

Per A. Nilsson*

Expectations and experiences of temporarily studying abroad

A B S T R A C T

This tentative study focuses on the experiences of outbound exchange students and underlines the international relations component among contemporary universities. The aim is to investigate to what extent the expectations of outbound exchange students are being met in a population of students who had temporarily studied abroad. In this study, Umeå University, Sweden, is used as a case. The study was inspired by Plog's studies (1974, 2001) in the field of tourism and hospitality research. Exchange students show similarities with tourists when it comes to choosing study destinations. This study partially confirms Plog's model. Students who are outgoing and self-confident seem to choose non-English speaking countries. In addition, this study highlights what incentives students have, to become exchange students and most importantly how they value this experience. The respondents had positive expectations before departing as exchange students and they returned with even more positive attitudes.

Keywords: student mobility, exchange students, expectations and experiences of studying abroad, international relations between partner universities

Introduction

A growing number of university students of today have become 'mobile'. Many will have international experience during their studies; the uniqueness of an international experience is gone (Streitwieser, 2012). However, the increase in the number of students studying abroad also leads to questions about the students' expectations and how they are met. The students invest time and money in studying in a foreign country and many students, hope to improve their language skills, experience a different culture and to develop personally (Teichler, 2002; Teichler, 2004; The Swedish International Programme Office for Education and Training, 2002, 2008). Thus, learning more about students' experiences from a period of temporarily studying abroad is of importance, i.e. learning whether and how expectations are met is crucial for a deeper understanding of mobility among young people when it comes to employability and careers in life.

Within Europe, the Erasmus Programme has improved students possibilities to international studies. The Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme is the largest mobility programme in the world, and enables students to temporarily study abroad for one or two

* Director of the International Office at Umeå University, Sweden.

semesters at academic institutions in Europe. Erasmus networks now cover 90% of Europe's universities (Times Higher Education Supplement, 2005). In Sweden and many other countries, there are also options for university students to study abroad outside of Europe. For that very reason, student mobility has become an ambiguous area of research (Cambridge & Thompson 2004). According to Findlay, King, Stam and Ruiz-Gelices (2006), student mobility can be conceptualised theoretically in three ways: as an element of highly skilled migration, as a product of globalisation, and as an element of youth mobility cultures and consumption geographies.

This article deals with experiences of temporarily studying abroad. The aim is to investigate to what extent the expectations of outbound exchange students are being met in a population of students that has temporarily studied abroad. What are the students' expectations and experiences after returning from temporarily studies abroad? In this article a model is used from tourism and hospitality research to test if student mobility can be better understood by widening the perspective and studying student mobility from another angle.

This tentative study has focused on the Swedish experience of outbound exchange students and, in particular, the case of outbound students from Umeå University. The basis for the analysis has been built on this limited case study. This Swedish example will be used throughout the article to discuss student mobility.

What do exchange students expect?

Travel has become a meaningful part of many young peoples' lives. Why, how and where you travel says something about who you are and who you want to be (Jonsson, 2003). In Jonsson's study, attitudes towards studying abroad were examined among those who were considering studying at a college or university. The motives given were the expected ones, for example, to learn a new language and to learn about another culture. More surprising were the findings that the students wanted a break from the monotony of the daily grind, a bit of time to breathe freely, to do something new and to get away for a while. Moreover, the study showed that young people have very positive associations regarding internationalisation and many want to live, work and/or study outside of Sweden. The final report of the Professional Value of Erasmus Mobility, VALERA (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler, 2006), makes a similar observation, i.e. Erasmus is gradually losing its uniqueness, as mobility has become the norm among European university students.

Cultural experience is often the major reason for students choosing to study abroad temporarily (Thissen & Ederveen, 2006). This is, of course, true for exchange students who study abroad for one or two semesters. Thissen and Ederveen (2006) emphasise that the motives for fee-paying students coming to Europe to study for a whole degree are somewhat different from the motives of exchange students who enrol in a mobility programme such as Erasmus. This has to do with differences in expectations regarding experiences and career. Fee-paying international students studying for a whole degree are investing a lot of money in a career, whereas exchange students are focusing on aspects of personal development (Papatsiba, 2005; Thissen & Ederveen, 2006).

That which is a motive for some students to study abroad might be an obstacle for others. The Swedish International Programme Office for Education and Training conducted a survey in 2002 and found that students who did not participate in mobility programmes highlighted reasons such as timing, language problems, previous experience of working abroad, travel, studying abroad and being unmotivated as obstacles to studying abroad. Swedish students who did not enrol in student mobility programmes also emphasised ties to family and friends as a reason for staying put. Another study by the Swedish International Programme Office (2008), involved interviewing students about their attitudes towards studying abroad. The results of the study confirmed the desire among Swedish students to study in English when studying abroad.

In a New Zealand study Doyle, Gendall, Meyer, Hoek, Tait, McKenzie & Loozparg (2009), found that students perceived the cost of studying abroad, leaving friends and family, studying in a language other than English, and a preference for prioritising completing an undergraduate degree to be the main obstacles to overseas exchange studies.

When students are asked about how they perceive the benefits of experiencing studying abroad, as many studies on student mobility have done (cf. Bond, Girgrah, Burrow, Ingersoll, Vandersmuhlen, Spaling & Areemanpattnil, 2009), the answers are quite similar. For instance, Doyle et al. (2009) found that students perceived the exposure to a different culture and language, and the experience of studying and living abroad as benefits of overseas exchange studies.

What do exchange students experience abroad?

Students who choose to study abroad are taking a significant step in setting in motion their own individual life projects and it can be assumed that they dream of and aspire to having a great experience, be it for academic or personal development. It is quite obvious that students have expectations before enrolling in a student mobility programme; other scholars have also designed studies to follow-up on students' experiences of temporarily studying abroad (cf. Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler, 2006; Campbell & Li, 2008; McLeod & Wainwright, 2009). One follow-up study observed separation and isolation in the international student community with weak attachment to the 'local' community (Waters & Brooks, 2009).

The outcome of students studying abroad has received quite a lot of attention in various studies. However, outcomes can be difficult to evaluate depending on when follow-up studies take place, these can take place immediately after a period abroad or up to several years later, but also depending on whether the studies target exchange students (often Erasmus) or international students in general. In addition, the conclusions that can be drawn from follow-up studies depend on the size of the population studied, which may explain why results from follow-up studies can differ.

Erasmus students' mobility has not attained the scale anticipated, particularly for UK students (King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). To learn more about the students' experiences of temporarily studying in Europe, King et al. (2003) conducted a study. The study showed that the experience of a year abroad led to linguistic improvement, the cultural

experience of living in another country and further general personal development. While career prospects improved after studying abroad, academic learning experiences were less significant. These findings are similar to many other studies of student mobility (Maiworm & Teichler, 1996; Teichler, 2002; Bracht et al. 2006).

Bracht et al. (2006) concluded that former Erasmus students could expect higher income and status than their immobile peers but they were being employed in international work assignments and were often internationally mobile. Only former Erasmus students from Central and Eastern European countries could generally expect on better career opportunities than their immobile peers. Studies by Maiworm and Teichler (1996) showed that Erasmus-students found work that allowed them to exploit the special skills they gained during their experience of studying abroad. Norris and Gillespie (2009) found that studying abroad truly did change lives, as the respondents' career choices were affected by the experience of studying abroad. In addition, mobile students more frequently had jobs with international work assignments (Wiers-Jenssen, 2008). A comprehensive study by Mohajeri Norris and Gillespie (2009) on the experience of studying abroad also confirmed its impact on career choices later in life. The study showed that studying abroad affected the career choices of nearly two thirds of the respondents.

Introducing a model from tourism and hospitality research to better understand student mobility

In tourism and hospitality research, exchange students would be defined as tourists because they are temporarily mobile like all other tourists. Exchange students study for one or two semesters at a foreign university and then return home to finish their degrees. Moreover, the literature review above indicates that reasons other than those related to education are applicable. Thus, it can be argued that most exchange studies are prompted by a mixture of motives, including typical touristic motives, such as experiencing something different to everyday life. Therefore, some scholars have studied international education viewed as tourism (e.g. Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Field, 1999). One could therefore, assume that studies of tourism could contribute to a better understanding of the rationale behind international student mobility. In our global economy, student mobility is a part of the tourism industry. Students "shop for" experiences and training in different parts of the world and this shopping is a source of income for businesses.

Plog (1974, 2001) attempts to understand why destinations and resorts rise and fall in popularity. According to Plog, certain destinations attract visitors with distinct psychological profiles. Applied to the phenomenon of student mobility, this could mean that universities in some countries are more attractive to certain student groups than to other student groups, particularly when life-style considerations are more important drivers than academic concerns. For instance have universities in Australia, Spain and France lost in popularity and countries as Denmark, Poland, Japan and China have gained in popularity for Swedish students studying abroad (Statistics Sweden 2012). Based on this, the design of this study has been inspired by Plog. It seems that the psychology of

students when choosing a study destination has much in common with the decision making of the individuals in Plog's studies.

Plog's study involves understanding the psychology of decision-making when people travel. Can the same principles also apply to the psychology of students when choosing a study destination? In Plog's earlier work (1974), he used the terms 'psychocentrics' and 'allocentrics' to describe the characteristics of people travelling. Later, Plog (2001) changed the terminology and grouped the people under these labels 'dependables' (psychocentrics) and 'venturers' (allocentrics). The dependables try to make their daily lives predictable and dependable. The venturers are personalities at the opposite end of the spectrum. These individuals reach out to and explore the world and all of its diversity. They are self-confident and intellectual explorers. The archetypes of these two personalities are rare, which is why the dimensions of venturesomeness and dependability distribute on a normal curve. Plog argues that this fact, which is based on empirical studies, helps to explain why destinations rise and fall in popularity. Destinations attract different groups of consumers/tourists. Analogously, it can be assumed that different study destinations, i.e. the city or region where a university is located, attract different students. Jonsson (2003) showed that some students were attracted by study destinations far away from Sweden. Others, mostly less experienced travellers, looked for options closer to the home university. The conclusion drawn by Plog is that these personality characteristics determine travel patterns and preferences.

Method

The focus of this study is the expectations that outbound exchange students have when they depart to study abroad for one or two semesters. Hence, the analyses are based on data from a survey monitoring their expectations prior to leaving and a follow-up survey after their time abroad. The survey was carried out as web-based questionnaires directed at outbound exchange students from Umeå University, a comprehensive university in the north of Sweden, with 32,000 students during the academic year 2007/2008. In total, 143 students from

Umeå enrolled in an exchange program in the autumn term of 2007. Two thirds were Erasmus students and the rest were bound for studies in North America and Australia. 123 had signed up for one semester abroad, and the remaining 20 were to spend a full academic year at a university abroad.

The Umeå University case is a limited study and was chosen because of good collaboration with the International Office and accessibility to the students and their participation in the survey. Later, 10 outbound exchange students were interviewed randomly after they returned. The students knew that the interviews were going to be published on the Umeå University web-site in an effort to promote exchange studies and they all agreed to that.

Before leaving for their studies abroad, the 143 students received a questionnaire in which they were asked about their previous experiences of travelling and living abroad, their motives for enrolling in an international study programme, their choice of study destination, and their expectations (such as learning another language, getting to know

another country and culture, a sense of adventure, etc.). A Likert scale was used in the survey to scale responses to the questionnaire on seven levels from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In relation to their return to Sweden, six months later, the students were once again approached with a web-based survey and asked questions about how they had perceived their stay abroad. The data set therefore constitutes a panel.

For exchange students, an agreement between Umeå University and an international partner university is fundamental. Without an agreement, the only option for the students is to study abroad on their own, without a scholarship or support from the home university. Umeå University has more than 700 agreements with partner universities worldwide, but most of the agreements are within Europe (i.e. within the Erasmus and Nordplus mobility programmes).

An Umeå University student can choose from many countries when it comes to studying abroad as an exchange student. The choice is dependent on the student's main field of study. The students have many possibilities, for instance, a law-student can choose between 17 countries, and a business student between 24 countries. Students have many more options than they are willing and able to exercise when it comes to studying abroad, especially within the Erasmus Programme. Many students from Umeå University prefer to travel far from Sweden when studying abroad. Countries such as Australia, South Africa, Japan and the USA are popular among students but there are relatively few places available. The demand from Umeå students to study abroad is very different from that which Umeå University can actually supply. The places available at universities in many countries are not very popular among students. One thing to keep in mind is that the students' home university can only nominate students, while the hosting universities admit the students. For example, many more students from Umeå want to study in Great Britain than can possibly be accepted by the admitting study institutions, due to the popularity of that particular country among a large group of potential international students. Thus, there is a discrepancy between what the students perceive as the best option and what Umeå University can actually provide supply its students. What impact does this have for the research question in this study, i.e. how expectations are met? The students have different expectations when being granted their first priority destination compared with if they are offered their second/third priority. In addition, this has most likely an impact on how they experience the period abroad.

In the present study, outbound exchange students were studied in order to be able to draw conclusions from what exchange students had experienced after having temporarily studied abroad. The questionnaire about the students' expectations, previous experience of travelling etc. was not validated which is a weakness of the study. Further limitations are, for example, that the study relied on a relatively small group of outbound exchange students, and that the students were followed up after a relatively short period of time. Moreover, this study lacks a control group of students studying on campus. These limitations will, of course, make conclusions drawn from this study tentative.

Participants

Of the initial 143 outbound students, 80 persons answered the first questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 56%. One reason for not answering the first questionnaire may have been that students are frequently asked to answer surveys during their studies at Umeå University and many students become hesitant to responding to surveys. The follow-up survey was directed at the 80 students who answered the first questionnaire and yielded 62 answers. Non-respondents in the follow-up survey were mainly the result of students having changed their e-mail addresses and, therefore, not possible to reach.

Of the initial population of 143 students, 62 answered both questionnaires, and 57 of the respondents could be matched and linked between the responses in both surveys. Therefore, panel encompasses 40% of the population. An analysis of the non-respondents does not indicate any bias with respect to gender, age or study programmes. However, the results of this study are limited to 62 students who participated in an international programme and cannot be generalised to all students at Umeå University who choose to study abroad (a substantial but unknown number of students choose to study abroad for shorter or longer periods outside of mobility programmes administered by the university).

All statistical analysis was performed with SPSS, version 17.0 for Windows. The Wilcoxon signed ranked test was used for the study of paired observations, e.g. when comparing the answers to the questionnaires after returning to Sweden with the answers before leaving for studies abroad. The Mann-Whitney test was used to compare differences between groups. The level of statistical significance was set to $p < 0.05$.

The framework of the survey

The characteristics of psychographic types are described in Table 1 and were inspired by Plog (1974, 2001). Student mobility characteristics can be categorised as either the self-inhibited and non-adventurous type (dependables) or the type of person who is outgoing and self-confident in his/her behaviour (venturers). In this study, students going to non-English speaking countries were labelled more self-confident (venturers) than those going to English speaking countries (dependables). In addition, foreign language competence is important for students' choice of study destination.

According to Plog, psychographic groups can be placed on a population curve; the graph follows a normal distribution curve with the two extremes at opposite ends. This model was chosen in order to understand why students make different decisions when choosing study destinations, especially when they have such a wide range of options. In accordance with the model, the respondents were divided into two groups, those studying in 'English speaking countries' and those studying in 'non-English speaking countries'. Plog's studies examined tourists choosing tourist destinations and this study examines the potential for applying tourism research when studying the choices exchange students make when choosing study destinations. In addition, this model was used as a hypothesis to better understand why students make different decisions when choosing a study destination.

<i>Dependables (self-inhibited and non-adventurous type of person)</i>	<i>Venturers (a person who is outgoing and self-confident in their behaviour)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer an English-speaking country to improve English • Like commonplace activities at study destinations • Prefer a study destination in an attractive country, academic work secondary • A limited challenge • Prefer a commonplace destination • Prefer familiar atmosphere (a culture you can recognize and not too different from Sweden) • A schedule and an experience of studying abroad that you can foresee before going 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer a non-English-speaking country to learn a third or fourth language • Enjoy a sense of discovery and delight in new experiences • Prefer novel and different study destinations, academic work primary • High level of challenge • Prefer an exotic destination • Enjoy meeting and dealing with people from a strange or foreign culture • Pre-arrangements should include basics, but open to flexibility and changes to courses

Table I. Student mobility characteristics of psychographic types inspired by Plog 1974. The questions in the survey were all connected to what is described in Table I. For instance, students were asked about their knowledge of a second and third language, how much they had travelled, the parts of the world they had visited, their expectations before studying abroad, and finally their motives for choosing a foreign university.

Results

The following section presents the results from the two surveys. Of the respondents answering the first survey (n=80), the average age was 24 and the majority of respondents were women. The vast majority of all of the students were studying social sciences, law and business. The rest of the students were studying natural sciences and technology, medicine, dentistry, education, humanities and fine arts.

A large majority was about to study in Europe and wished to study in an English speaking country. About half of the respondents studied in the UK, Ireland, Australia, Canada and the USA.

In the first survey, the students were asked how they valued the importance of the study destination, i.e. a city or a region where the university was located. Seven out of ten said that the study destination was more important than the university itself. They were also asked to value the importance of the country and 76% of the respondents thought that the country was more important than the study destination.

The students' backgrounds

An analysis of the results from the first survey showed that a large majority (89 %) of the respondents had grown up in Sweden, and half had some previous experience of living abroad for a period of time. Many of the students who enrolled in the mobility programmes were experienced travellers. All had visited at least one European country outside of Sweden. A majority had been to North America and Asia. Fewer students had been to Africa, South America, the Middle East, Oceania and Central America. In other words, the students had visited many countries, and they had a good knowledge of languages (Table II). They had university backgrounds, such as law school and business school, which could strongly benefit from the experience of studying abroad, especially when it came to further career planning and choosing a country for their studies. Most students preferred an English speaking country. Over half of the students had studied in English; another 4 students had studied in English and the language of the country. Six of the students had studied in Spanish alone. One student had studied in Chinese (Mandarin) when studying abroad, another one in German, and one had studied in French. It should be emphasised that not being proficient in a third or fourth language does not seem to be an obstacle to student mobility. One might add that most of the students had studied for quite some time at the university level. The majority of the students had earned 121 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits or more at Umeå University before temporarily studying abroad as an exchange student.

Language	Frequency
Swedish	80
English	66
Spanish	16
Norwegian	11
French	11
German	9
Finnish	4
Danish	2
Russian	1

Table II. A self-evaluated knowledge of languages. The students were asked to rate their knowledge of the languages on a scale from 1 to 7, where 7 stood for very good knowledge of a language. The results for 'very good knowledge' in the self-evaluation are shown in the table.

English speaking versus non-English speaking countries

The respondents in the first survey, pre-departure, were divided into two groups: students who studied in an English speaking country (n=44) and those who studied in a non-English speaking country (n=36).

In both groups, female students were the majority. Students who went to non-English speaking countries had a more international background, i.e. the answers from the survey showed that they (n=6) grew up mostly outside Sweden and, additionally, 23 students responded that they had lived abroad at some point during their childhood. They were also looking for an academic challenge. Students who went to English speaking countries had less experience of living abroad. Three of the students had lived outside of Sweden for most of their upbringing and 17 had lived outside of Sweden for part of their lives. Those who studied in an English speaking country were to a higher degree looking for an adventure than those studying in a non-English speaking country. One can also observe that the students preferred to improve their already high proficiency in English rather than invest in learning a third or a fourth language. Worth noting is the fact that 18 out of the 36 students in a non-English speaking country studied in English.

Motives for studying abroad were compared between students who studied in an English speaking country with students who studied in a non-English speaking country. Motives such as 'recommended by a teacher'; 'living abroad part of the upbringing'; 'good reputation of the university'; 'asset to other academic course work'; 'grew up mostly outside Sweden'; 'family/friends' were significantly more prevalent among students in non-English speaking countries. Moreover, motives such as 'recommended by a friend'; 'learn another language'; 'adventure'; 'existence of an agreement'; 'attachment to the university'; 'information via Web/Internet' were significantly more prevalent among students studying in an English speaking country (Figure 1). Furthermore, students studying in English speaking countries seem to have different expectations to those going to non-English speaking countries. The latter are more experienced having previously lived, travelled or worked abroad. They know more about what to expect and they seem to make more independent choices. Moreover, they expect to be studying at a prestigious university with good quality academic courses. On the other hand, students going to English speaking countries seem to depend more on the existence of agreements with partner universities and recommendations from friends, and they expect studying abroad to be an adventure.

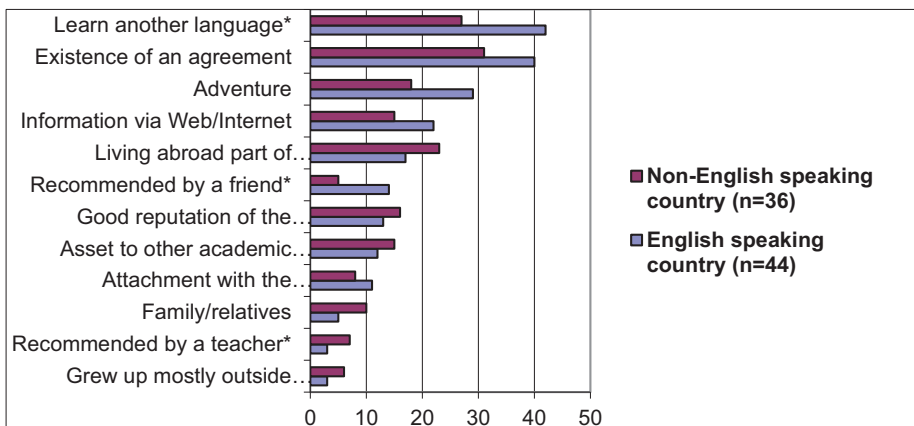


Figure 1. Differences between the motives of students who studied in an English speaking country (n=44) and those who studied in a non-English speaking country (n=36), the frequency is shown per 'motive' in the table. The level of statistical significance was set to $p < 0.05$ (*).

Comparisons of expectations and experiences before departure and after return

The students in this study had expectations prior to departing and, having returned, they have, experiences they gained from temporarily studying abroad (Table III). Before departing as exchange students, the vast majority expected of excitement and adventure. Moreover, a majority of the students did in fact experience adventure. For the respondents, adventure stands out as the aspect that characterises the experience abroad. Adventure was shown to be a significant element. Before leaving Sweden, the students responded that a period abroad would be an adventure and this expectation was shown to have been fulfilled. The two surveys asked questions about what it was like to be an exchange student. Many expected that they would find a job more easily in the future, learn about another culture and learn another language. It seems that the respondents were looking for the experience of having lived abroad for a period of their lives. After returning home, the respondents reported that they had enjoyed the change of study location and that they thought it was interesting to learn more about another culture. Elements such as a change of study environment and learning about another culture became more important after a study period abroad, i.e. these aspects surpassed the students' expectations. The respondents had positive expectations before going as exchange students and they returned with even more positive attitudes. This study indicates that their expectations were met and that the students were very satisfied with their overall experience of temporarily studying abroad. It seems that the experiences the students have in foreign countries are well received in all respects. In addition, the respondents considered the study period worthwhile. Finally, this study also shows that living in a warmer climate does not stand out as important for students when they choose their destinations, something that one might expect considering that Umeå University is located in northern Europe.

	<i>Before going</i>		<i>After returning</i>	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Exciting/ adventure	35	61	28	50
Learning about another culture	5	9	7	12
Learning another language	4	7	5	9
Studies in a more interesting academic environment(*)	2	4	4	7
Change of environment (*)	3	5	8	14
Living in a warmer climate	1	2	0	0
Easier to get a job (*)	6	10	3	5

Other matters	1	2	2	3
TOTAL	57	100	57	100

Table III. How can your expectations and experiences best be described? Data has been matched between the same respondents before departure and after return to Sweden. The statistical significance level was set to $p < 0.05$ (*)

Interviews with students after returning

After returning from studying abroad, ten exchange students were randomly chosen for follow up interviews. The students knew that the interviews later were going to be published on the Umeå University website. The students expressed that they were looking for a change and personal development and they expected studying abroad to be a challenge. A few used the term ‘adventure’. Further, one student stressed that she enjoys travelling and, for her studying in Poland was a thrilling experience. Other emphasised the language training. One stressed that studying abroad was more or less expected from a student studying at the international business programme. The experience was about learning, not only academically but mostly learning outside the lecture halls, i.e. learning how other people think, feel and argue turned out to be the greatest learning experience. Moreover, the experience was also about a different way of lecturing and adjusting to another study system with different requirements to those they were used to. Moreover, the students also had to adjust to another type of university bureaucracy, which often caused them frustration.

Participation in the Umeå University Buddy Programme was important in preparing one of the students before enrolling. Every academic year, Umeå University offers all international students the opportunity to participate in the Buddy Programme and about 1 000 students participate together with Swedish students (buddies). The student underlined that the international students he met in the programme were a great inspiration. When he considered studying as an exchange student, his choice was to study in Taiwan because of the friendly and interesting Taiwanese students he met in the Buddy Programme.

One student was greatly committed to studying in Istanbul, Turkey. That commitment made him contact a Turkish university on his own initiative to open a dialogue with that particular university. A formal Erasmus agreement was later signed by his home department and the Turkish university in Istanbul.

To summarize, the students expressed in the interviews that studying as an outbound exchange student enriched their lives. The students said; “just go as an exchange student, you will not regret your decision”; “when you get there everything will be resolved”; “for those aiming at an international career, being an exchange student is something to be recommended”; “it might be comfortable to go to an English speaking country but it is more of a learning experience to study in a non-English speaking country”; “it does not matter where you go just take the opportunity and study abroad”.

Conclusion and main findings

Since the 1970s, the number of students studying abroad has increased considerably worldwide. In 2005, approximately 3 million university students were enrolled in studies outside their country of citizenship, in comparison with approximately 0.6 million in 1975 (OECD, 2009). Due to the fact that student mobility has become an ambiguous area of research this tentative study has broadened the perspective and added the research question, i.e. how expectations are being met? In addition, a model from tourism and hospitality research is used studying student mobility from another angle.

The findings in this study indicate that a period of studying abroad enriches students' lives but this study also confirms that it is a selection of students that studies abroad. The most adventurous and internationally experienced students are attracted to enrolling in student mobility programmes. It is clear that these students see exchange programmes as an opportunity for exploration but also as a way to use the experience as a merit later in life.

In this study, it was found that the choices students make about mobility is individualistic and it seems as if the students place a very high value on the country in which to study. For most students, the study destination is more important than the university itself. A vast majority of the respondents thought that the country was more important than the study destination (cf. Jonsson, 2003). This is an interesting result taking into consideration that the students have many more options than they are willing and able to use when it comes to temporarily studying abroad. However, some studies have shown that international mobility for study purposes may be tied in to future intentions about places of work and residence (OECD, 2009). One may also assume that there will be differences between the choices of Swedish students and those of students of other nationalities. The OECD Programme for International Students Assessments (PISA) programme indicates that 15-year-old students vary when it comes to gender and social background when preparing of today's knowledge society (PISA, 2009)

The article defines students as 'tourists' on the basis of temporary mobility. The reason is not to trivialize studying abroad and the motivations, and expectations students have in relation to mobility. The study, inspired by a model used in tourism and hospitality research, is aimed to broadening the perspectives and to learn more about what attracts students who temporarily study abroad. This should be seen in the light of mobility being a normal thing among contemporary university students (Brach et al. 2006). This tentative and limited study partially confirms Plog's model. Students who were outgoing and self-confident in their behaviour seemed to choose non-English speaking countries. They had a more international background; they were looking for an academic challenge; they wanted to study at a university with a good reputation; they trusted their teachers' advice on where to study and they used their own networks, such as family/relatives, when choosing a study destination.

It would seem that students see studying abroad as an opportunity for a unique adventure. When Plog (1974, 2001) discussed venturers and non-venturers as types of people, he was rather strict. When the students in this study responded to the survey, they seemed to label themselves as more adventurous than they were in more objective and

strict terms. A survey is a self-evaluation, and therefore, terms such as ‘adventure’ and ‘exotic’ mean very different things to different people. However, students who went to non-English speaking countries seemed to be able to consider a wider range of options when it came to studying abroad. It is noteworthy that half of the students who studied in a non-English speaking country actually studied in English. English has become a global language (cf. Crystal, 2003), a lingua franca. The students expressed the desire to become more fluent in a language they already had good knowledge of (i.e. English), rather than a desire to learn a language of which they had limited or no knowledge. However, improvement of language skills still seems to be important to students when choosing to enrol in a student mobility programme. Other studies have also shown the desire of students to learn another language (Maiworm & Teichler, 1996; Teichler, 1999; Maiworm, 2001; Teichler, 2002; Bracht et al. 2006). Moreover, the respondents studying in an English speaking country were less internationally experienced and expected studying abroad to be an adventure. Students going to English speaking countries valued adventure more because they had limited experiences of studying, travelling and/or working in a foreign country. For those students, it would seem that the experience gained from a period of studying abroad confirms Plog’s model; their experiences moved them from dependables to venturers in the sense that they became more self-confident, and their mind-set became more explorative and they became more curious about the world.

In conclusion, a global life style among young people and the fact that being mobile has become normal among European university students raise questions. Are the students who are not presently attracted to exchange programs already experienced travellers with extensive international experience? Can students who do not utilize the available mobility programmes be categorised as self-inhibited and non-adventurous types of person? This study has highlighted the incentives students have to becoming exchange students but, most importantly, how they value this experience. The findings from this study indicate that the student first prioritize which country they would like to study in and secondly the more precise destination. Only there after comes aspects that has relevance for an ‘academic’ exchange programme such as courses, research reputation of selected universities or departments, teaching and learning issues, etc. Mobility as a phenomenon is also strongly supported by mobility programmes, for instance, the Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme.

However, to make progress, more knowledge is necessary in this field, especially when it comes to inspiring students not only with ‘political’ arguments but with personal rationales as well. Stretwieser, Le & Rust (2012, p.17) call “to engage in deeper research to more fully understand the totality of the study-abroad experience.” Furthermore, when increasing the attractiveness of exchange programs, one has to be aware of the psychology of students as they choose their study destination. Finally, future research is needed to focus on the students’ adjustment process when returning from a period of studying abroad (e.g. Sandhu, 1994).

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