when it came to personal development, cultural intelligence and transformative experiences. The students who had been abroad for longer did have a more striking experience with transformations, but both respondent groups had a similar mindset about having experience abroad and shared views on what they deemed as necessary skills in their field of studies.

5.2 Suggestions for further research

This thesis covers only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the topics of transformative experiences, cultural intelligence and personal development. Examples of future research topics could be the connection of cultural intelligence and transformative sojourn only, having a comparison of before and after sojourn, and the development of cultural intelligence. Also, different theoretical backgrounds on any of the topics could be compared and investigated with each other.

A point to investigate could be how respondents had used the skills and competencies they had mentioned in this research, and how useful they were in their career. Another research could be done with comparing students' perceptions and skills before their departure, to once they have returned and adapted to being back.

5.3 Validity and reliability

Both of the surveys were sent to their selected appropriate groups, through e-mail – anonymously. The responses were collected through Webropol, and the responses were collected in an anonymous manner. The e-mails and surveys both informed respondents that the responses were to be used in this thesis, which was a commission work for Haaga-Helia international services, Haaga department especially. Due to developing services and the nature of personal experiences, the results might slightly differ even if repeated on the same target groups.

The first survey was sent out by international services to 310 students. 6 responses were collected, leading to a response rate of 1.9%. The timing of the survey was at the cusp of semester final exams and summer vacations starting, so it is speculated that it affected the response rate. The second survey was sent individually out by an exchange university professor, so there is no information of how many the referral link was sent to, and that

gathered 7 responses. Overall, it is estimated that the response rate combined could be ~4%. Even so, the response rate is unfortunately low, giving a regrettably small sample to work with. This on the other hand meant that each individual answer could be thoroughly dissected, and more open-ended questions could be used to gather and analyse more useful information.

The information that was collected from both exchange student and international student surveys covered the three main topics and theories of the thesis and provided comprehensive data to analyse for the research and to use for the leaflet.

The research was done on reliable sources found. The main information was gathered from respectable and noted researchers and their articles and past research. Even if some information was based on older research and articles, they were ones that have been referred to by many and are considered to be the foundations of some of the theoretical views. Some information was gathered from company websites and articles. The information that was not deemed relevant or that seemed outdated was either left out or specified.

5.4 Reflection on learning

This thesis has been a process. It has been a learning experience and the creation process of it has included both ups and downs. It was necessary to make some emergency decisions, like adding another survey and reaching out for extra help for another possible respondent group. The main take-aways the thesis has given for the writer have been time management and the analysis process. The thesis also gave inspiration and interest to some of the topics for the writer, as well as a sense of realising one's potential.

The thesis was also informative during the research and data analysis, giving further knowledge about intercultural skills and cultural intelligence, and their relation to the field of hospitality and tourism. This knowledge could be further used and studied by the author, and it could be beneficial for the author's career in the field.

The process and steps that were taken to create this thesis were also useful for self-reflection and growth. The notes taken from the experience can be useful for the author in the future, as a tool of self-development. Focusing on the knowledge of what skills and mindsets to develop can be highly useful in the author's future career advances in the hospitality and tourism field.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Exchange student debrief survey questions

Please write down where you are from and where you went for your time abroad

- Where I'm from (which culture you're from?)
- My destination country was

What experiences were you aware of possibly having during/after your exchange experience?

- Culture shock
- Reverse culture shock
- Transformative experience
- None
- Something else?

From the following, please pick changes you feel you experienced during your time abroad

- Learning about other cultures
- Changing perspectives on life
- Becoming independent
- Confronting stress
- Changing priorities
- Renegotiating domestic life
- None
- Something else?

From most (1) to least (10) , please rank these skills and competencies according to what you improved in the most

- Communication skills
- Adaptability
- Co-operation
- Persistence
- Networking ability
- Cultural knowledge
- Languages
- Tolerance
- Self-confidence
- Interest towards new issues

Name top 5 skills you feel are most useful in the hospitality and tourism field

Do you agree with these statements?

- After my experience, I feel more confident when dealing with situations involving people from different cultures
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree

- Comparing before and after being abroad, I feel more qualified to work in my field of studies
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree
- Having knowledge on other cultures and different views are not necessary in my field of studies
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree
- Internationalization is very relevant in the hospitality/tourism field
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree
- I feel like some of my priorities and views have changed after my time abroad
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree
- Being abroad didn't develop any of my skills
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree
- I would recommend experience abroad to other students
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree

How do you think you personally changed during your time abroad, what did you gain from your experience?

What skills do you think are necessary when dealing with cross-cultural encounters?

What tips would you give for students going abroad?

Anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix 2. Experience abroad student debrief survey questions

Please write down where you are from and where you went for your time abroad

- Where I'm from (which culture you're from?)
- My destination country was

How long have you been abroad?

- 1-2 months
- 3-5 months
- 6-8 months
- 9 months - 1 year
- 1 - 2 years
- 2 or more years

How long do plan on staying abroad?

- I will return once my degree is done
- I will move abroad after my degree is done
- I have yet to decide, whether I will return or go abroad again
- I plan on staying long term

What experiences were you aware of possibly having during/after your experience abroad?

- Culture shock
- Reverse culture shock
- Transformative experience
- None
- Something else?

What kind of expectations did you have about studying abroad, and what were your motives to go abroad?

From the following, please pick changes you feel you experienced during your time abroad

- Learning about other cultures
- Changing perspectives on life
- Becoming independent
- Confronting stress
- Changing priorities
- Renegotiating domestic life
- None
- Something else?

Has there been a situation or an experience that has made you aware of possible changes in yourself?

From most (1) to least (10) , please rank these skills and competencies according to what you improved in the most

- Communication skills
- Adaptability
- Co-operation
- Persistence
- Networking ability
- Cultural knowledge
- Languages
- Tolerance
- Self-confidence
- Interest towards new issues

Name top 5 skills you feel are most useful in the hospitality and tourism field

Do you agree?

- After my experience, I feel more confident when dealing with situations involving people from different cultures
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree
- Comparing before and after being abroad, I feel more qualified to work in my field of studies
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree
- Having knowledge on other cultures and different views are not necessary in my field of studies
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree
- Internationalization is very relevant in the hospitality/tourism field
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree
- I feel like some of my priorities and views have changed after my time abroad
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree
- Being abroad didn't develop any of my skills
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree
- I would recommend experience abroad to other students
1 strongly disagree .. 5 strongly agree

How do you think you personally changed during your time abroad, what did you gain from your experience?

What skills do you think are necessary when dealing with intercultural encounters?

What tips would you give for students going abroad?

Anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix 3. Leaflet

What one can expect from experience abroad?

Things to note on as a student going or returning from abroad
- information package for briefing and debriefing



This leaflet

- The information in this leaflet is based on research and previous experiences of students who have been on an exchange semester
 - Some extra notes added with international students' perspectives
- With this leaflet, one is introduced to topics that are relevant for exchanges students
- One can use this leaflet also after their time abroad, to reflect on their experience and help recognize changes and developments in oneself
- Leaflet is divided into 2 sections : personal changes and utilization of changes



Experience abroad

- When going abroad, you will be interacting with many different types people and in different encounters
- Your experience will be unique
- The new situations might be shocking or strange
- You might notice that you are always learning something new
- Developing and changing during/after the experience is normal

Personal changes

The three C's
Transformative experience



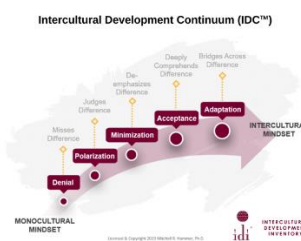
The Three C's

- Experience abroad might bring changes and development in the form of the three C's
 - Culture shock
 - Reverse culture shock
 - Cultural intelligence
- Many know about culture shock, but some may find reverse culture shock even more jarring, because it is going through a change in what is now considered as the norm

<p>Culture shock</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. intrigued and excited (honeymoon) 2. noting differences and frustrated (crisis) 3. homesick, but adapting (recovery) 4. adapted and settled (adjustment) experiences 	<p>Reverse culture shock</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. detaching and eagerness 2. realisation and reluctance 3. frustration, but adapting 4. integrating both
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The Three C's

- **Cultural intelligence (CQ)** measures ones ability to adapt during cultural encounters
 - Similar idea to IQ and EQ
- Cultural intelligence could be assimilated with Intercultural Development Continuum
 - The more accepting and adapted a person is, the more intercultural their mindset is
 - Intercultural people has skills to work with varying cultures
- Both CQ and IDC are about adapting, which is also a commonality with culture shock and reverse culture shock

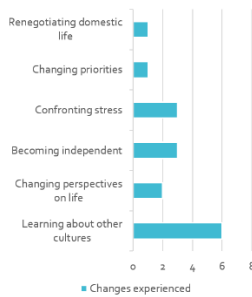


Transformative experience

- Transformative experience can change ones way of thinking and even ones values
- Can be linked to 'peak' experiences that get internalized and understood, leading to a personal transformation
- Experience abroad may offer elements of personal transformation, which are linked to cultural intelligence:
 - Developing international perspective
 - Discovering priorities
 - Intercultural learning
 - Challenging stereotypes

Transformative experience

Changes reported by previous exchange students



- From a list of changes linked with transformative experience (and cultural intelligence) everyone had noted at least one change in themselves

Make use of the changes

Developed skills
Hidden competences



Developed skills

- Experiences by previous exchange students:
 - 67% feel more confident dealing with instances involving different cultures
 - 50% agree they feel more qualified to work in hospitality & tourism field
 - 83% say being abroad developed their skills
 - 100% would recommend having experience abroad
- Many noticed improvement in cultural knowledge and confidence
- To give an idea of possible skills one might improve on the following slides may also be useful for debriefing, and to reflect and recognize skills one can use and highlight in their career

Developed skills

Top 5 skills most developed during time abroad, ranked by **international students**

1. Networking
2. Languages
3. Self-confidence
4. Adaptability
5. Communication skills

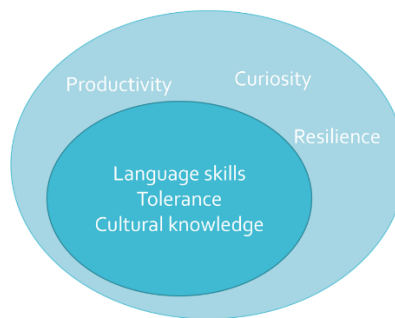
Top 5 skills most developed during time abroad, ranked by **exchange students**

1. Persistence
2. Interest towards new issues
3. Tolerance
4. Co-operation
5. Cultural knowledge

The skills are all considered 'international competences' and all are connected to international experiences.

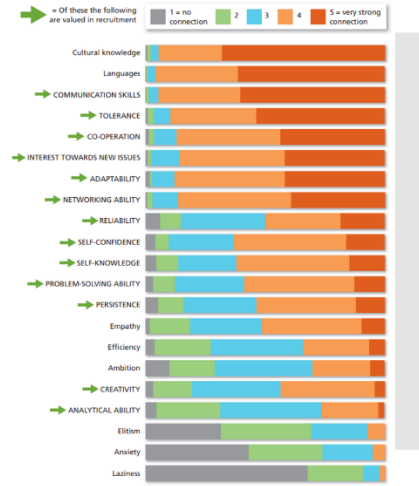
Hidden competences

- The darker blue sphere demonstrates competences thought most commonly/traditionally to be developed through international experiences
- Lighter sphere demonstrates competences developed through international experiences, considered to be 'hidden competences'
- Hidden competences include a lot of traditional skills one may not connect with international experience, but which are thought to be developed with said experience



Hidden competences

- The best way to utilize ones hidden skills is to recognize them
- Here are some skills that studies show are both valued by recruiters, as well as connected to development with international experience
 - This list can be used as a point of reflection after ones sojourn



List of international competences, CIMO (2014)

What one can expect from experience abroad?

Things to note on as a student going or returning from abroad - information package for briefing and debriefing

