

Transnational mobility in the context of vocational education and training in Europe

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TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN EUROPE

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“Crossing borders (one's own, those of others, internal vs. external borders) is a core skill for European citizens,,

European Commission / Study Group on Education and Training (1997)
Accomplishing Europe Through Education and Training, pp. 59-60.

1. MOBILITY IN VET: THE ISSUES AT STAKE

The discussion about transnational mobility in a VET context seems all too often to take as its starting point the assumption that it is part and parcel of the discussion about transnational mobility on the labour market in Europe - but this is only one aspect of a complex whole. When we are discussing transnational mobility in a VET context, we are discussing an issue that covers a far wider range and is situated in a complex multidisciplinary field, much of which still remains largely uncharted by documentation and research. Transnational mobility as an integral part of VET is a preparation not just for a life as a migrant worker and (as the quotation above from “Accomplishing Europe through Education and Training,, - also - implies) that of a European citizen, but has a much broader scope: it imparts skills and attitudes of value to most aspects of adult and working life. In this paper, we will investigate what the issues are when we are dealing with transnational mobility in VET, try to give an overview of both the empirical data available and the research and development activities that have been conducted in the field and/or related fields. We will draw attention to any lacunae in both whenever these are found to exist and make recommendations for future research and action.

2. TERMINOLOGY

“Mobility in VET,, is taken here to mean the transnational mobility of students/apprentices in VET. In this paper we are neither concerned with the mobility of teachers/instructors and other staff at vocational schools or curriculum development units, nor with other aspects of mobility (mobility within national borders, social mobility etc.). The term “student/apprentice” is used to denote any person who is enrolled in a training establishment and who receives vocational education and training. The term “placement,, is used throughout the paper to refer to any type of transnational training or work experience involving students/apprentices in VET apart from study tours (i.e. a stay consisting of short visits at various sites for groups of young people and of a maximum duration of 1-2 weeks). The term thus includes both school-based stays and work placements in companies. Vocational education and training (VET) is defined here as all more or less organised forms of initial and continuing and further education and training activities leading to professional qualifications, independent of their venue and location, age of participant, and his level of qualification, but excluding all forms of higher education.

3. LABOUR MARKET MOBILITY IN EUROPE

It seems appropriate to start by taking a look at what is just one of the several aspects that come into play here, namely the issue of transnational labour market mobility in Europe. The advantages of a mobile labour force are, at first sight and from an economic point of view, evident: enterprises will avoid “bottleneck,,situations where production is held up through the lack of labour with the right qualifications, and the plight of unemployment can be alleviated if workers are not only restricted to their own Member State in the search for work, but can extend their search to cover all of Europe.

The free movement of labour was a central issue when the EEC was founded in 1957 with the signing of the Treaty of Rome, it being one of the four cornerstones on which the house of Europe was built (the others being the free movement of capital, services and goods). The Treaty talks of “the abolition of any discrimination based on nationality between workers in the Member States as regards employment, remuneration, and other conditions of work and employment,, (Article 48). In Articles 49-51, this statement is further substantiated, and the articles make provision for, other than the removal of all “technical,, barriers to transnational mobility:

- close collaboration between the national labour market authorities with a view to disseminating information about vacancies and about living and working conditions in general;
- the creation of a programme for the exchange of young workers between the Member States (Article 50) in order to clear away some of the mental barriers to mobility.

It is worthwhile dwelling a little on these three measures, and examining how they have been translated into reality. As for the removal of technical barriers (i.e. difficulties with residence and work permits, social security, taxation etc.) this has been largely accomplished over the years; a fact which must count as one of the major achievements of European integration. In the area of labour market information, a scheme for the systematic exchange of mobility-related labour market information has been set up (EURES - European Employment Service - formerly SEDOC) which contains provisions for the announcement of vacancies, a large database on living and working conditions, and a finely meshed network of "Euro-advisers" - guidance personnel having received special training to deal with all enquiries concerning employment in other Member States. The Young Workers Exchange Programme (as it was known) operated as an independent programme from 1964 to 1992, when it was incorporated in the PETRA programme. As of 1995, it forms part of the LEONARDO DA VINCI-programme, and it can thus look back on over 30 years of uninterrupted, in the course of which many thousand young workers (young people under 27 with qualifications from initial vocational training or corresponding practical experience) have benefited from a work placement in another Member State.

Despite these measures, the actual number of EU citizens working in a Member State other than their own is not very impressive: it is estimated that in 1990 this figure was approximately 2 million, which meant that only one in 500 workers worked abroad. This number includes frontier workers, seasonal workers, those posted abroad by their employer for a limited period of time, in addition to those who have actually settled in another Member State.¹ And it has not increased significantly since then.²

There are several explanations as to why not more workers have availed themselves of the possibility for unlimited travel inside the EU in search of employment. Heinz Werner in his paper "Mobility of workers in the European Union," (1996) points out how developments in trade and industry inside the EU³ as well as the presence of the structural funds by and large have prevented a "prosperity gap," coming about, thus preventing the push-pull factors of traditional migration theory coming into existence and giving rise to migration on a larger scale. A case in point here is the Republic of Ireland, whose present economic boom may well owe something to an infusion of capital from the structural funds amounting to between 4 - 7% of the GNP in the years between the late 70s and the early 90s.⁴

Other determinants can be identified too - e.g. the presence of cultural and linguistic barriers, the still unsolved problems concerning the recognition of qualifications obtained in another Member State and the high unemployment levels in all Member States. Heinz Werner's conclusion is that there is no reason to expect any large scale migratory movements between the current Member States, but he identifies some areas where a limited increase in transnational mobility is likely. One is linked to the globalisation and internationalisation of companies and their deployment of staff in subsidiaries in other countries, where he sees the development of a stratum of "Euro-executives," - a highly qualified, internationally mobile group that is linguistically, technically and culturally flexible. Another is concerned with the border regions in

¹ From Bahl-Poulsen & Fahle: Transnational placements - impact and potential, p. 21

² See EUROSTAT Migration Statistics 1996

³ Two factors come into play here, according to Heinz Werner: firstly, the removal of barriers to trade inside the EU has led to a situation where each country concentrates on producing the goods for which it has a comparative advantage (i.e. can produce more cheaply). Trade relations will thus induce a division of labour in line with the comparative production advantages between countries, making labour migration unnecessary. Secondly, this situation of free trade and specialisation has not produced any major production displacements as it has assumed the form of intra-industrial trade rather than inter-industrial trade; i.e. given rise to a diversification of products rather than a division of labour with the concomitant losses of production units and unemployment in whole regions or Member States. (Werner p. 7-8)

⁴ The Economist, May 17th 1997

Europe (the „Euro-regions,,), where he sees signs of an increase in frontier work, e.g along the Franco-German border.

Even though H.Werner does not give any concrete figures, there is a simple way of assessing in relative terms the growth in intra-company transnational mobility. If a company decides to post an employee in another EU Member State for a limited period (up to 1 year), the employee will continue to be covered by the social security system of the home country on the basis of the form E 101 (according to EU directive 1408/71 on social security). By looking at the number of E 101-forms completed, it is possible to get a clear picture of this type of mobility. According to the Danish Directorate for Social Security, the figures have developed in the period 1985-96 as follows (figures in 500s):

1985	500
1992	3500
1995	12000
1996	13500 ⁵

It has not been possible to obtain the similar figures for other Member States, but we may at least take it as an indicator of a clear trend in migration. The growth that there is in transnational mobility mostly affects those with a high level of qualifications and already in employment, and it has no impact on the unemployment situation. Its immediate relevance to our target group - students/apprentices in vocational education and training - is therefore questionable when seen from this perspective, both in terms of absolute and relative numbers.

This situation closely mirrors the situation on a national level in many Member States, where mobility likewise is a prerogative of those who are equipped with the best qualifications. In their book "From PETRA to LEONARDO,, (cf. Hertogenbosch 1995) T. Farla and F. Meijers attack the verbiage surrounding the relationship between transnational mobility in VET and on the labour market, refuting its relevance by drawing a parallel to the situation on the national labour market in the Netherlands. "In many documents, the central argument creates a direct link between the disappearance of internal borders within Europe and the mobility of the workforce. Since internal borders are disappearing, it is expected that a single European employment market will come into being, which in turn will lead to increased mobility. This means that a transparent 'European qualification area' must be created, which in its most extreme interpretation would require a standardised European vocational training system. Everyone gets the same vocational training which makes it possible to achieve optimum mobility. The simplicity of this argument may be rather attractive - bearing in mind the existing level of mobility within the Netherlands, which is considered by many policy-makers as being completely inadequate - but it probably does not bear much relation to the facts. Only better educated, better paid employees are prepared to move house within the Netherlands, and most less educated people are not prepared to move at all. Therefore, it seems unrealistic to expect cross-border mobility to be any different. The vast majority of employees will only consider emigrating (either temporarily or otherwise) in cases of extreme need (in particular once they have started a family)." (p. 28)

These conclusions are by no means new and revolutionary and have been taken into account on political level. In the Commission's yearbook "Employment in Europe,, for 1993, a short passage on transnational mobility on the labour market ends: "In practice the EC policies are based on the fact that capital movements rather than labour market mobility are the most important instruments for evening out any imbalances. Mobility is seen more as a means to extending the career prospects of the individual regardless of his abode, rather than a regulatory mechanism on the labour market.,, And it continues: "Thus, there are very convincing arguments against the desirability of a massive migration of labour from the poor to the more affluent regions, not least because of the ensuing loss of income in the former and the extra pressure on the social and physical infrastructure in the latter which would normally be the result.,,"⁶

⁵ Source: Head of section Per Drost, Directorate for Social Security, Denmark

⁶ European Commission: Employment in Europe 1993, p. 62. Translated from the Danish version by S.K

We may also draw an illustrative parallel to the Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland) between which all technical barriers to free mobility across borders were already taken down in 1954. In addition, the national labour market authorities entered into close collaboration concerning the announcement of vacancies, and detailed information concerning living and working conditions has been made available to job seekers. Since the mid-80s, these efforts have been backed by the existence of exchange programmes for young people in initial vocational training (Nordplus Junior), young workers (Nordpraktik) and students in higher education (Nordplus) within the framework of the Nordic Council. In other words, an exact parallel to the situation in the EEC/EU. Moreover, the Nordic languages (Danish, Norwegian, Swedish) are mutually intelligible, and there are strong cultural bonds between the countries (which share a long history and for long periods in medieval times were indeed united as one country). Yet despite this closeness the migratory movements between the countries remain negligible.⁷

The situation, then, is one where the free movement of capital and services (the advance of telework will also, to some extent, have an influence here) has to a large extent obviated the need for labour market mobility. The existing mobility arises mostly in connection with multinational companies posting staff abroad e.g. in connection with a relocation, a merger, an acquisition or a joint venture. This trend - not only in the EU, but also worldwide - is confirmed in an OECD report from 1994.

The limited importance of transnational labour market mobility in the past, present and (presumably) also in the immediate future should not detract from its political importance as a symbol of a Europe with no borders not only for capital, goods and services, but also for its citizens. If we continue to maintain that transnational mobility in VET is an important issue, however, and one that yields returns on the investments made in it e.g. through the LEONAR-DODA VINCI programme, it is in the light of the above conclusions not tenable to refer to it in terms of transnational labour market mobility. This constitutes only one function - and perhaps a minor one at that - of the ensemble. The task, then, is to define the other aspects that together constitute an answer to the question of why it is an important issue.

In the publication "Transnational placements: Impact and potential," which is an assessment of the placement activities in the PETRA programme produced by the European Commission and the PETRA Bureau (the Technical Assistance Office) in Brussels together with a team of experts from the PETRA national coordination units, a section bearing the title "Transnational placements: what's in it for young people," lists a number of reasons for investing in transnational mobility for young people in vocational training. These advantages are, in order of appearance:

- enhancing vocational skills
- developing transversal skills
- increasing intercultural awareness
- improving foreign language skills
- stimulating transnational mobility and promoting young people's future prospects
- enhancing the self-confidence of disadvantaged young people.

⁷ On Jan. 1st 1994, the number of nationals from other Nordic countries resident in Denmark was as follows (absolute figures):

Norway	10,528
Sweden	8,31
Iceland	3,111
Finland	1,922

This number includes all residents; i.e. also those not active on the labour market (children, students, pensioners, accompanying spouses etc.) By way of comparison, the similar figures for nationals of other countries are:

Germany	9,490
UK	11,365
Poland	5,106
USA	4,782
Former Yugoslavia	11,618
Turkey	34,658

(Source: Eurostat Migration Statistics 1996)

It is interesting to note that the issue “stimulating transnational mobility,, (what is meant by this is transnational labour market mobility) in comparison with other documents on the issue is heavily downplayed and only appears way down the list. Furthermore, it is not even allowed to stand alone: it is coupled with the argument that a transnational placement will also be an asset to the future career in the *country of origin* (my italics) for the participant. In the Green Paper of the European Commission (1996) “The Obstacles to Transnational Mobility,, these issues are repeated in the introduction, and even though we must bear in mind that the paper not only refers to vocational training, but also to transnational mobility in the context of higher education and research, we can nevertheless see the arguments of the PETRA paper more or less closely mirrored here. In summary, we can boil down the arguments for transnational mobility in VET to four points (excluding that of its relevance as a factor in the promotion of labour market mobility, which has already been sufficiently dealt with):

- a) transferral of technology and know-how (enhancing vocational skills);
- b) development of international qualifications (including foreign language skills);
- c) development of transversal skills;
- d) importance for disadvantaged persons.

To these four points we may add a fifth, namely the value of transnational experiences in developing a notion of European citizenship (as opposed to a narrow, national(istic) perspective) in the individual participants. As this is a political goal more than an aspect of direct relevance in VET, we will merely mention it here. In the following, the above points will be described in more detail, but before that it is useful to take a look at the empirical background to these statements.

4. MOBILITY IN VET - THE EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

Transnational mobility in VET can happen in two ways: either a young person on his own initiative crosses the border to take a full VET course in another Member State, or he spends a period of time abroad at a vocational school or in a work placement as an integral part of his native course. In the first instance, he receives his certification from the host country; in the second, he will receive his certification in his native country. The impetus for mobility in the first situation in most cases comes from the student/apprentice himself (“spontaneous,, mobility), whereas the second mostly involves placements organised for the individual or a group of students/apprentices by a placement organiser, in most cases within the framework of a general agreement between vocational schools and with support from the EU mobility programmes (see below on the concept of “free movers,, in VET). This situation is in principle similar to what we find in higher education; however with the important difference that the target group is as a rule significantly younger (15-19 which is the age bracket in which most persons start a VET course) and are consequently less able to take the truly momentous decision to go to another country and stay there for a number of years.

Another, equally important difference is that qualifications from higher education as a whole are a lot easier to recognise across borders (e.g. through the ECTS system), and somebody with qualifications from the VET system of another country may find it very hard indeed to go back to his country of origin and obtain the type of work that his training has qualified him for. The number of persons taking their entire VET course abroad is therefore minute. When we talk about mobility in VET, we are therefore in reality only dealing with young people taking part of their VET course in another Member State than their own. The idea of the “free mover,, as we know it from higher education (i.e. a person who spontaneously and outside of any institutionalised arrangements goes abroad to do a study period here) is not very widespread in VET, as the difficulties concerning the recognition of periods spent abroad in most cases present an insurmountable barrier for this. Mobility in VET is consequently an activity that primarily takes place in organised projects (i.e. not spontaneous) within EU or national programmes.

Most of the stays consist of placements of a relatively short duration, which means 3-4 weeks (cf. evaluation of PETRA, LEONARDO). The reason for this is mostly to be found in provisions in national legislation pertaining to VET which makes it extremely difficult or even impossible to

recognise long-term placements as an integral part of a VET course. At the time of writing, Denmark is the only Member State of the EU that has integrated the possibility of long-term placements abroad as a feature of the VET system. Although there are no statistics to underpin this, it would seem that almost all long-term placements and the major part of short-term (i.e. up to 12 weeks) take place in companies and are recognised as part of an alternance-based course (apprenticeship).

Transnational mobility in VET - despite the fact that it has historic roots dating back to the "travelling journeymen,, (fahrende Gesellen) of medieval times - is after all a fairly recent phenomenon. Until VET with the Treaty of Maastricht became a legitimate area of concern for the European Union, next to nothing happened on Community level, and only very little on national level (see below). It is only with the advent of the PETRA and the LINGUA programmes and later the LEONARDO DA VINCI programme that we see any concerted effort in the field. The empirical data on which to build any research thus mainly emanates from these initiatives, and it seems therefore appropriate to give a short description of the structure as well as the key figures for each of these, to be used as a point of reference.

PETRA (1st phase 1987-92; 2nd phase 1992-95):

The PETRA programme consisted in two phases, of which only the second (1992-95) contained a mobility strand. In the programme, mobility was promoted in the shape of grant aid for two distinct target groups, namely

- *action 1a*: young people in the age bracket 15-25 enrolled in initial vocational training, for placements in another Member State of a duration from 3-12 weeks;
- *action 1b*: young workers in the age bracket 18-27, including young unemployed and young people in advanced training programmes building on qualifications from initial vocational training; for work placements in another Member State of a duration between 3-12 months (continuation of the former "Young Workers' Exchange Programme,")

The programme in its second phase also contained provisions (*action 3*) for the setting up of working links between national systems for vocational guidance and for the training of guidance counsellors; (partly) with the aim of promoting the exchange of information related to mobility in VET.

The financial support provided by the Community for the activities undertaken within the framework of the PETRA programme amounted to 104.2 MECU for the second phase; half of which was allocated to the strands directly promoting mobility (*action 1a & 1b*). In its lifetime, the programme supported placement activities involving over 35,000 young people (23556 under *action 1a* and 13053 under *action 1b*).

LINGUA (1990-1995):

The objective of the LINGUA programme was to promote quantitative and qualitative improvement in foreign language competence among the Community's citizens. Under *action 4* of the programme, support in the shape of grant aid was given to groups of young people for short transnational placement activities or meetings of a minimum duration of two weeks in order to improve their foreign language ability. Young people in VET could also participate in these projects, but there is no information on the share of them in the total number of participants (117,168).

LEONARDO DA VINCI (1995-1999):

The LEONARDO programme represents the amalgamation and enlargement of a number of hitherto independent programmes in the field of VET and higher education: PETRA, LINGUA, FORCE, COMETT and EUROTECNET. The programme consists of four strands of which the first contains provisions for improving the transnational mobility of students/apprentices in VET:

Strand 1: Support for improving vocational training systems and arrangements in participating countries: This strand is aimed at all those involved in the field, and particularly those in charge of training systems. In this strand, grant aid is given for transnational mobility projects involving young people in initial vocational training (I.1.2.a) for short placements (3-12 weeks) and for

long placements (3-12 months) and in I.1.2.b for young workers (3-12 months). The programme operates with a target group of young people in the age bracket up to 28.

The programme has a budget of 620 MECU. In its first year of operation (1996), it managed to move 10,925 young people in initial vocational training and 4,700 young workers across national borders.

When we are dealing with transnational mobility in VET, it is first and foremost the experience from these programme activities that we must rely on for our empirical data. This is not very much, and as it is such a relatively new phenomenon, much of the information that we have is at present only available as raw figures concerning the quantitative aspects, as yet unprocessed and uninterpreted in any qualitative context. The programmes mentioned are the ones where the link VET/transnational mobility constitutes the main element. There are, however, further programmes and Community initiatives where transnational mobility in a VET context play an - albeit minor - role. In particular the Social Fund initiatives under the EMPLOYMENT umbrella (YOUTHSTART/EUROFORM, NOW, HORIZON), the ADAPT-initiative, but also Objective 4 under the Social Fund itself. Many other EU-schemes contain a mobility promoting action line (e.g. the research programmes), and also the initiatives promoting cross-border regional development (INTERREG) may be of interest. The experiences harvested here in connection with transnational mobility, however, have never been evaluated independently, as it remains a side issue.

With a LINGUA programme that did not focus on this target group, and the LEONARDO programme as yet hardly over its teething problems, we therefore have to fall back on the PETRA programme for most of our empirical material in connection with this paper. In this context, we have at our disposal, other than the statistical material, an interim and a final evaluation of the placement activities made centrally⁸, plus a number of more or less usable national evaluations of the impact of the programme - including the placements - here. In addition, we have two special studies commissioned by the Commission concerning particular aspects of the placement activities: one on legal and administrative barriers to mobility in VET (Kristensen 1994) (later incorporated in the Green Paper on obstacles to mobility) and a study on the problems in connection with recognition/certification of transnational placements (McKerracher 1994). Any long-term evaluation of the effect of a transnational placement on the participant is thus lacking, and we must base at least some of our conclusions on less valid sources (statements of placements organisers and individual participants).

Many interesting parallels may be drawn to the Young Workers□ Exchange programme, though, where the target group - albeit by definition outside the VET system - in many instances is similar to what we are dealing with in VET. In some Member States the responsible coordinator for activities under this programme was (and still remains) the national labour market authorities, and here there are many examples of the participants not having been recruited directly "from the street,,," but taken from a national training programme (e.g. the *escuelas talleres* in Spain) which has thus been given a tangible European dimension. The outcome of these activities is directly comparable to what is happening now in VET in the Leonardo programme. Unfortunately many of the activities have never been properly evaluated.

On a European basis, activities under the Young Workers□ Exchange Programme were evaluated qualitatively in 1989 for the Commission by a German consultancy company (IKAB 1989) and again in 1993 by an Irish/Greek consultancy consortium (NICO Education Services Ltd. and ACRONYM 1994). The findings from these two evaluations - both based on questionnaires sent to a representative sample of participants from placement projects 1-2 years prior to the evaluation - have formed the basis for many of the qualitative statements (e.g. on the length of placements) in this paper. Both evaluations suffer from the disadvantage of being based on interviews with participants in recent placement activities. As an indicator of the long-term effect - e.g. on transnational mobility on the labour market - we may draw our conclusions from the enthusiastic statements of participants declaring themselves able and willing to look for work in other Member States as a result of their participation in the activity, but

⁸ *Interim report:* NICO Education Services Ltd. and ACRONYM (1994): A report on young people
Final report: Bahl-Poulsen/Fahle (1995)

we cannot say anything definite in this respect. In order to do this, we would have to follow a representative number of participants over an extended period and see whether this actually happened or not. Such an exercise has still to be carried out.

Unfortunately, we cannot refer to any other extensive experiences in the field that could give us more definite material or at least corroborate our conclusions. Mobility as such is, of course, no new thing, but the idea of mobility programmes and other types of incentives to promote transnational mobility for workers and people in VET - i.e. with emphasis on the economic, education and training aspects - is something that we only see in connection with the creation of a supra-national structure like the EEC. There are organisations that have been active in the field of youth exchange for a long time, but this has happened primarily for reasons other than those related to the economy and training. Their declared aim is to promote peace and solidarity between the nations of the world rather than the vocational dimension (e.g. organisations like AFS/Intercultura, Youth for Understanding etc.).

In a more official setting we have the experience of large and institutionalised organisations like the Carl-Duisberg Gesellschaft in Germany (since 1949) and the Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk/Office Franco-Allemand pour la Jeunesse (since 1962), where many exchange activities indeed have taken place in a vocational context, but again with the overriding perspective being one of fostering friendship and collaboration across borders. In these organisations, we may find many interesting experiences concerning the qualitative aspects of transnational placements in a vocational context, for instance concerning the cultural and linguistic preparation of participants, the monitoring of placement activities etc. A substantial body of work on these aspects has also been done in the framework of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, which has also tried to launch a placement scheme similar to the Young Workers Exchange Programme: the New European Journeymen Network, an initiative by the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe. Lacking the necessary finances as well as the executive powers of the Commission of the European Union (being an international and not a supranational institution), the impact of these efforts has been limited.

Concomitantly with post-Maastricht Community intervention in the field, we have in the 90s seen a number of interesting developments on the national level where several Member States have taken initiatives to supplement or complement the efforts of the Community programmes; e.g. the Dutch SESAM programme and the Danish PIU programme. Especially the latter contains interesting perspectives, as it in some respects goes beyond the scope of the Leonardo programme. It is, therefore, relevant to include a brief description of this initiative in this paper as it contains experiences of relevance for the later sections of this paper.

The PIU programme was set up in 1992 and consists of two elements: one is an amendment to the national law on VET making it possible for students/apprentices in the alternance-based VET system to take part or all of their mandatory work placement periods in an enterprise in another EU or EFTA-country; the other a funding scheme set up in the framework of the so-called "Employers Reimbursement Scheme for Apprentices and Trainees," (AER) which gives financial aid to all applicants who can meet the criteria for support. In 1996, some 1,000 young persons availed themselves of this opportunity and spent periods ranging from 3 months to 3 years in companies abroad. The total amount of money spent on programme activities was DKK 15 million (approx. 2.1 MECU). To assist the individual participant, vocational schools, enterprises and labour market organisations in this, a centre (the PIU-Centre) has been set up by the social partners at the instigation of the Ministry of Education. The main roles of this centre is - besides practical assistance to the actors in the field - to disseminate information, to coordinate activities, to develop the programme qualitatively and quantitatively, and to be instrumental in the evaluation of results. Since we are only in the second phase of the PETRA programme, however, there are as yet no appraisals of its long-term effects on the participants. The programme is very interesting however, because it is open to all (no upper budget limit and consequently no restriction in terms of number of participants) and because it allows long-term transnational experiences to be formally recognised as an integral part of a national vocational training course.

To conclude on this section, however, we can say that there are at present, because of its novelty, still many issues in relation to transnational mobility in VET that have not been properly

evaluated and thus authenticated, especially in relation to the long-term effect of placements and their impact on the subsequent career of the participants.

5. MOBILITY IN VET: IMPACT AND POTENTIAL

In the following section, we will examine the issues raised in section 1 of the paper, trying to give, in the light of the available data and the existing research in the field

- a) a definition
- b) an assessment of their relevance, and (where necessary)
- c) an description of the process of acquisition.

Here, it is taken more or less as an axiom that a learning process in relation to each of the four issues mentioned previously (i.e. the importance of mobility for the transferral of technology and know-how, for the development of international and transversal qualifications, and for disadvantaged persons) does take place in connection with the experience of a transnational placement, but other than a few general comments we will not go deeper into the subject of how this happens. There is, of course, a clear link between the length of a placement and the degree of exposure to the native environment of the host country and the benefits of the stay. Short stays for groups of participants have of course their value, in particular if the participants are well prepared and carefully debriefed afterwards, but in order for any real transfer of skills to take place, the ideal is an individual placement lasting at least 3 months. This realisation is also evident in the evolution of the mobility programmes, where the minimum length of placement activities is gradually being extended.

5.1 Transfer of technology and know-how in placements

In medieval times and up to around the mid-19th century, mobility was indeed an integral feature of VET in that it was quite common in at least Northern Europe for a young person at the end of his apprenticeship to travel widely across Europe for a period of time in order to hone his skills, gather experience and acquire new knowledge and inspiration in his chosen field. In many guilds it was a prerequisite to have travelled if one wanted to set up as a master craftsman, and there were rules laid down as to the length of the period and the distance from home. Here, mobility was clearly a vehicle for the transfer of technology and know-how across borders, and as such of crucial importance for the development of trade and industry.

The transfer issue is of continuing relevance in the discussion on mobility in VET, albeit with a shift in focus: it is no longer in this forum that the exchange of technology and know-how on the macro-level takes place.⁹ This happens e.g. through the mobility of researchers and - in an educational context - in the placement activities organised between universities and private enterprise in a COMETT/LEONARDO framework. Instead, the focus is on the individual participant and the infusion of skills that a transnational experience may represent for him. In an evaluation carried out under the PETRA programme in 1994¹⁰ among former participants in action 1a placements, 71% said that they considered the training they had received was good, 71% felt better trained for future jobs, and 72% found the training very useful. For the young workers in action 1b, the corresponding figures were 77, 75 and 73. These figures should, of course, be taken with a pinch of salt as they do not reveal whether they actually cover an acquisition of "hard,, (process-dependent) vocational skills, or whether they represent an overall assessment that relates as much (or more) to the overall experience and/or to the "soft,, (process-independent or transversal) skills that are dealt with under a separate heading. However, going over individual placement reports we may find many instances where the transfer of technology/know-how is a major motivation. In the Danish PIU-programme (see above) we find instances of apprentice chefs/cooks going to France and Italy to learn about the cuisine there, and of apprentice car mechanics going on a work placement in Germany in the factories where the cars they repair are produced. In both instances they clearly augment and

⁹ The issue, however, is relevant in connection with the placement activities in the framework of the LEONARDO (and formerly the COMETT programme) involving university students and companies dealing with high technology products.

¹⁰ IKAB, p. 8 (short version in English)

supplement their skills in a way that would not have been possible had they stayed at home. For many students/apprentices in the commercial areas, the outcome in terms of foreign language competency in their field of work and their knowledge of procedures and other legal and administrative issues etc. of the labour market in the host country is of direct relevance to them in their future careers. This experience could not have been obtained to the same extent in their home country.

There is a general acceptance of the fact that a real transfer in terms of hard skills is not the central element in a placement. Farla and Meijers (1995), to mention one example of this, in their evaluation of the impact on the PETRA programme in the Netherlands clearly see this aspect (i.e. the acquisition of vocational skills) as being a much less important "return," on a placement than the acquisition of transversal skills (pp. 98-103).

5.2 Development of international qualifications (including linguistic skills)

In an age where international trade is increasing, where production processes are split up temporally and spatially, and where mergers, acquisitions, relocations and joint ventures across borders are the order of the day, the ability to act transnationally becomes a key qualification for large parts of the labour force, even though it does not actually move across borders. They must possess what are described as here as "international qualifications,". This term is not the only one in circulation: others talk of "Euroqualifications," "European key qualifications," "intercultural skills," etc.; terms that in principle mean the same, even though the authors of the concepts may include slightly different sub-items under their chosen heading.

For the purpose of this paper, we will adopt a very broad definition of "international qualifications," as a range of skills, knowledge and attitudes that allow a person to act in an international vocational context.¹¹ Attempting to precisely define what it takes to act transnationally is an enormous task, as it varies from sector to sector, from company to company, and from position to position. Also the level at which these skills must be mastered varies. Competency in foreign languages is a case in point, where at one end we have the sales manager in an international company who has to conduct complicated negotiations in the language of the prospective buyer, and at the other we find the shopfloor worker, who can get along with no other languages than his own in his entire working life. In between these poles, we have the examples of e.g. the skilled metal worker who must be able to read and understand a manual for a new piece of machinery in a foreign language, and the office worker who must be able to answer the occasional telephone call from clients from other countries.

How relevant are these intercultural qualifications to the labour force in Europe? Again, it varies. In some regions/Member States they are deemed crucial due to the composition of the economy, in others they are seen as less important. The overall need for foreign language competency in German companies, for instance, was estimated according to an investigation made by the Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (Federal Institute for Vocational Training) in 1991/92¹² to concern only 12% of all workers. In Denmark, on the other hand, the relevance is considered so self-evident that language training is compulsory everywhere in mainstream VET (this is not the case in Germany).

Taken in its totality, we may divide the international qualifications into three major headings, namely:

- a) linguistic competency;
- b) intercultural competency;
- c) international vocational competency.

The third point - international vocational competency - is concerned with specific vocational skills that are necessary within a given profession in order to act transnationally. This could e.g. be knowledge of legal and administrative practices in countries other than one's own,

¹¹ A profound overview of research and development in this highly complex area is found in Busse, Paul-Kohlhoff, Wordelmann (1996)

¹² Quoted in: Busse (1997), p. 7

knowledge of technical norms, the knowledge of a set of specific technical terms (vocabulary) or in general proven excellence in the chosen field.

Whereas foreign language competency and vocational competency is relatively easy to deal with once it is placed in a concrete context, cultural competency is a more diffuse term to work with, and one that is difficult to make operational. What does it actually mean, understanding the mentalities and the cultures of people from other countries? For the purpose of this paper, we will define it as the ability to interact constructively with people of a different cultural background on the basis of a perception of differences and similarities in values and attitudes. M. Meyer¹³ has defined three levels of cultural competency where level one (monocultural) is used for the level where the person judges everything by the norms of his own culture, and level three (transcultural) is used for the person who is capable of acting competently in many cultural environments:

Monocultural

The person sees everything and judges everything according to his own cultural norms; the attitude to other cultures is characterised by stereotypes and clichés.

Intercultural

The person can explain cultural differences because of a specific knowledge he has acquired, either through personal experience or from other sources.

Transcultural

The person is able to discern intercultural differences and solve intercultural problems in a balanced way. The person can develop his own identity in the light of an intercultural understanding. The person has an overview of both his own and other cultures, so that he understands and appreciates both.

With Meyer's notion of the transcultural level of cultural competency, we are, in reality already into the next area, namely that of transversal skills.

5.3 Development of transversal skills

Transversal skills - also called core skills, personal skills or process-independent qualifications - are defined against vocational skills - as not being tied to any particular trade, profession, sector or work process but as being applicable to a wide range of situations in private as well as working life. The terms covers many different skills, such as entrepreneurial skills (creativity, risk-taking, responsibility, self-reliance, decision-making skills, the ability to take an initiative), communicative skills (including foreign language proficiency, negotiation skills), interpersonal skills (tolerance, flexibility, conflict-handling, team-building skills) as well as a number of other skills (problem-solving skills, quality awareness, self-confidence, determination, the ability to learn new things and de-learn old ones etc.). These are skills that are becoming increasingly valuable on a labour market which is characterised above all by change, where there is a constant need to adapt to new developments in technology and working methods. Concrete, technical skills become obsolete almost overnight, and huge hierarchies with clear, well-defined positions are being broken down into smaller units with new roles for employees. The Irish Business and Employers' Confederation, in its response to the Commission's Green Paper on Education in March 1993, stated: "Education as a preparation for working life is not the once-and-for-all proposition that it was. The value of too narrow vocational qualifications is shrinking in the face of technological innovation and rapid changes in working techniques. Consequently, there is an increasing premium on such types of formal education that improve problem-solving skills, enterprise, initiative, creativity, adaptability, and a willingness to undertake further education and training on the job".¹⁴

A great deal of effort has been made in order to find methods of imparting those skills to young people, and while there are many views on the matter, a general understanding seems to be

¹³ Quoted in: Broe, Kristiansen, Norberg (1995)

¹⁴ quoted from: Kristen/de Wachter (1995) p. 10

emerging among educationalists that these competencies cannot be taught in the traditional way, but that it is possible to create frameworks in which they can be learned. A transnational placement has turned out to be a very effective framework for the acquisition of those skills.¹⁵

During a placement, young people often find themselves left to their own devices as the usual network of friends, colleagues and family are often a thousand kilometres or more away. They have to tap into their own resources or enhance these in order to survive in these new and unknown surroundings. A few examples will show how it works in practice:

Self-confidence and self-reliance - due to the fact that the young person has managed to "survive" in an alien environment, he leaves with an increased belief in himself and his own abilities;

Adaptability and risk-taking - participants must adapt to a new and strange environment. The language, customs and habits all seem different from those at home and the young person must cultivate a flexible attitude and demonstrate a willingness to change or modify former points of view or attitudes. In a new environment, participants may be stimulated to try out something new - something they might never have considered doing under normal circumstances. Making a move and learning from that process helps the young participants to go beyond what they thought was feasible when they were in more familiar situations.

Communication skills - because participants find themselves in another country with another culture, communication skills have to go further than the mere acquisition of a foreign language. Young people gain an insight into the cultural norms that lie behind the language and a realisation that words that are seemingly identical mean different things to different people. In a multicultural society, these are important insights which can contribute to increasing intercultural awareness and to a change in mentality.

Creativity and lateral thinking - participants learn that there are more ways of going about solving a specific problem than the way which is used in their own country or region. In addition, they have to be creative to solve problems in communicating with people who speak a different language or in situations where their usual reactions, gestures and expressions do not have the desired effect.

Initiative - it is often hard for the placement organisers to assess the correct skills level of the participants and to identify a work placement that corresponds to their qualifications. Also, employers are often too busy to spend time finding suitable tasks for participants. Instead of being stuck with undemanding or routine tasks, young people have to take the initiative in negotiating tasks which are more in line with their qualifications and training needs.

This aspect of the learning process in a transnational placement was deemed so important that the German National Coordination Unit for action 1a in the PETRA programme, the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft, titled their evaluation report for the year 1992-93: "Im Ausland Lernen - Förderung von Kreativität, Eigeninitiative und Verantwortungsgefühl," (Learning abroad - fostering creativity, initiative and responsibility).

5.4 Mobility for disadvantaged persons

In the Council Decision governing the second phase of the PETRA programme, it was stipulated that programme activities must "devote particular attention to young people at risk, including disabled and disadvantaged young people," a concern that is repeated in the LEONARDO programme. The formulation offers the possibility for a very wide interpretation of the target group, as one can be at risk or disadvantaged in many ways (low skills level, coming from less affluent regions, deprived areas, immigrants, delinquency, unemployment or threatened by unemployment, gender, mental and physical handicaps, problems with social integration etc., etc.). However, it falls outside the scope of this paper to discuss the exact definition.

¹⁵ For a more exhaustive argumentation for this, see Kristensen/de Wachter (1995) p. 28-29

There is, of course, a clear political message in the Council Decision about a social Europe that offers opportunities to all its citizens and not only to those who are in a position to grab and hold them on their own account. Other than that there are two other issues of relevance in this context. One is concerned with the increasing importance of the so-called "international qualifications," on the labour market (see above). If these are not imparted to the disadvantaged or marginalised groups on the labour market, too, they will end up even more disadvantaged and marginalised. The other is linked to the fact that transnational mobility has been and is ongoingly also used as a pedagogical tool in the work with those groups, for most of whom transnational mobility in a labour market context is - and probably forever will be - beyond the borderline of the possible.

The pedagogical advantages of working with transnational experiences with certain groups of disadvantaged persons may be summarised as follows:

- a) The fact that they break a barrier that for many has been insurmountable - namely that of going to another country and spending a period of time there in interaction with the local environment - will motivate them to break through other barriers later;
- b) Many in this group are tied to an unfortunate image of themselves by the expectations of their surroundings. By leaving behind them the negative influence and pressure of the social environment and entering a space where nobody a priori meets them with negative expectations, they may - with adequate psychological support - manage to take the first steps towards a "redefinition" of themselves.

The issue of transnational experiences and disadvantaged groups has received much more attention in other programmes than those directly concerned with VET and mobility. In this context we may point to HELIOS (physically and mentally handicapped), NOW (women), HORIZON (groups threatened by social exclusion) and YOUTHSTART (young people with no or limited qualifications). The last three are initiatives under the Social Fund. This subject has also been given priority in all three phases of the Youth for Europe Programme.

5.5 Other

Most of these issues are centred around the individual and his personal and vocational development. To them, we may also add another issue that operates on another level: namely that of transnational mobility as a way of raising the status of VET and making it more attractive to young people by offering the possibility of transnational experiences. This theme is central to the Leonardo programme, and is explicitly mentioned as a prioritised objective in the preamble to the programme text.

6. MOBILITY IN VET: THE OBSTACLES

The identification and subsequent deconstruction of obstacles to mobility in VET has been high on the agenda in the EU since the early '90s. In 1993, the Commission commissioned a European-wide study of legal and administrative barriers to the transnational mobility of young people within the framework of the PETRA programme. The study was conducted on two levels: firstly, a team of national experts was set up to elaborate a report on the legal and administrative barriers to mobility in each of the then 12 Member States. Secondly, the Commission appointed an expert to write, on the basis of the 12 national reports, a synthesis report (Kristensen) that looked at the problems from a Community perspective and identified the areas where Community intervention was deemed appropriate to help overcome these obstacles. Another study, based on the same principle with a synthesis report being made on the basis of national contributions, was elaborated concerning the problem of recognition/certification (McKerracher 1994) The two studies had the status of "grey papers," - i.e. served as internal papers for the Commission as the basis for a recommendation, and the findings were later (in conjunction with investigations in areas other than VET; e.g. mobility in higher education and for researchers) incorporated in the Green Paper "The obstacles to transnational mobility,".

The Green Paper of the European Commission (1996) points to a number of obstacles of a legal and administrative character for transnational mobility where either Community intervention or concerted action on national level can provide a solution. The obstacles listed in the Green Paper that are relevant in a VET context may be divided into two groups: those that make participation in transnational VET activities impossible (legal and administrative barriers), and those that make participation difficult (e.g. lack of recognition, linguistic and cultural barriers etc.). The Green Paper points to five basic obstacles to mobility in education, training and research, four of which are of relevance to mobility in VET:

- the unemployed lose the right to unemployment benefit if they participate in training courses in another Member State exceeding three months;
- statutory problems for trainees and young people doing voluntary work;
- territorial restriction of student grants;
- problems of mutual recognition of academic and vocational qualifications.

In addition to these, the paper mentions a number of other obstacles of a more practical nature, e.g. lack of funding for placement activities, lack of host companies for placements etc.

On the basis of the barriers identified, the paper proposes a number of lines of action to facilitate mobility within education, training and research in Europe. The proposed actions include:

- according specific status to trainees on placements in other Member States;
- ensuring social protection for everyone benefiting from mobility as part of their training;
- creating a European area of qualifications to ensure recognition of placements;
- removing territorial restrictions on grants and national financing;
- improving the situation of nationals of third countries (i.e. non-EU countries) legally resident in the European Union with regard to training;
- reducing the socio-economic obstacles (increase funds for mobility);
- reducing linguistic and cultural obstacles;
- improving the information available and administrative practices.

Some of these action lines are very specific, and are related to the problems for certain groups of availing themselves of the benefits of mobility on a par with everybody else. This is the case for e.g. unemployed persons (who will in some Member States lose their status as unemployed and their rights to unemployment benefit and social protection if they go to another Member State to undergo training) and for nationals of non-EU countries legally resident within the EU. The proposal to confer special status on trainees on placements refers to unremunerated work placements, where the participant in some Member States will encounter problems with e.g. industrial injuries and liability insurance.

Other barriers are much broader, and create obstacles that affect mobility in VET more or less in its totality.

If we concentrate on those barriers that affect most prospective participants in mobility activities, the incompatibility of VET systems remains one of the biggest barriers, just as the problems concerning the recognition of qualifications obtained in other Member States stands in the way of mobility on the labour market. There is an important difference between the two, however. The recognition of qualifications obtained in another Member State in a labour market context (profession recognition) concerns entire courses and is made enormously complicated by the often fundamental differences between the structure and contents of VET in the European Union. In VET, on the contrary, we are dealing with a situation where the student/apprentice only takes part of his course in another Member State (academic recognition), and here it is easier to find common elements where recognition is possible.

Member States with an alternance-based VET system (CEDEFOP 1995) have here an advantage as the training requirements for work placements are broader and more flexible in terms of contents than theoretical courses. In the Danish PIU programme companies abroad are approved as training providers by the accrediting structures in Denmark (the trade

committees) according to a procedure where the company is informed about the requirements of the apprentice and subsequently signs a statement to the effect that they will provide the required training. An apprentice may take up to all his mandatory periods of work placements abroad, which means that he can spend from 3 months to 3 years abroad, in one or more companies. During that time, however, the apprentice will have to come home to Denmark for a number of obligatory school periods that may under no circumstances be taken abroad. During these periods, his skill level is assessed in comparison with other apprentices undergoing training in companies at home and any deficits diagnosed. If it is estimated that the training he has received is not of a standard that is compatible with the demands of the curriculum, the company is asked to rectify this, and in the cases where this does not happen, the training period may ultimately not be recognised and the apprentice will have to return to train with a Danish company. Programme coordination and development is assured by the accrediting bodies (trade committees) themselves through a special organisation (the PIU Centre) which has been set up by the social partners and is partly financed by the Ministry of Education.

Denmark is at the time of writing this article the only Member State where such a model exists, as a number of legal and administrative constraints makes it impossible or extremely difficult for apprentices in other Member States to train abroad for any extended period (McKerracher 1994). As there is an obvious connection between the duration of a placement and its long-term positive repercussions, it means that some of the potential value of such activities cannot be exploited fully here.

Another approach is offered by a number of transnational pilot projects in PETRA and LEONARDO where a number of national or regional bodies with responsibility for curriculum development and accreditation (e.g trade committees, Industrie- und Handelskammer, Training and Enterprise Councils etc.) have gathered across borders to develop joint modules for elements of particular training courses, allowing students/apprentices to circulate freely between the participating Member States, albeit only in relation to a specific module of their course. The Commission proposes in its Green Paper the creation of a European qualification area for vocational training along the lines of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The actors in the ECTS system are institutes of higher education all over the EU that have entered into a voluntary agreement to recognise study periods from one institution to the other across borders. To this purpose they exchange information material about their curricula, and every institution appoints an ECTS coordinator to help students organise their study period abroad. Courses of higher education are, however, as a rule a lot more flexible than VET-courses. As a rule, they award their diplomas themselves which most vocational schools do not. Moreover, the structure and contents of higher education courses definitely contain more similarities on a European-wide basis than do VET-courses, where the differences from one Member State to the other can be fundamental.

The lack of information on mobility-related issues is another important obstacle. The Green Paper mentions the need to coordinate information activities, and points to the existence of mobility-related information services and databases like EURES, ORTELIUS, EURODESK, CORDIS, NARIC and EURYDICE. Of these, only EURES and - to a limited extent, since it is open to a restricted number of users only - EURYDICE is useful in a VET-context, the others being dedicated to higher education, research and youth matters. The list is not complete however, and fails to mention some important information tools that are directly useful for mobility in VET. Under the PETRA programme, a number of National Resource Centres was set up to facilitate the exchange of information across borders between guidance and counselling structures in Member States. In connection with this, a European Handbook for Guidance Counsellors was produced containing information on mobility-related issues, and a series of training seminars for guidance counsellors was held. These efforts bear some resemblance to the EURES system for the exchange of similar information on the labour market, albeit on a vastly smaller scale. The activities are continued in the LEONARDO programme, but the resources allocated are not of a size that allows any major initiatives. As mentioned above, individual young people may supplement this service, however, by taking advantage of the information available on living and working conditions in the EURES system.

As an example of a major information activity of relevance in this context we may draw attention to the international organisation, ERYICA (the European Youth Information and Counselling Association) that some years ago with financial support from the Commission's Task Force for Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth (now DG 22) produced a series of small handbooks (approx. 100 pages) "Guide for Young Visitors to ...". These guidebooks were elaborated by Youth Information structures in a number of European countries (also non-EU) according to a common model, and were written especially for young people intending to go to another country for the purpose of work or education/training. They are obtainable at a small price. Recently these information guides have been reissued with support from the Youth for Europe programme in a CD-ROM version, albeit not for all Member States.

Developments in the information area are happening at a rapidly increasing speed, however - not least due to the new information technologies. Much information is now made available transnationally through e.g. the Internet. In the framework of the LEONARDO/PETRA programme, many projects tackle the issue of information - e.g. by producing preparation material for transnational long-term placements. The problem here is almost the opposite: how to get an overview of all the material that exists and how to evaluate it and assess its relevance in a concrete context.

Given that many transnational activities in VET are placements in companies, the problems connected with finding a company willing and suited to take a student/apprentice from abroad take on enormous importance. In a recent article in *Le Magazine*, a publication issued by DG 22 on education, training and youth¹⁶ Michael Adams from CEDEFOP points to the difficulties of finding work placements for young people on national level as a major obstacle to the advance of alternance-based training. Even in Member States with a long tradition for this (e.g. Germany) there are now problems with getting companies to take in the required number of apprentices. These difficulties can be multiplied several times over when we talk about finding placements for young people from other countries. Besides the problems in connection with language and mentality, the prospective placement host in many cases also suffers from a lack of information on the training system of the applicant's country of origin, increasing the margin of insecurity as to what he can actually do and to what extent the employer will have to devote resources to monitoring the trainee and to making sure that his training needs are met. Other than the problems with language, culture, vocational background etc. there is also the danger that these young people from other countries are seen as taking the places that should rightly go to young nationals of that country. For one thing, this will clearly not advance the idea of European citizenship particularly if, of course, the flow of students/apprentices is in one direction only, and there is no matching number of young people in training going the other way. All these difficulties taken together make "marketing" a young trainee from abroad an often extremely difficult task, especially in cases where it is foreseen that he be paid during the placement. That these difficulties are very real is shown by a recent investigation made by the Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk/Office Franco-Allemand pour la Jeunesse which followed the fate of a number of young people looking for placements in other countries ("spontaneous" mobility). In the overwhelming majority of cases, the search was fruitless.¹⁷ That it can be done, however, is demonstrated by the Danish PIU programme (see description above) which sends out some 1,000 apprentices from the dual system every year on a purely unilateral basis, mostly to Germany. How these contacts have been made and why the enterprises accept a Danish student/apprentice for an extended period has never been properly analysed, but a closer scrutiny of the motivating factors for employers in all EU Member States could yield much useful knowledge for future strategies on how to find the coveted placements.

The Green Paper recommends that all training should be accompanied by adequate linguistic and cultural preparation and that funding be made available not only for items like travel costs, accommodation and food, but also for related activities like reception, monitoring and evaluation to ensure the best possible chances of success. In this statement there lies a recognition of the fact that transnational mobility taking place in the context of formalised vocational education and

¹⁶ Le Magazine, December 1996

¹⁷ ⓉUntersuchung der beim DFJW eingegangenen Einzelfragen nach Praktika in Frankreich und Deutschland. DFJW Referat III, Bad Honnef 1996.

training and leading to recognised qualifications consists of more than the mere shifting across borders of a number of students/apprentices. A badly prepared and executed stay may entail a whole range of calamities and often produce the opposite results of those intended: the participant returns with a feeling of defeat that he will forever associate with the host country, prejudices are confirmed instead of dispelled, no extra skills are acquired and quite probably the participant may in many cases have to add extra time to his course in order to catch up, host companies are disappointed and may decide not to accept foreign trainees again etc. etc.

A notion of quality is, therefore, instrumental in the work with transnational placements in a VET context. Quality in this field, however, is not a fixed and unalterable thing. What constitutes good quality in a given placement activity varies according to target group and circumstances, but we can on an overall level identify a number of aspects that any placement activity taking place within the framework of VET - be it on an individual or a group basis - must consider. Besides the practical arrangements, which fall outside the scope of the paper, these are:

- selection of participants;
- preparation of participants (linguistic, cultural, vocational, psychological and practical preparation);
- preparation of host company or institution (training requirements);
- monitoring;
- debriefing of participants;
- evaluation.

Of these, linguistic and cultural preparation in particular has received attention, both in the context of mobility in VET, but also in a labour market context, where many companies offer special preparation courses for staff that is about to be posted abroad. In the framework of the PETRA programme, a special study was undertaken in 1994 (Carpenter, Egloff, Walters 1994), drawing on experiences both from the programme itself and from the LINGUA programme. It also involved expertise from the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The paper offers a very comprehensive overview of the experiences harvested so far, especially in relation to linguistic preparation. It has the advantage of being very operational containing, as it were, direct guidelines for concrete activities for various target groups within VET and references to additional literature on special issues such as VOLL pedagogics (VOLL = vocationally oriented language learning), TELL (technologically enhanced language learning) and the use of untraditional techniques like drama in the work with disadvantaged groups. Since the paper was elaborated, however, a great many initiatives have been taken in the field and much interesting material produced in the framework of the PETRA, LINGUA and LEONARDO programmes. However, the study has not been updated.

As mentioned already, a significant body of research and development work has been going on in recent years concerning the preparation of employees from multinational companies who are to be posted to another country. This reflects the tendency described in the section on labour market mobility, where an increase in mobility for this particular group has been registered. Much of the work here is concerned with intercultural aspects and is based on the findings of the Dutch sociologist, Geert Hofstede (1991), who in the late '70s conducted a worldwide survey among the employees of a large multinational company (IBM), on the basis of which he set up some operational parameters on which to position cultural differences.

For the other aspects of quality in placements, there is certainly much experience and material to be found in a variety of contexts, but there have been made no attempts to gather, systematize it and disseminate it on a European scale.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND ACTION

In its White Paper (1996) "Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society,, the European Commission proposes the creation of an "ERASMUS programme for apprentices,, i.e. a scheme whereby young people in alternance-based VET can spend an extended period of time in a placement in another Member State than his own. The proposal is not described in any greater detail, and how far the analogy with the ERASMUS (now part of the SOCRATES)

programme can be taken is not evident yet, but the chosen name seems to indicate that it will be long-term placements (i.e. at least 3 months) and that the transnational element must be fully integrated into the national curriculum.

If such a scheme is to succeed in shifting any larger number of young people across borders, there are two major obstacles that will have to be overcome first. One is a practical one and is concerned with the difficulties of finding work placements in other Member States. The other is concerned with the problem of recognition of periods spent in another Member State.

There is no easy, top-down implementable solution to the first problem. It is in all cases the individual employer who omnipotently decides whether he or she wants to accept a foreign student/apprentice in his company or not, and in many cases also the conditions for this. The problems in connection with marketing a foreign student/apprentice (language, culture, insecurity about skills level etc.) have been sufficiently enlarged upon earlier to make it clear that it is tough, uphill work, especially if the organiser is sitting in one Member State trying to make contact with potential host companies in the other. What actually induces a company to accept a student/apprentice from abroad is something that many placement organisers may have as many shrewd opinions of, but we lack, on European level, a study of the reasons that motivate employers to do so - something that can form the basis for a concerted recruitment effort. This was attempted, albeit on a very minor scale, by the European Commission in the framework of the PETRA programme with a small study entitled "The benefits for enterprises participating in action 1b., by Daniela Della Valle (1994).

Another step in the right direction could be to encourage the formation of strategic alliances across borders between placement organisers, so that organisation A uses its network and credibility on national level to find placements for organisation B from another Member State, and vice versa. There are at present a multitude of placement organisers about, operating on local, regional, national or European levels, but their aims are often too different to allow direct collaboration. In the "Young Workers Exchange Programme", up to 1991, the European Commission operated with a network of *national promoters*, which were appointed or set up exclusively to deal with this particular target group on the basis of the stipulations given in the programme. This system was since abolished as it became too rigid to contain the many new initiatives that sprang up as other actors moved into the field, but there is no doubt that its importance for the development of the programme was vital at the time when very few outside of Commission circles championed the idea of transnational activities for this target group.

If mobility in VET is to expand, the concept of quality assumes an even more central role than now. How can we be sure that a given enterprise can actually deliver the training required for the placement, and - once this has been ascertained - how do we monitor the placement to ensure that it is actually done, and that the student/apprentice is not merely used as cheap labour? It is rarely possible for a placement organiser to visit all foreign enterprises and assess these *in situ*, and there are no ways of sanctioning them if they do not live up to their initial promises in this respect. All that can be done is to blacklist the employer and thus debar him from receiving any more students/apprentices from that particular organiser. The most obvious solution to this problem would be to enlist the aid of the certifying bodies for apprenticeship training in the host country and empower these with the monitoring of placements according to a set of transparent quality criteria, but there are as yet no evident models for this.

The quality issue must also work the other way round, however. How do we ensure that the host company will always receive a motivated and well prepared student/apprentice that can perform the tasks that he is expected to? And that the placement activities are carefully evaluated afterwards to ensure that all mistakes are corrected the next time round? This is also an aspect of the problem of finding work placements, for an employer that has once been disappointed by a student/apprentice may very likely not be prepared to offer any placement opportunities again. It is, therefore, in a placement organiser's best interest to ensure that the students/apprentices have been carefully selected and prepared, but many neglect this due to financial constraints, lack of experience and the absence of guidelines and suitable material especially developed for this purpose on the basis of previous experience.

To ensure that (once a new and ambitious mobility programme has been launched) the desired quantity is matched by the required quality, it is necessary to focus on this issue and make sure that all expertise, examples of good practice and material developed is gathered centrally (both on European and on national level) and made known and available to placement organisers.

The proposal of the Commission to create a "European Qualification Area," is impossible to impose as a top-down decision, and it is up to the certifying bodies in each Member State to change their systems so that transnational placements may become an integral part; both with regard to work placements (in the Member States where the system is alternance-based) and school placements. Given the differences in the systems, this is a difficult task, but saying that it is difficult, however, is not the same as saying that it is impossible. Georg Hanff from Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (Federal Institute for Vocational Training) (which was the National Coordination Unit for the PETRA programme in Germany)¹⁸ has pointed to a number of trends that will gradually make VET contents and practices converge; the most important of which is what he calls the "internationalisation of technology,,". By this he means the fact that as production processes, standards and practices are harmonised all over Europe, the contents of VET-courses in these fields must needs reflect these changes and thus, for certain elements, approach each other to an extent where a direct and transparent comparison is possible. Georg Hanff points to several examples in the PETRA programme of projects which, taking their point of departure in such convergences, have proceeded on the basis of these to elaborate joint training modules that students/apprentices may take in any of the involved Member States. A case in point in the PETRAnsport project, where the certifying bodies of no less than eight Member States have developed a joint training module concerning the handling of dangerous goods on the basis of an EU-directive covering all Member States. Another example of this, taken from several that operate in a LEONARDO context, is the ELEA-project¹⁹ which covers apprentices in the electronics sector and involves four Member States (United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany and Austria). It aims to develop mutually recognisable modules of training for apprentices that can be taken in any of the four participating Member States, thus making free circulation possible along the lines of the ECTS-system, albeit on a restricted scale.

The CEDEFOP project concerning the comparability of qualifications in VET represents an attempt to establish transparency between whole courses of VET across borders. The conclusion of this project, however, must be that the differences between the systems are so fundamental that it is not possible to do this if the outcome is to be useful in the context of labour market mobility; i.e. be transparent to employers. Sectoral studies aiming to identify joint platforms in VET courses across borders that can be used for the basis for the elaboration of joint modules, however, might yet do for the mobility of VET what the comparability project failed to do for labour market mobility.

It is clear that mobility in VET cannot be dictated from above, but must grow up from below, given the proper incentives and technical assistance. The bottom-up approach, however, carries with it the risk of efforts being duplicated and much valuable experience being lost.

Transnational mobility in vocational education and training is a fairly recent phenomenon, the study of which combines elements from such diverse fields in pure and applied sciences as sociology, psychology, law, pedagogy, demography, educational research, political sciences, languages, history and geography. Even though there are research and development environments in areas close to it (e.g. in the area of labour market mobility, comparability of qualifications, international qualifications, language training pedagogics in a vocational context etc.), it has not as yet established itself as a proper field for research in its own right. We may here draw a parallel to the field of guidance and counselling, which is an equally diverse field, but one where a professional environment has come into being and where there is a coordination and dissemination of research via the existence of professional societies and journals both on national, European and global levels. Much of the impetus for this, however, comes from the United States and Canada where guidance and counselling long before it happened in Europe had been established as an academic discipline. We cannot hope for any

¹⁸ Contribution to Wordelmann (ed.) 1996

¹⁹ Project description available from Metalindustriens Løflingeudvalg, Nørre Voldgade 24, DK-1780 København V.

U.S cavalry rescue here, however: transnational mobility in VET is only possible on any large scale in the European Union with the possibilities of free movement that have been developed and institutionalised over the years, the availability of mobility-related information, and infusion of capital from the mobility programmes. It can be seen as an example of the differences in Europe being used as a strength rather than perceived as a weakness. There is therefore a need for a centripetal force, acting as a repository of examples of good practice, research and development activities, evaluating all actions in the field and bringing together the various elements and actors in a constructive atmosphere to ensure that a process of mutual enrichment takes place.

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