

PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH:



FACTORS SUPPORTING LEARNING IN MOBILITY

REPORT

By PhD. Artūras Deltuva, **kitokie projektai**© 2012.06-2013.02

With support from Laimonas Ragauskas, Aga Byrczek and Justė Rakauskienė

Description of the research

Aim

Identify and describe factors supporting learning in mobility in order to organise learning in the way that gives as much space as possible for those factors.

Method

Phenomenological analysis.

Number of texts/interviews

10

Interviewees

- Have experienced mobility projects themselves.
- Are able to tell their story in languages of interviewers.

Type of mobilities

Youth exchange - 4

International training course - 4

Long term voluntary service - 2

Study visit - 1

Geography of mobilities

Spain - 3

Lithuania - 3

Latvia - 1

Georgia - 1

China - 1

Guatemala - 1

Process of interviews

The main aim of the interview was to encourage people to say as much as possible about how they lived their mobility projects.

It can not be “too much” of what they say. It can be just too little. So we asked the question and let them talk. If they didn’t get to the point about learning factors of the mobility experience it is not a problem. Actually it is good. We need a description of their experience so to see the results from their lived experience if there are any results.

Questions we asked:

1. Please remember different mobility projects you have been to.
2. Choose the one you feel you learned the most or you feel it is the strongest, most colourful. Tell your story of it from beginning to the end as detailed as possible.

We could also ask additional questions during the interview. Questions like:

- the brightest moments of this experience;
- The strongest learning moments during this experience;
- How did your experience help during this experience;
- Are you grateful for something after this experience;
- Anything else to add.

Those additional questions are to be asked if people don't say it by themselves.

Three interviews are made by Artūras Deltuva. 7 more interviews are recorded by the three people interviewed by Artūras. So we collected 10 interviews to be analysed. Three interviewers are:

Laimonas Ragauskas

Aga Byrczek

Justė Rakauskienė

Analyzing the texts

We base our procedure on one of the classic procedures described by A. Giorgi. (Giorgi A. Phenomenology and Psychological Research. Pittsburgh: PA, Sagesne University Press 1985) and adapted by A. Deltuva (PhD paper "Personal development in long term training programs for youth leaders" 1999) and A. Čepienė (PhD paper "Phenomenological perspective on development of transversal competences in professional training" 2010)

Step by step procedure:

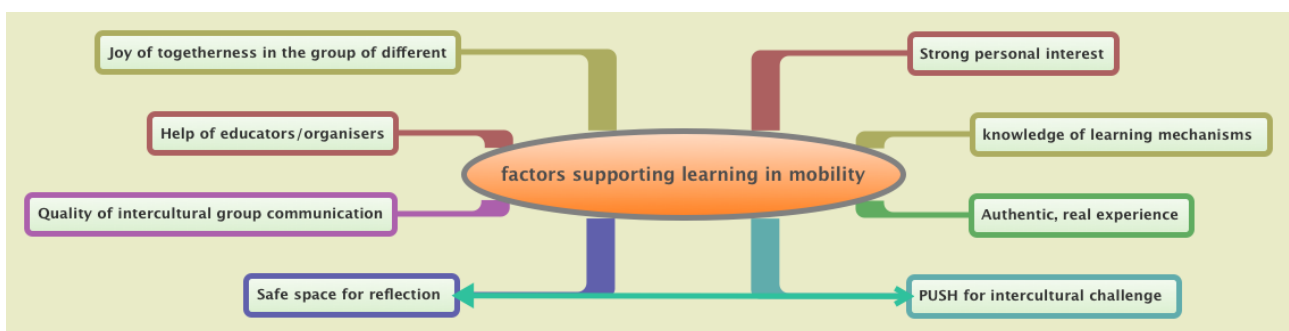
All texts were transformed into less subjective language or to more unified language used in the framework of education.

Main content centers related to the process and outcomes of the mobility process were identified by researchers; it is important not to "invent" anything different from what is said by interviewees, but to identify what have really happened.

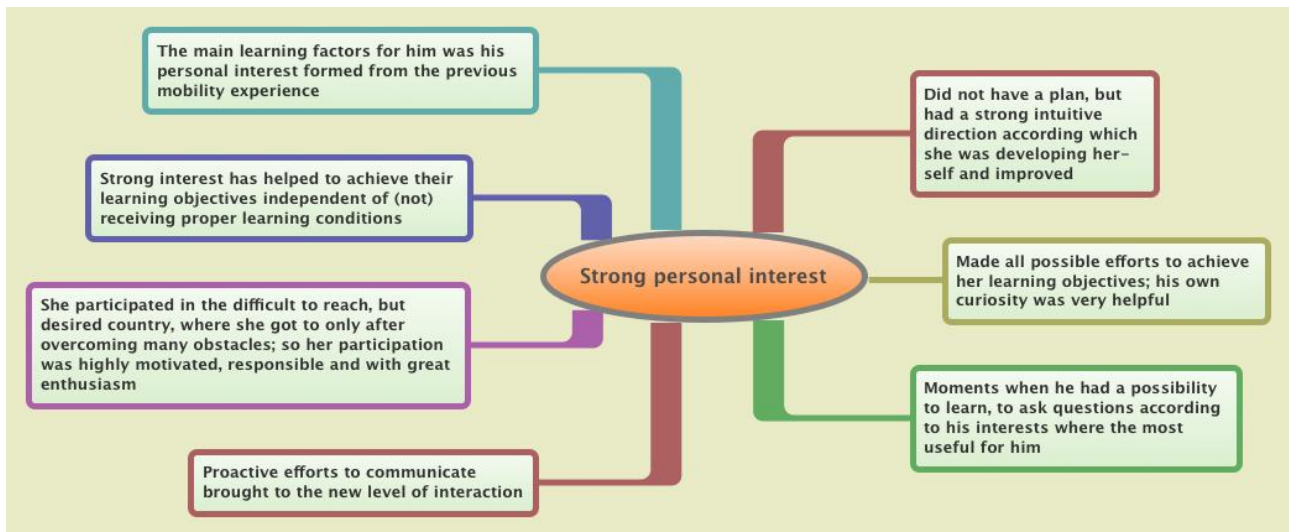
Every individual text was reviewed again and content of texts was sorted according previously identified content centers; if I noticed the content that I was not able relate to any previously identified content centers, I added a new content center. The aim is not to lose the content of experience described by participants.

Results

Factors supporting learning in mobility



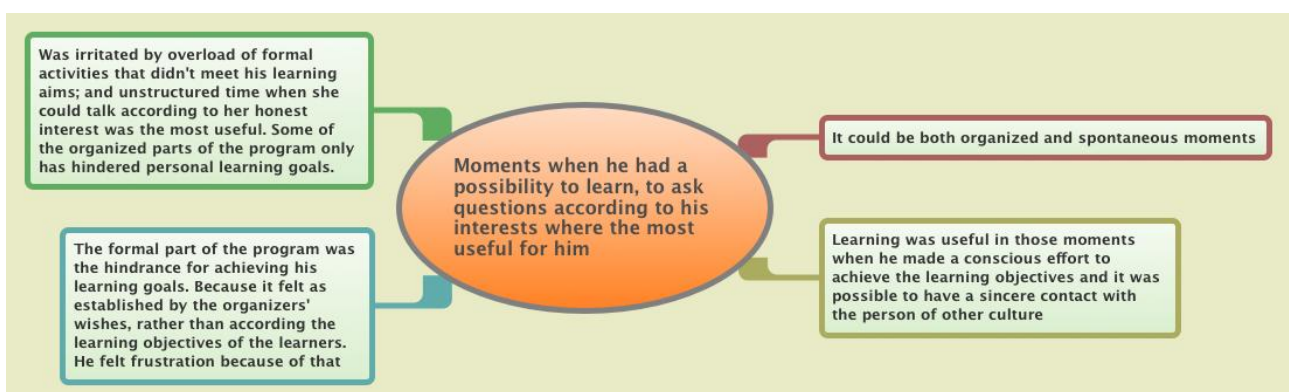
Strong personal interest



Strong personal interest made their learning possible even when learning conditions were not there and the strong personal interest made their leaning more fruitful. The interest could be very clear and conscious or intuitive but emotionally charged. The person with strong personal interest is looking for flexible space in the program to reach their learning objectives. Too structured, organisers' needs oriented program might provoke irritation and dissatisfaction of the learner or it provokes even stronger effort to strive for their learning. As well as difficult to reach but desirable learning opportunity creates additional motivation to reach it and to participate as full as possible. The interest (or lack of interest) might be rooted in their previous successful (or unsuccessful) learning experiences.

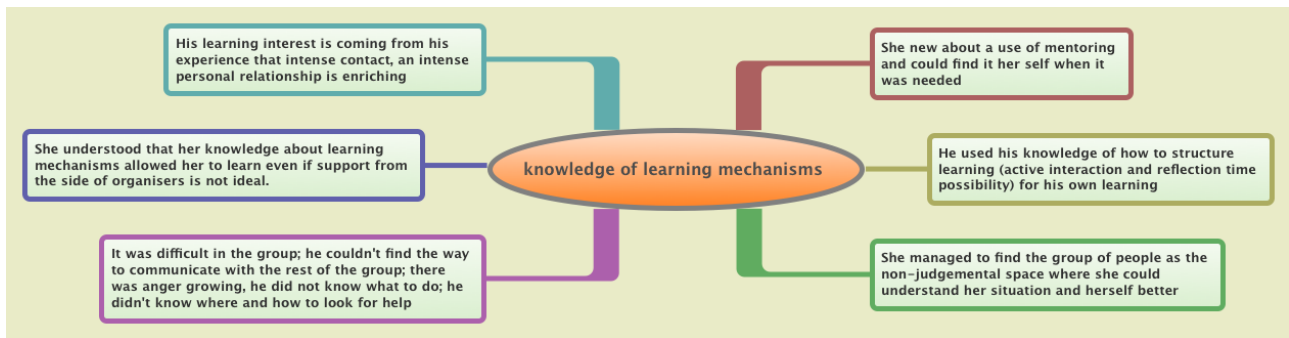
Here and further in the text the bulleted text means transformed quotes from the interviews.

- Did not have a plan, but had a strong intuitive direction according which she was developing her-self and improved.
- Made all possible efforts to achieve her learning objectives; his own curiosity was very helpful.
- Moments when he had a possibility to learn, to ask questions according to his interests where the most useful for him.



- It could be both organised and spontaneous moments
 - Learning was useful in those moments when he made a conscious effort to achieve the learning objectives and it was possible to have a sincere contact with the person of other culture
 - Was irritated by overload of formal activities that didn't meet his learning aims; and unstructured time when she could talk according to her honest interest was the most useful. Some of the organised parts of the program only has hindered personal learning goals.
 - The formal part of the program was the hindrance for achieving his learning goals. Because it felt as established by the organisers' wishes, rather than according the learning objectives of the learners. He felt frustration because of that.
- The main learning factors for him was his personal interest formed from the previous mobility experience.
 - Strong interest has helped to achieve their learning objectives independent of (not) receiving proper learning conditions.
 - She participated in the difficult to reach, but desired country, where she got to only after overcoming many obstacles; so her participation was highly motivated, responsible and with great enthusiasm.
 - Proactive efforts to communicate brought to the new level of interaction.

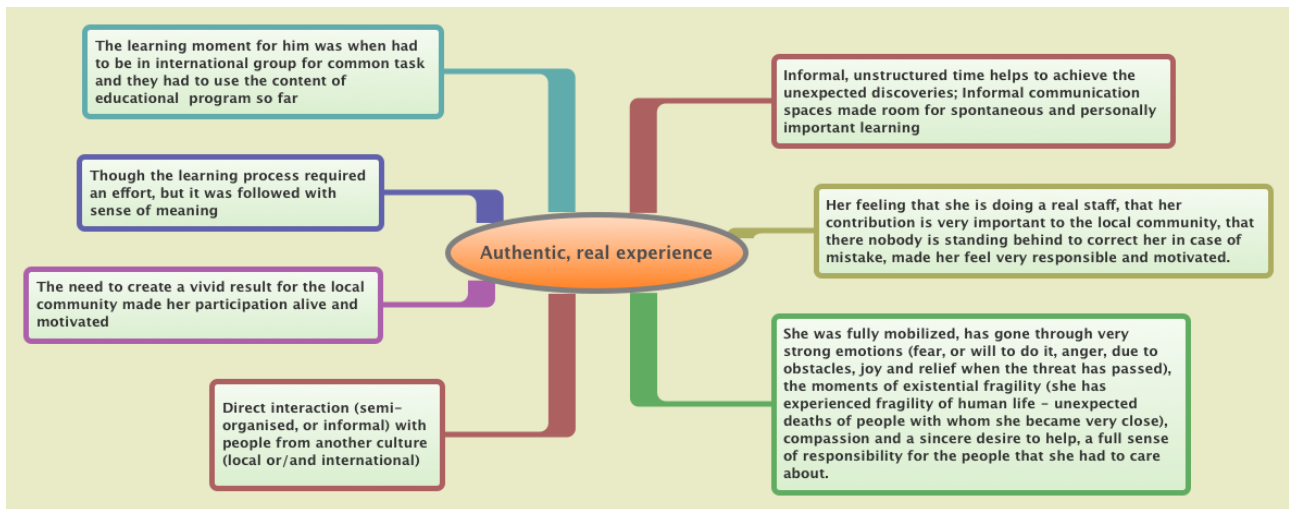
Knowledge of learning mechanisms



Knowledge of learning mechanisms helps participants to be self-dependent learners and to reach their learning results even when learning conditions are not completely there.

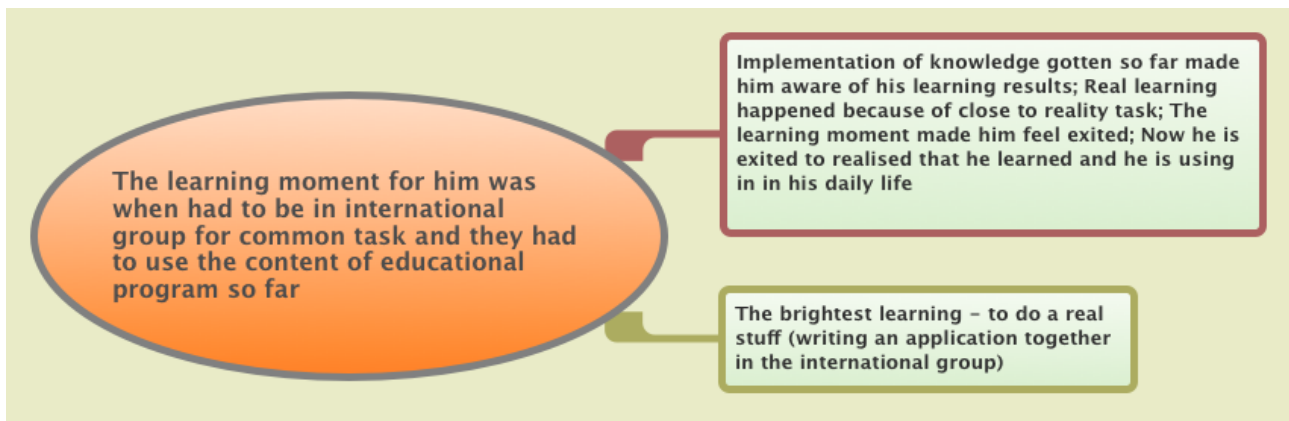
- She new about a use of mentoring and could find it her self when it was needed.
- He used his knowledge of how to structure learning (active interaction and reflection time possibility) for his own learning.
- She managed to find the group of people as the non-judgemental space where she could understand her situation and herself better.
- His learning interest is coming from his experience that intense contact, an intense personal relationship is enriching.
- She understood that her knowledge about learning mechanisms allowed her to learn even if support from the side of organisers is not ideal.
- It was difficult in the group; he couldn't find the way to communicate with the rest of the group; there was anger growing, he did not know what to do; he didn't know where and how to look for help.

Authentic, real experience



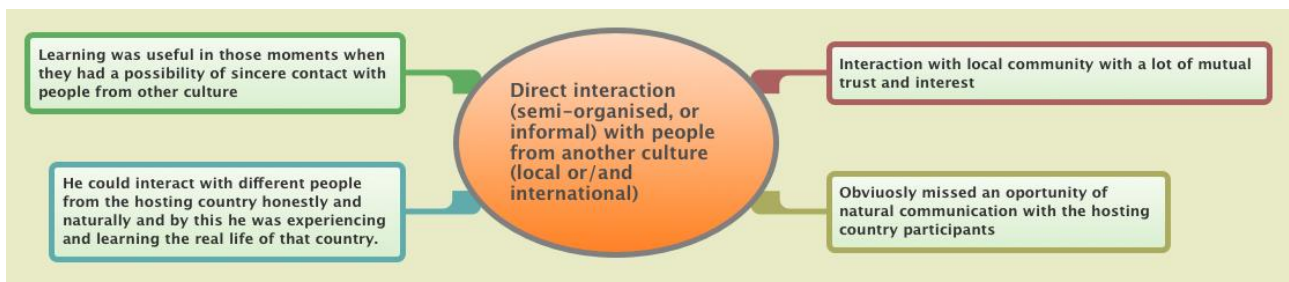
Real, authentic experience means that learning experience goes beyond the isolated learning situation. It has direct link to the daily life of participants or to the daily life of other people (usually it is a local community), it has part of honest spontaneous interaction with people of another culture, the interaction is based on honest interest. This kind of experience is followed with emotional involvement and increasing motivation, with appearing sense of meaning. It motivates to put efforts to overcome difficult, uncomfortable moments during the mobility project.

- Informal, unstructured time helps to achieve the unexpected discoveries; Informal communication spaces made room for spontaneous and personally important learning.
- Her feeling that she is doing a real staff, that her contribution is very important to the local community, that there nobody is standing behind to correct her in case of mistake, made her feel very responsible and motivated.
- She was fully mobilized, has gone through very strong emotions (fear, or will to do it, anger, due to obstacles, joy and relief when the threat has passed), the moments of existential fragility (she has experienced fragility of human life - unexpected deaths of people with whom she became very close), compassion and a sincere desire to help, a full sense of responsibility for the people that she had to care about.
- The learning moment for him was when had to be in international group for common task and they had to use the content of educational program so far.



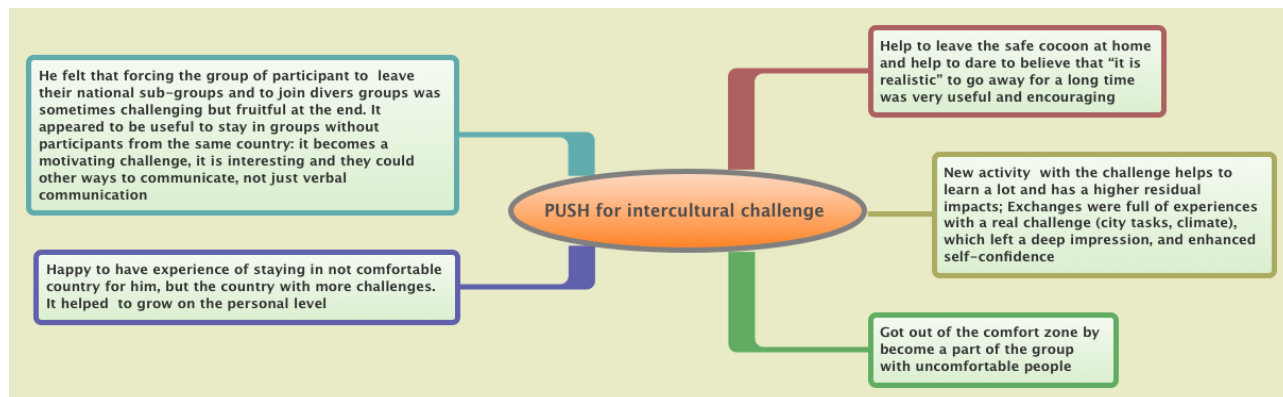
- Implementation of knowledge gotten so far made him aware of his learning results; Real learning happened because of close to reality task; The learning moment made him feel excited; Now he is excited to realised that he learned and he is using in in his daily life.
- The brightest learning - to do a real stuff (writing an application together in the international group)

- Though the learning process required an effort, but it was followed with sense of meaning.
- The need to create a vivid result for the local community made her participation alive and motivated.
- Direct interaction (semi-organised, or informal) with people from another culture (local or/and international).



- Interaction with local community with a lot of mutual trust and interest.
- Obviuosly missed an oportunity of natural communication with the hosting country participants.
- Learning was useful in those moments when they had a possibility of sincere contact with people from other culture.
- He could interact with different people from the hosting country honestly and naturally and by this he was experiencing and learning the real life of that country.

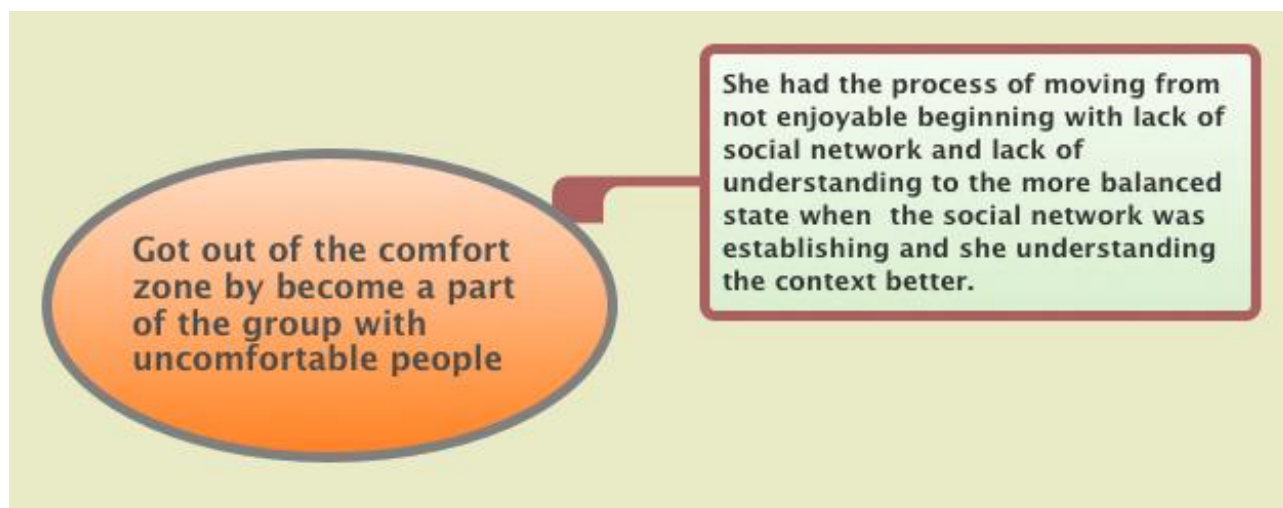
PUSH for intercultural challenge



See Also: [Safe space for reflection](#)

Interviewees in most cases recognise their tendency to stay in their comfortable conditions, but they also recognise that accepting the intercultural challenge is fruitful in sense of learning and personal development. This challenge comes like a push from outside by giving hints to "go for it", by giving activities, inviting (I say pushing) to act in intercultural groups, staying in the foreign culture/country.

- Help to leave the safe cocoon at home and help to dare to believe that “it is realistic” to go away for a long time was very useful and encouraging.
- New activity with the challenge helps to learn a lot and has a higher residual impacts; Exchanges were full of experiences with a real challenge (city tasks, climate), which left a deep impression, and enhanced self-confidence.
- Got out of the comfort zone by become a part of the group with uncomfortable people.



- She had the process of moving from not enjoyable beginning with lack of social network and lack of understanding to the more balanced state when the social network was establishing and she understanding the context better.

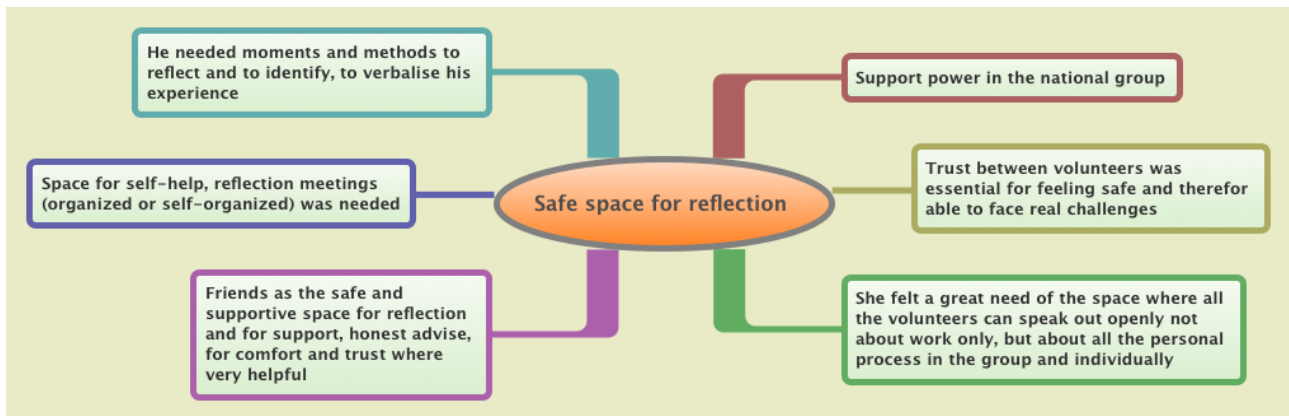
She had the process of moving from not enjoyable beginning with lack of social network and lack of understanding to the more balanced state when the social network was establishing and she understanding the context better.

She learned to create an acceptable social distance to different people according her need and interpersonal synergy. It was new and annoying to have a big emotional distance and still do something together. She learned to accept it: she got experiential material to reflect her character, her communication strategies, her ability to compromise her wishes and visions on how things should happen; she became more aware of her limits but also she kept being optimistic because of her ability to develop herself and because of more vivid directions of her further personal development; real, though uncomfortable interaction with new people helped her to face and know her-self better.

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- He felt that forcing the group of participant to leave their national sub-groups and to join divers groups was sometimes challenging but fruitful at the end. It appeared to be useful to stay in groups without participants from the same country: it becomes a motivating challenge, it is interesting and they could other ways to communicate, not just verbal communication.
- Happy to have experience of staying in not comfortable country for him, but the country with more challenges. It helped to grow on the personal level.

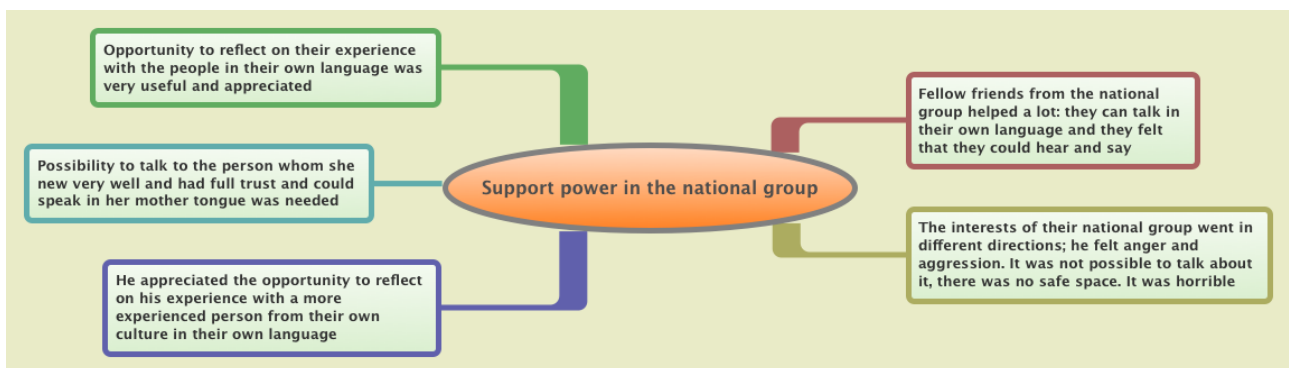
Safe space for reflection



See Also: [PUSH for intercultural challenge](#)

Safe space for reflection is named as a need for counterbalance for challenging part of intercultural experience during mobility projects. National groups or just groups where someone feels safe, proper moments and methods serves well for this counterbalance. Lack of it is experienced in a very negative way, especially in the case when knowledge of experiential learning mechanisms was absent.

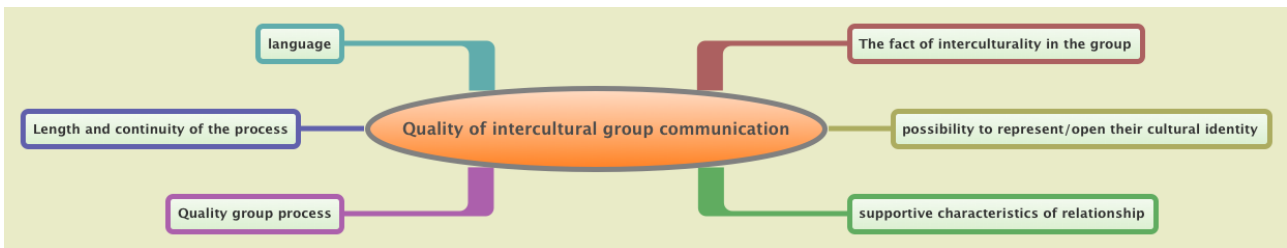
• Support power in the national group



- Fellow friends from the national group helped a lot: they can talk in their own language and they felt that they could hear and say.
- The interests of their national group went in different directions; he felt anger and aggression. It was not possible to talk about it, there was no safe space. It was horrible.
- Opportunity to reflect on their experience with the people in their own language was very useful and appreciated.
- Possibility to talk to the person whom she new very well and had full trust and could speak in her mother tongue was needed.
- He appreciated the opportunity to reflect on his experience with a more experienced person from their own culture in their own language.

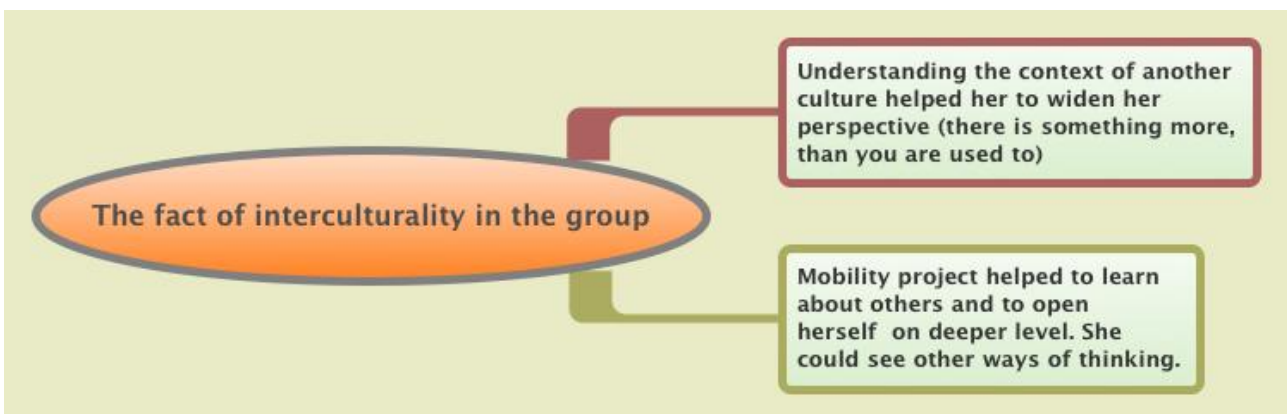
- Trust between volunteers was essential for feeling safe and therefore able to face real challenges.
- She felt a great need of the space where all the volunteers can speak out openly not about work only, but about all the personal process in the group and individually.
- He needed moments and methods to reflect and to identify, to verbalise his experience
- Space for self-help, reflection meetings (organised or self-organised) was needed.
- Friends as the safe and supportive space for reflection and for support, honest advice, for comfort and trust were very helpful.

Quality of intercultural group communication



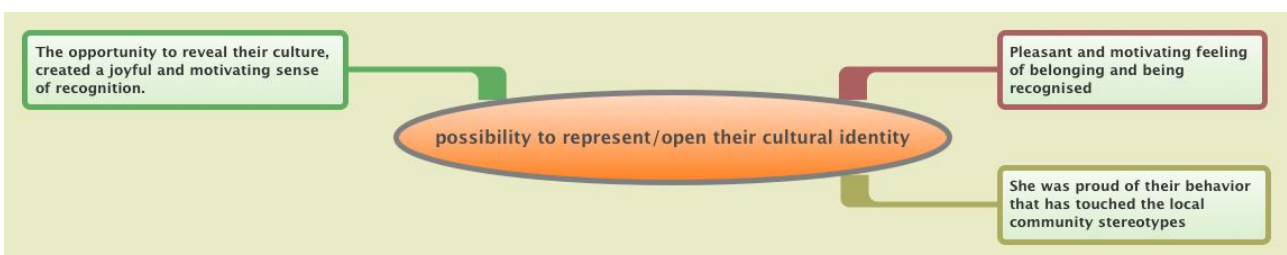
Quality of intercultural group communication serves as the context for learning in mobility projects. The fact of interculturality in the group has its own impact already at least it works as the possibility to open up their own identity. Research data allows to name a specific list of supportive characteristics of relationship in mobility projects, such as openness, goodwill, respect, trust, mutuality of honest interest, patience. The atmosphere based on this kind of relationship encourages people to speak even if they are not perfect in foreign language. Supportive atmosphere in intercultural group goes together with quality group process. Long enough group process is part of it.

- The fact of interculturality in the group.



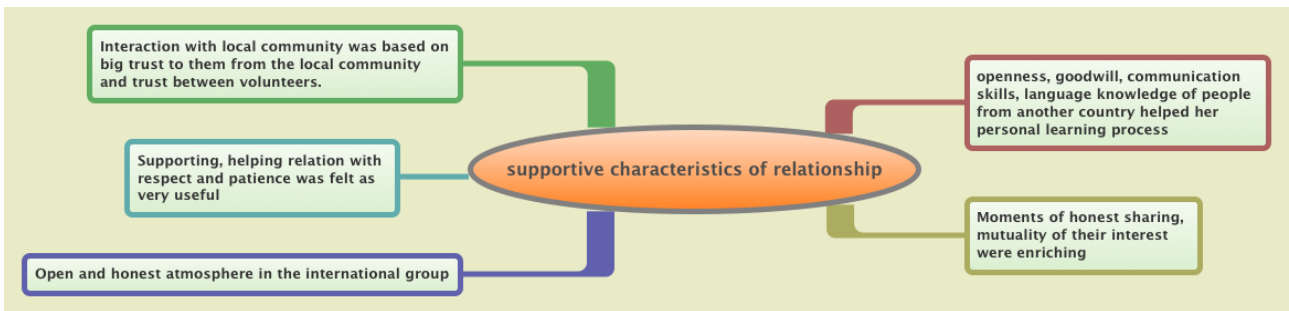
- Understanding the context of another culture helped her to widen her perspective (there is something more, than you are used to).
- Mobility project helped to learn about others and to open herself on deeper level. She could see other ways of thinking.

- Possibility to represent/open their cultural identity.



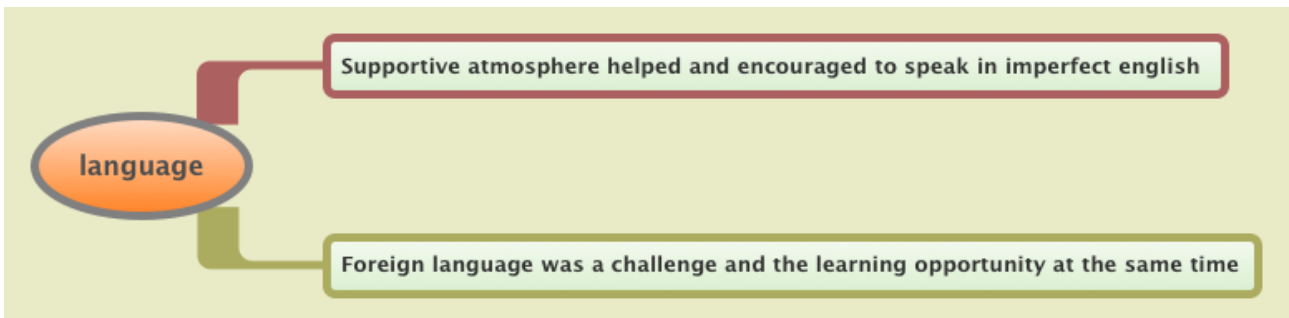
- Pleasant and motivating feeling of belonging and being recognised.
- She was proud of their behavior that has touched the local community stereotypes.
- The opportunity to reveal their culture, created a joyful and motivating sense of recognition.

• Supportive characteristics of relationship.



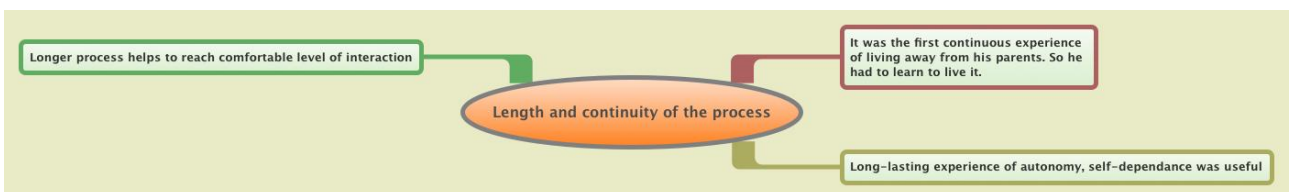
- Openness, goodwill, communication skills, language knowledge of people from another country helped her personal learning process.
- Moments of honest sharing, mutuality of their interest were enriching.
- Interaction with local community was based on big trust to them from the local community and trust between volunteers.
- Supporting, helping relation with respect and patience was felt as very useful.
- Open and honest atmosphere in the international group.

• Language.



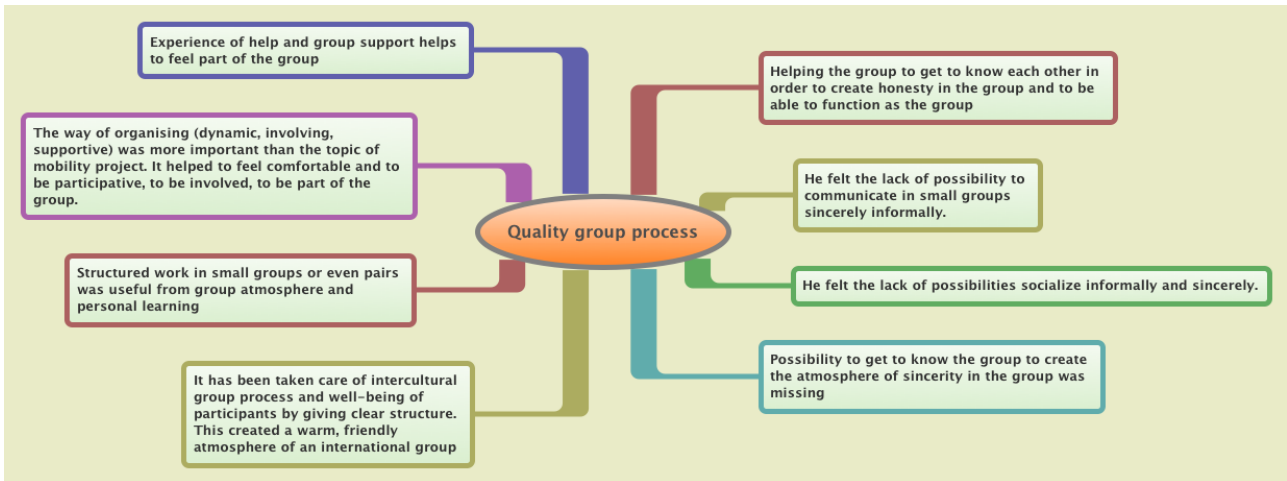
- Supportive atmosphere helped and encouraged to speak in imperfect english.
- Foreign language was a challenge and the learning opportunity at the same time.

• Length and continuity of the process.



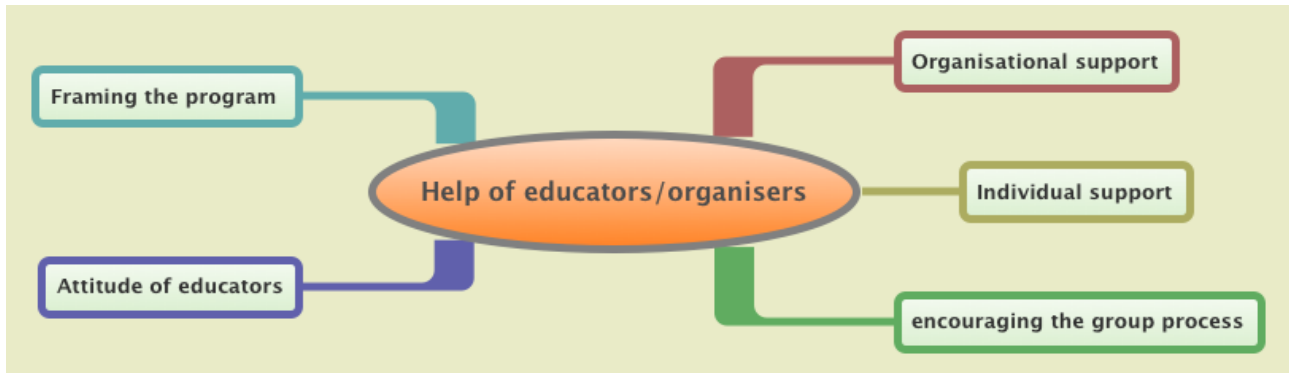
- It was the first continuous experience of living away from his parents. So he had to learn to live it.
- Long-lasting experience of autonomy, self-dependance was useful.
- Longer process helps to reach comfortable level of interaction.

• Quality group process.



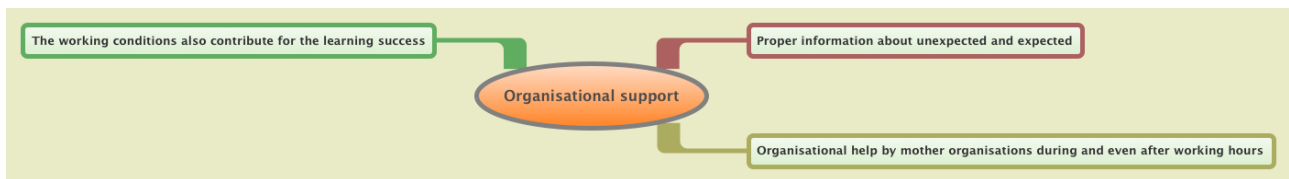
- Helping the group to get to know each other in order to create honesty in the group and to be able to function as the group.
- He felt the lack of possibility to communicate in small groups sincerely informally.
- He felt the lack of possibilities socialise informally and sincerely.
- Possibility to get to know the group to create the atmosphere of sincerity in the group was missing.
- Experience of help and group support helps to feel part of the group.
- The way of organising (dynamic, involving, supportive) was more important than the topic of mobility project. It helped to feel comfortable and to be participative, to be involved, to be part of the group.
- Structured work in small groups or even pairs was useful from group atmosphere and personal learning.
- It has been taken care of intercultural group process and well-being of participants by giving clear structure. This created a warm, friendly atmosphere of an international group.

Help of educators/organisers



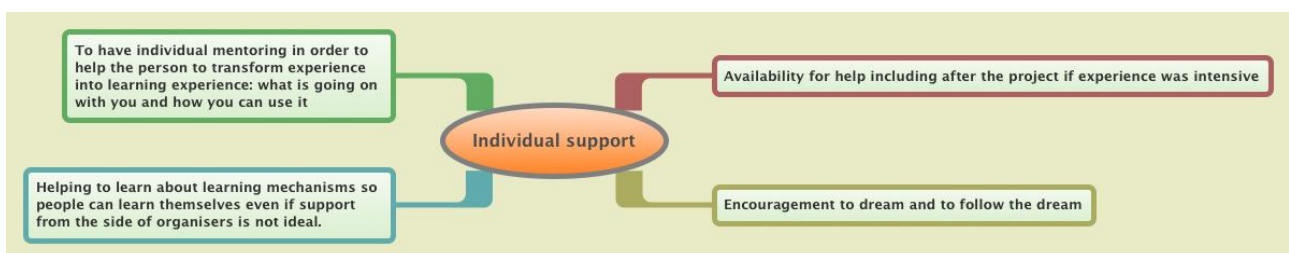
We have a big list of possible educational support divided in subcategories of organisational support, individual support, encouraging group process, framing the program, attitude of educator. They were experienced by the interviewees. But in most cases we had to ask directly this to be named, unless people felt lack of something. They didn't mention support of educators without being asked when support was there.

• Organisational support



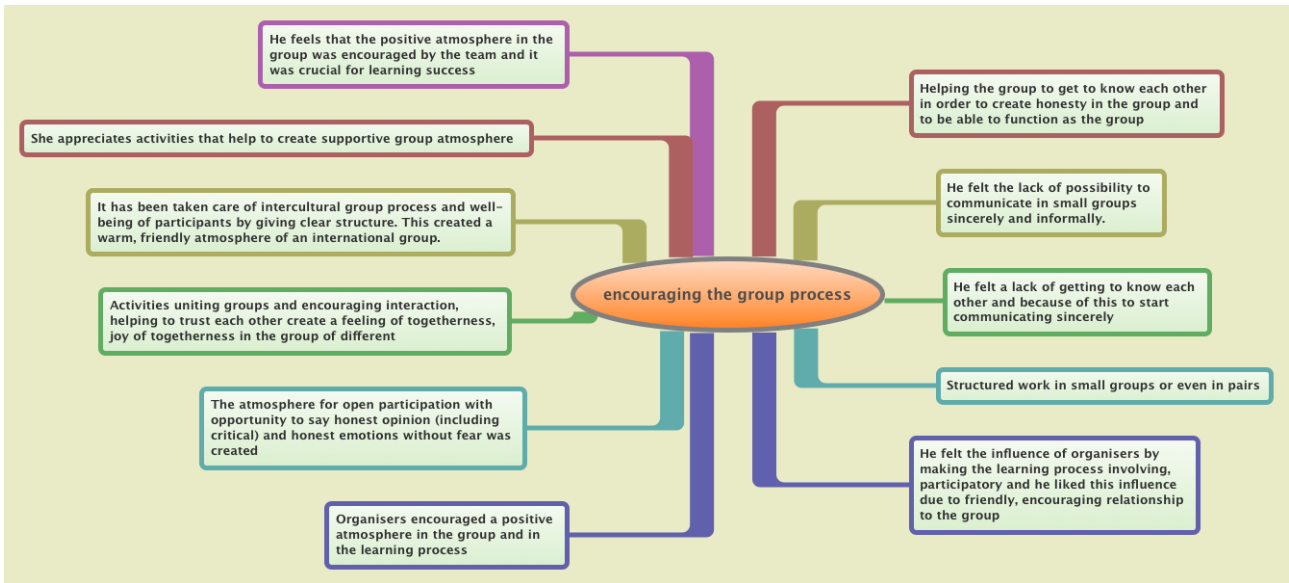
- Proper information about unexpected and expected.
- Organisational help by mother organisations during and even after working hours.
- The working conditions also contribute for the learning success.

• Individual support.



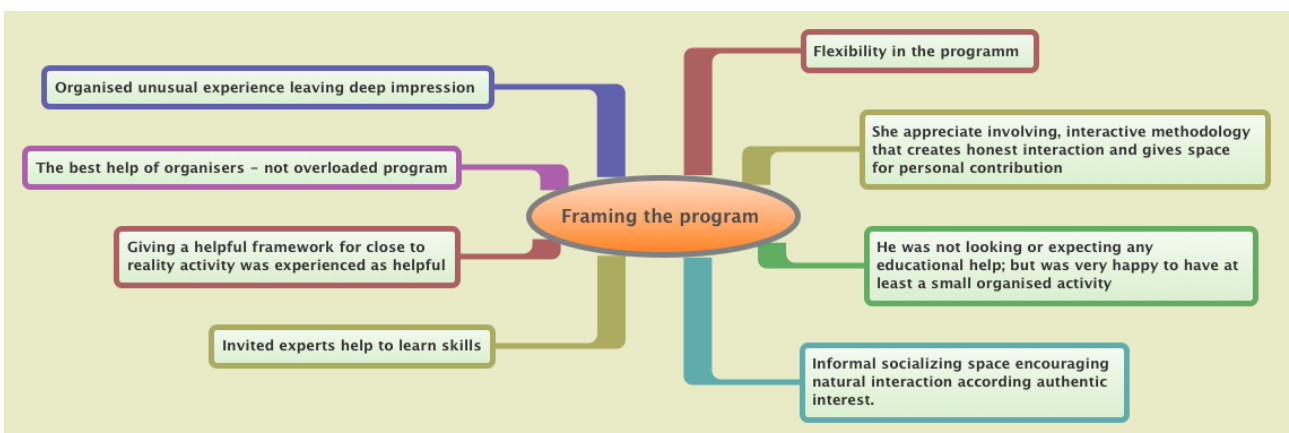
- Availability for help including after the project if experience was intensive.
- Encouragement to dream and to follow the dream.
- To have individual mentoring in order to help the person to transform experience into learning experience: what is going on with you and how you can use it.
- Helping to learn about learning mechanisms so people can learn themselves even if support from the side of organisers is not ideal.

• Encouraging the group process.

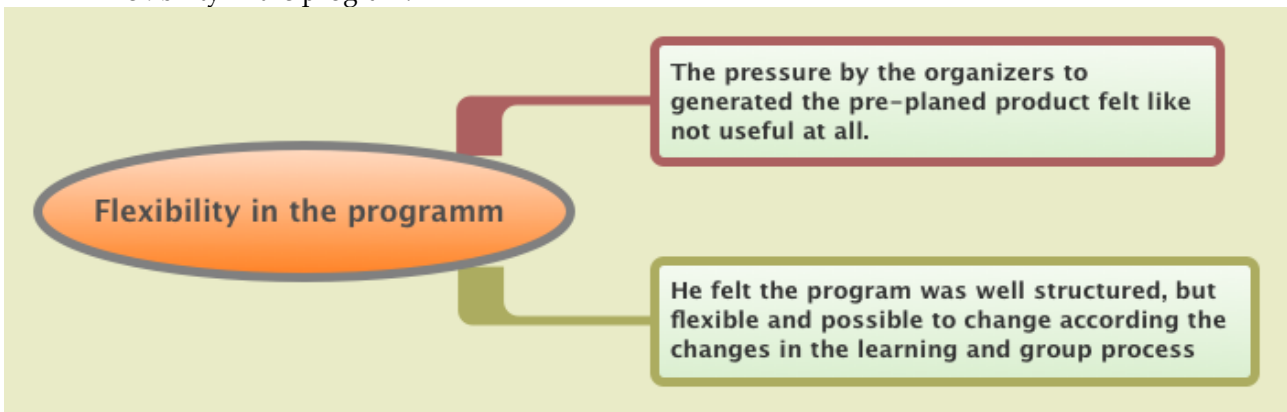


- Helping the group to get to know each other in order to create honesty in the group and to be able to function as the group.
- He felt the lack of possibility to communicate in small groups sincerely and informally.
- He felt a lack of getting to know each other and because of this to start communicating sincerely.
- Structured work in small groups or even in pairs.
- He felt the influence of organisers by making the learning process involving, participatory and he liked this influence due to friendly, encouraging relationship to the group.
- He feels that the positive atmosphere in the group was encouraged by the team and it was crucial for learning success.
- She appreciates activities that help to create supportive group atmosphere.
- It has been taken care of intercultural group process and well-being of participants by giving clear structure. This created a warm, friendly atmosphere of an international group.
- Activities uniting groups and encouraging interaction, helping to trust each other create a feeling of togetherness, joy of togetherness in the group of different.
- The atmosphere for open participation with opportunity to say honest opinion (including critical) and honest emotions without fear was created.
- Organisers encouraged a positive atmosphere in the group and in the learning process.

• Framing the program.



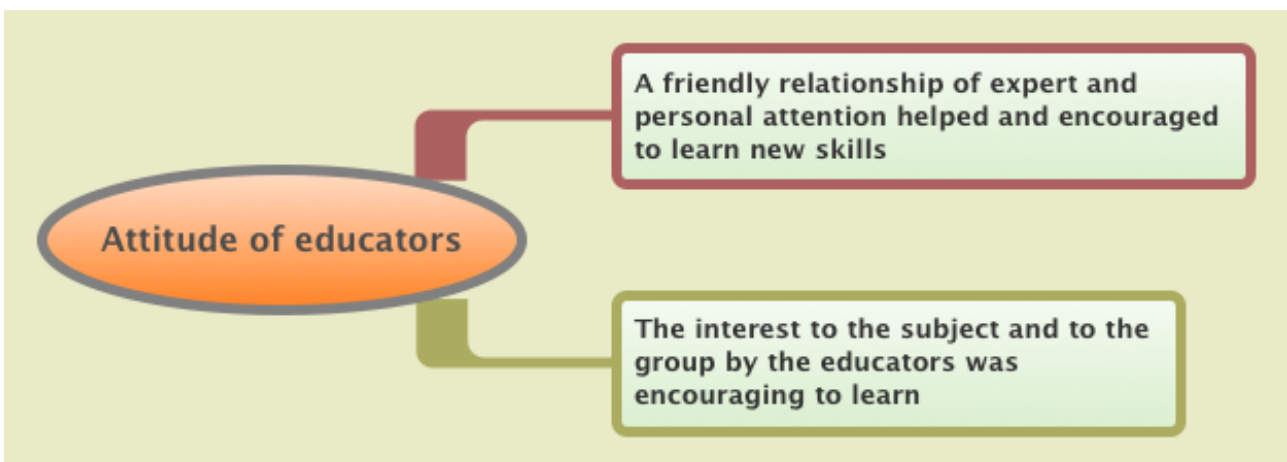
- Flexibility in the program.



- The pressure by the organisers to generated the pre-planned product felt like not useful at all.
- He felt the program was well structured, but flexible and possible to change according the changes in the learning and group process.

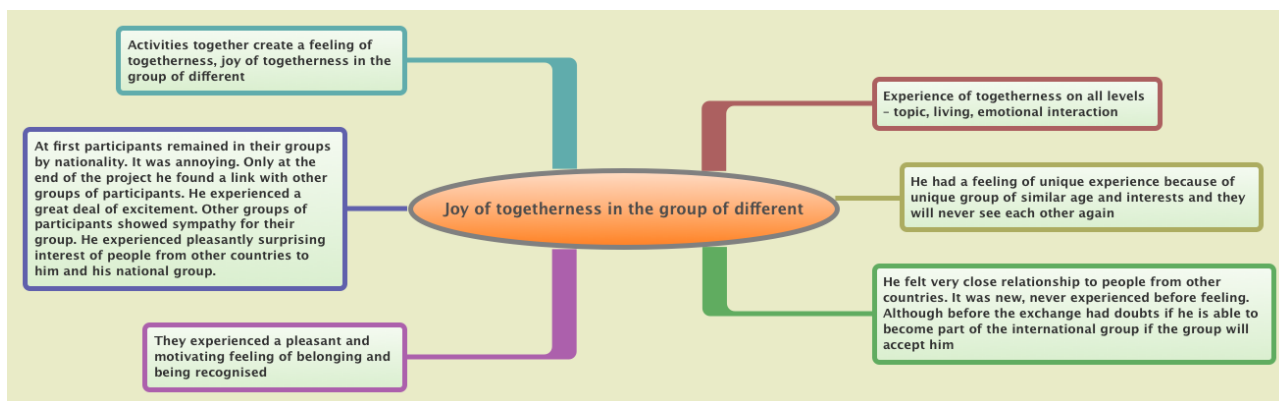
- She appreciate involving, interactive methodology that creates honest interaction and gives space for personal contribution.
- He was not looking or expecting any educational help; but was very happy to have at least a small organised activity.
- Informal socialising space encouraging natural interaction according authentic interest.
- Organised unusual experience leaving deep impression.
- The best help of organisers - not overloaded program.
- Giving a helpful framework for close to reality activity was experienced as helpful.
- Invited experts help to learn skills.

• Attitude of educators.



- A friendly relationship of expert and personal attention helped and encouraged to learn new skills.
- The interest to the subject and to the group by the educators was encouraging to learn.

Joy of togetherness in the group of different



I was very happy to recognise this phenomenon of mobility projects, because I have experienced it myself many times and I value it so much. Is it a learning factor? I think so. Why I think so? I don't know.

- Experience of togetherness on all levels – topic, living, emotional interaction.
- He had a feeling of unique experience because of unique group of similar age and interests and they will never see each other again.
- He felt very close relationship to people from other countries. It was new, never experienced before feeling. Although before the exchange had doubts if he is able to become part of the international group if the group will accept him.
- Activities together create a feeling of togetherness, joy of togetherness in the group of different.
- At first participants remained in their groups by nationality. It was annoying. Only at the end of the project he found a link with other groups of participants. He experienced a great deal of excitement. Other groups of participants showed sympathy for their group. He experienced pleasantly surprising interest of people from other countries to him and his national group.
- They experienced a pleasant and motivating feeling of belonging and being recognised.

Conclusion

Experience of the interviewees of the research factors supporting leaning in mobility is structured in 8 main content centers:

Strong personal interest:

Strong personal interest made their learning possible even when the learning conditions were poor or not there at all. Strong personal interest made their leaning more fruitful. The interest could be very clear and conscious or intuitive but emotionally charged. The person with strong personal interest is looking for flexible space in the program to reach their learning objectives. Too structured, organisers' needs oriented program might provoke irritation and dissatisfaction of the learner or it provokes even stronger effort to strive for their learning. Difficult to reach but desirable learning opportunity creates additional motivation to go for it and to participate as full as possible. The interest (or lack of interest) might be rooted in their previous successful (or unsuccessful) learning experiences).

Knowledge of learning mechanisms:

Knowledge of learning mechanisms helps participants to be self-dependent learners and to reach their learning results even when learning conditions are not completely there.

Authentic, real experience :

Real, authentic experience here means the moments that learning experience goes beyond the isolated learning situation. It has direct link to the daily life of participants or to the daily life of other people (usually - a local community), it has part of honest spontaneous interaction with people of another culture, the interaction is based on their honest interest. This kind of experience is followed with emotional involvement and increasing motivation, with appearing sense of meaning. It motivates to put an effort to overcome difficult, uncomfortable moments during the mobility project.

PUSH for intercultural challenge:

Interviewees in most cases recognise their tendency to stay in their comfortable conditions, but they also recognise that accepting the intercultural challenge is fruitful in sense of learning and personal development. This challenge comes like a push from the outside by giving hints to "go for it", by giving activities, by inviting (I say pushing) to act in intercultural groups, by staying in the foreign culture/country long enough.

Safe space for reflection:

Safe space for reflection is goes with the need for a counterbalance with challenging part of intercultural experience during mobility projects. National groups or just groups where someone feels safe, proper moments and methods serves well for this counterbalance. Lack of it is experienced in a very negative way, especially in the case when knowledge of (experiential ?) learning mechanisms was absent.

Quality of intercultural group communication

Quality of intercultural group communication serves as the context for learning in mobility projects. The fact of interculturality in the group has it's own impact already at least it works as the possibility to open up their own identity and to realise the difference of others as the resource. Research data allows to name a specific list of supportive characteristics of relationship in mobility projects, such as openness, goodwill, respect, trust, mutuality of honest interest, patience. The atmosphere based on this kind of relationship encourages people to speak even if they are not perfect in foreign language. Supportive atmosphere in intercultural group goes together with quality group process. Long enough group process is part of it.

Help of educators/organisers:

We have a big list of possible educational support divided in subcategories of: organisational support, individual support, encouraging group process, framing the program, attitude of educator. They where experienced by the interviewees. But in most of the cases we had to ask directly this to be named. They didn't mention support of educators without being about it. Unless people felt lack of something, they they where mentioning not fulfilled need.

Joy of togetherness in the group of different

It is feeling of connection with people from another context, another culture. It is followed with feelings of joy, positive surprise, motivation to participate and to keep in touch. I was very happy to recognise this phenomenon of mobility projects, because I have experienced it myself many times and I value it so much. Is it a learning factor? I think so. Why I think so? I don't know.

Follow-up possibilities

It is useful and recommended that international mobility organisers and educators:

1. Analyse what they recognise from the results of the research
2. Discuss what they can do intentionally in order to foster the learning factors during learning mobility projects.

The article with analysis of the results can be produced by the author of the research or by UNIQUE after separate discussion and decision.

It is important to understand that the learning factors identified during the research can serve as the principles, but not as the specific recipe “how to do”. The specific ‘how’ should raise from creative solutions adapted according to the specific group and specific context.