

PANORAMA

Disadvantaged groups in transnational placement projects

Disadvantaged groups in transnational placement projects

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Foreword

Over the last decade, transnational mobility in the form of placements in private or public enterprises abroad has been increasingly used as a didactic tool of vocational education and training (formal and non-formal) to acquire and develop vocational, linguistic, intercultural and personal skills. Many people will receive funding to participate in transnational mobility projects in the second phase of the Leonardo da Vinci programme (2000-05). While the programme specifically allows for the participation of ‘disadvantaged groups’, actual implementation can be difficult.

Studies on the mobility of disadvantaged groups have focused largely on access, i.e. practical, legal or administrative barriers. This pilot study focuses on disadvantaged groups characterised by low skills levels, for whom the greatest barriers are psychological rather than practical. It considers intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors (i.e. the environment) and examines whether, on the basis of an analysis of empirical material (eight case studies), a pedagogical model can be developed, in outline form at least.

What emerges from the analysis is not so much a model but a step towards a greater understanding of the elements of successful placement abroad for disadvantaged groups. The main benefits of such placements appear to be in personal achievement and in experiencing a ‘free space’ where character and vocational direction can be explored without the constraints or prejudices faced in everyday life. International skills, vocational skills and adaptability may also develop as a result. Success demands a professional approach to the way programmes are structured, with systems designed to meet the needs of the target group. The relevant learning processes are complex, mostly unique and impossible to replicate accurately but the detailed descriptions of models and tools can serve to inspire placement organisers.

The present study was carried out by Cirius/Denmark, to whom I would like to express my thanks. Its publication follows the European year of people with disabilities, aimed at raising awareness of the equal rights of the disabled. We must now act on that awareness and widen its scope to all disadvantaged groups.

Stavros Stavrou

Deputy Director

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Executive summary

In the second phase of the Leonardo da Vinci programme (2000-05) it is expected that some 220 000 people will benefit from a grant to go abroad for training, mainly with private and public companies. In the preamble to the programme, disadvantaged groups are mentioned specifically as a prioritised target. But what are the benefits of learning arising from participation in transnational placement projects and how should such visits be organised to best advantage? Little research has been done in this field, and the experience of practitioners is sparsely documented, mostly existing in the form of 'grey literature' that is difficult to identify and obtain. The present study tries to answer these questions, partly based on the limited material that has been found, and partly on the empirical material that has been gathered for this study. The latter comprises eight descriptive case studies, four from Denmark and four from other European countries.

Several learning outcomes are identified from the case studies. Transnational placement projects may be described as a learning platform with scope for learning international skills (foreign language proficiency, intercultural skills) and vocational skills (technology, knowledge of foreign markets) and acquiring intercultural understanding. The special value for this target group lies in acquiring 'personal skills' a term used here for qualities that can be developed during a stay abroad, namely self-confidence, self-esteem, a sense of purpose and clarifying personal goals and ambitions. Transnational placement projects include several parameters that can be adjusted to help develop these skills according to the exact nature of the target group, the learning aims, and the resources available. These parameters are motivation for participation, selection of participants, choice of host country, identification of placement opportunities, length of stay, mode of sending, supervision, preparation and debriefing after homecoming.

These personal skills are acquired in a 'learning situation' or through a 'mode of learning' called 'responsibilisation' that builds on two elements. First the participants, through looking after themselves in a foreign environment, feel pleased at having coped with what is seen as a formidable challenge. This sense of achievement leads to greater self-confidence and self-esteem which may, in turn, spark off a virtuous circle upon homecoming. The second element arises from the fact that the participants are alone in a foreign environment where their anonymity provides the opportunity to start afresh and experiment with aspects of their personality and vocational direction. Using a concept borrowed from Schön (1987) this is called the 'free space': participants are not limited by the expectations of their usual surroundings (stigmatisation) and the experiments may be safely abandoned on leaving if they are not seen to bring them any benefits.

For this method of learning to be applied however, the parameters mentioned above must be set accordingly. Length of stay, mode of sending, preparation, debriefing upon homecoming, etc. must all be designed for this target group and learning mode. It is not possible simply to copy a model used with groups from mainstream education and training and apply this to a

disadvantaged target group. A further consideration is that the term ‘disadvantaged’ is very wide, and covers many different groups – this is clearly demonstrated in the case studies. It is not possible, therefore, to construct a specific pedagogic model for disadvantaged groups in the form of a detailed set of user instructions. Instead, project organisers must set the parameters for the individual target groups, having regard to the nature of the learning process and the specific target group. Making placements abroad as a didactic tool for disadvantaged groups is a complex, but potentially rewarding area in which to work.

1. The study

1.1. Background

Within the last decade or so, placements abroad have been increasingly used as a didactic tool within vocational education and training (VET) in Europe. This increase is to a large extent fuelled by the funding possibilities offered by the European programmes such as Leonardo da Vinci programme. In the first phase (1995-2000), some 130 000 people have received funding for participation in transnational mobility projects, mainly in the form of placements, and a further 220 000 participants are expected for the second phase (2000-05). Placement activities are also funded through other EU programmes and initiatives, however and as a result many national and binational programmes have also been created. These programmes are either dedicated to transnational mobility or include it as an action line. It is difficult to assess the extent of the use of placements abroad due to the lack of statistics and information generally. An estimate, based on studies in the 15 Member States plus Norway and Finland, puts the number of participants at 200 000 per year though this may vary by up to 20 % either way, (Kristensen, 2004).

The participation of ‘disadvantaged groups’ in this activity is often emphasised in programme preambles and related official texts. Thus, for the Leonardo da Vinci programme, Article 2 (h) in the Council decision establishing the programme states that a specific purpose of the programme is in ‘encouraging specific vocational training measures for disadvantaged young people without adequate training and in particular young people who leave the education system without adequate training’. Consequently projects involving such groups are often given priority in selection and funding is often more generous. Despite these incentives, the numbers of disadvantaged groups participating in transnational placement projects is generally low and efforts have been made to increase the rate of European and national participation.

Although transnational placement projects involving disadvantaged groups is a prioritised activity in an evolving area, there is much to be learnt as there has been no dedicated research and few examples of experiences or good practice.

1.2. The task

The specified aim of this study is ‘to look into ways and means of developing transnational mobility (placements) as a didactic tool for disadvantaged groups’. The study should focus on pedagogical aspects, i.e. on describing and/or developing pedagogic models for participation with a view to promoting the acquisition of personal and vocational skills’. In the absence of prior research and data collection, the study should be based on data collected from selected projects with particular experience in the field. The study should focus particularly on the possibilities for increasing the participation of disadvantaged groups in the Leonardo da Vinci

programme, but examples of good practice may also be taken from other programmes and initiatives at European as well as at national level.

The Cirius proposal outlined a model where the core of the study would be based on case studies of selected Danish projects. These would be supplemented by further case studies from other European countries and the work organised in six phases:

Phase 1: literature survey

European-level search for available literature on the theme of participation of disadvantaged groups in transnational placement projects.

Phase 2: data collection in Denmark

Questionnaire survey to Danish projects involving disadvantaged groups in mobility (placement) projects. Selection of appropriate projects for case studies. Project visits and interviews with Danish projects.

Phase 3: data collection outside of Denmark

Identification of non-Danish projects for case studies to compare and contrast with Danish projects. Project visits and interviews.

Phase 4: analysis

Analysis of findings. Identification of relevant learning theory and construction of theoretical framework for the study.

Phase 5: conclusions and recommendations

Formulation of conclusions/recommendations.

Phase 6: discussion of results

Discussion of conclusions and recommendations with Danish reference group.

The work was largely carried out according to this plan although the collection of empirical data was expanded slightly more than originally envisaged. It was therefore considered necessary to visit and interview all four non-Danish projects to obtain data. The final phase – discussion of results at national level – had been planned as a seminar, but due to practical problems and time constraints was carried out as a written consultation procedure.

The work was carried out by Mr Søren Kristensen from the company Techne, who is also a doctoral student at the Danish University of Education, under the supervision of Mr Nils Kruse, Cirius.

1.3. The target group

The term ‘disadvantaged’ is an elastic one with almost any group capable of fitting this category. For the purpose of this study we defined the group as being ‘(young) people with low skills who are either in training or education, unemployed or employed with risk of marginalisation on the labour market’. This definition deliberately excludes the physically and mentally handicapped from the study, as their specific requirements would broaden the scope of the project and require a greater depth of study than possible here. It also excludes those who are sometimes described as ‘geographically disadvantaged’, i.e. from poor rural regions or city areas in decline.

Despite this refinement, the group is still diverse, comprising,

- those in education and training with low skills levels;
- the unemployed;
- the employed with risk of marginalisation in the labour market.

As the study developed, the definition needed further refinement as the case studies indicated that the first category mentioned may be too inclusive or even ineffective, as any person in initial vocational training necessarily has a low skills level until he or she has passed the examination or journeyman’s test. A more precise formulation would therefore be ‘(young) people who are unable to follow or have difficulties following mainstream education and training at initial (upper secondary) level’.

The term ‘unemployed’ is also problematic as it covers sub-groups with different characteristics in terms of ‘employment’ and ‘employability’. In the present climate of constant change in the labour market, many with sought-after skills find themselves temporarily out of employment, but nevertheless highly employable. Even though they are technically ‘disadvantaged’, due to their status as unemployed, they are capable both at professional and personal level. Including these as a target group alongside truly disadvantaged groups would make the exercise meaningless from a pedagogical point of view. However, not all the unemployed with qualifications should be excluded from the group of disadvantaged. ‘Employability’ comprises several factors, of which professional qualifications is only one. The well qualified may be highly unemployable as their qualifications become obsolete or because their lack of personal skills does not enable them to cope with change and be flexible. Similarly, many people with no or few formal qualifications have still reached high positions due to good personal skills or vocational skills acquired informally. However ‘disadvantage’ often comprises several factors and a lack of formal qualification, low self-esteem, poor communication skills, etc. are usually found together. The use of case studies of transnational placement projects involving the unemployed should therefore be approached with caution: can the disadvantaged status of the participants be ascribed to a lack of ‘employment’ or ‘employability’? The distinction is important as the pedagogical approaches used for one group are unlikely to work for the other. For the purpose of this study, we have

therefore chosen to focus on the latter and this, of course, has had consequences for the selection of case studies.

Because it was not possible to identify any examples of transnational placement projects involving employed persons at risk of marginalisation, this target group has not been dealt with in this study.

1.4. The literature survey

The first step in the process was to conduct a literature survey, at European level, to find appropriate work which would assist in the study and also obviate carrying out work already done by others. The word ‘literature’ here includes all types of texts, including articles, studies and project reports and official publications.

Libraries and the Internet were searched but the large volume of sites found using broad searches for words such as ‘mobility’, ‘placement’ and ‘disadvantaged’ yielded little. This would indicate that not much has been done in this area although there is some literature on stays abroad as a means of acquiring ‘intercultural understanding’. This literature emanates primarily from the USA and from Germany and France, where the activities of the Franco-German Youth Office have been well covered by research. Some work has been undertaken in the framework of the European Youth Centre (an institution under the Council of Europe) in Strasbourg. This however focuses on youth encounters (school stays, visits and joint projects organised in the framework of youth organisations, etc.) and only rarely involves placements. Though some elements can be applied to the theme of disadvantaged young people and placements, the two areas are qualitatively different and extensive reconfiguration is needed to make it practically useful here.

Literature on transnational mobility in the form of placements abroad and particularly literature dealing with transnational placements for disadvantaged groups is sparse and little is catalogued here. Much of the material that does exist is ‘grey literature’ – unpublished project reports, small-scale studies, evaluations, etc. – and is not available on the Internet. The most effective way of identifying literature proved to be the ‘snowball survey’: references contained in one text would lead to more texts containing more references and so on. This was a lengthy process and the literature survey was extended over the entire project duration with new material being discovered right to the end.

While there is a shortage of material directly referring to placements abroad for disadvantaged groups, information from similar contexts may be transferred to this field, albeit with adjustments and modifications. Elements of the material devised and used by youth organisations to develop cultural sensitivity as part of the preparation process can be used, as can, with the appropriate adjustment, material developed for placements for the disadvantaged in a national context, e.g. on mentoring. The adaptation processes needed here require careful handling, having particular regard to the nature of the target group concerned.

A list of relevant texts on transnational placements and disadvantaged youth has been included in the bibliography of this report. While not extensive, for the reasons given above, it is seen as a modest beginning that may be extended with developments in the field.

2. Empirical data collection

The empirical material has been obtained from case studies, made up of loosely structured qualitative interviews with key personnel, supplemented by information given in related texts (evaluations, reports) and, where appropriate, observations on site. The interviews lasted on average three hours, and the information derived was subsequently condensed into short texts, which are included in this report. The texts were sent for approval to the interviewees, who were allowed to make corrections and additions. In some cases, information was supplemented by later e-mail or telephone enquiry in an iterative process. The interviews naturally contain subjective statements from the interviewees concerning, for example, skills acquisition in projects and the relative importance of individual elements (e.g. preparation). The main aim of the interviews, however, was to elicit information not obtainable from other sources, or form judgements where these did not already exist in evaluation reports.

The data acquired from interviews and documents was analysed in the first instance in a 'closed circuit' to find significant patterns of meaning. The central questions were:

- What benefits are derived from participation in placement projects?
- How are these benefits achieved?

Once identified, these patterns of meaning were examined a second time in a broader perspective, drawing in theoretical and factual material from other sources. The research questions are basically the same but have been refined:

- What are the specific benefits for this particular target group?
- How can access to placement projects be further improved from a pedagogical point of view?

On the basis of findings here, conclusions have been drawn and recommendations made.

2.1. Representativity of the case studies

The four Danish case studies and four from other European countries aim to offer conclusions that are applicable not only in a Danish context, but at a European level. This raises the problem of representativity – i.e. to what extent can generalisations be made from such a limited number of studies to projects across the whole of Europe? It is clearly impossible, even with much larger empirical studies, to generalise and assume coverage in the 'traditional' scientific sense of the word for such a complex subject. What we can attain, however, is some kind of 'fuzzy generalisation'; a concept that has gained widespread recognition in qualitative educational research. Bassey (2003, p. 52) writes:

‘With the scientific generalisation there are no exceptions – and indeed in science if any are found then the statement is abandoned or revised to accommodate the new evidence. But in the use of the adjective “fuzzy”, the likelihood of there being exceptions is clearly recognised and this seems an appropriate concept for research in areas like education where human complexity is paramount.’

The complexity encountered here is indeed greater than in many other contexts: not only do we deal with a diverse and diffuse target group with different institutional attachments, we also have to take into account cultural differences between countries in Europe. What we have to consider is not only the extent to which a particular action is equally applicable to different target groups and institutional surroundings but also whether it would produce the same results if transferred to the cultural setting of another (European) country. Ideally then, the study would encompass case studies from all countries covered by Cedefop (Member States plus Norway and Iceland), and would, for each country, involve not one but several cases to include the major permutations of the target group and the institutional settings. Such an undertaking is beyond the scope of the present study and not necessarily more enlightening; representativity could never be taken for granted due to the ‘human factor’.

The method used for selecting the case studies for this particular study is described in greater detail below.

2.2. Validity of data

As in any study laying claim to the title ‘research’, we should also be concerned with the validity of our findings, i.e. are we really measuring what we think we are measuring?

It is important to consider the extent to which the projects selected actually deal with ‘disadvantaged’ youth as described above. The criticism levelled at the Danish Open youth education (see below) which eventually led to its abrogation, was that it did not cater for the target group it was designed for, namely youths who did not fit into mainstream youth education or the so-called ‘residual group’. Instead, it was said that the programme was taken over by bright young people who created opportunities for themselves, especially with regard to living abroad. Three of the Danish projects used as case studies are about experiences from the open youth education. Consideration must be given to whether these are appropriate and can apply to the disadvantaged as well as participants who may have well-developed personal skills and stable backgrounds. The case studies dealing with the experiences from this programme, therefore, concern the nature of the participants, whether they actually were from the ‘residual group’, or resourceful young people who opted for the open youth education because it appeared more attractive than mainstream youth education?

Similar consideration must be given to some of the international cases studied. The Swedish Interpraktik programme and the German European year programme are both directed at a target group of young unemployed in the age ranges from 20-30 and 18-27 respectively.

However, it is a condition for participation in the German programme that the applicant possesses initial vocational training qualifications. The Swedish programme has no 'upper limit' for the qualifications of participants; while there is a programme policy to favour those with the least qualifications in the selection procedure, there are participants with qualifications at master's level from higher education. Ignoring the issue of 'hard' qualifications, it can be assumed that the projects are only concerned with an elite and that their experiences are not entirely relevant. Arguably, applicants for the Interpraktik and the European year programmes are those with most initiative and the best personal skills who therefore stand out from other applicants. It is also important to consider the length of the unemployment period and whether it reflects those who are truly jobless or whether participation is simply an attractive option between periods of employment.

2.3. Reliability of data

Equally important is the reliability of the data. The primary source of data is the case studies and, in the absence of written material, personal interviews were used to obtain information. These interviews were not recorded but transcribed from the interviewer's contemporaneous notes; to ensure accuracy the transcriptions were sent to the interviewees for approval. There is a risk of inconsistency with the interview approach. Some interviewees may be asked leading questions and, particularly in this case, where the interviews extended over four months, analysis and knowledge gained during the process generated fresh areas to explore in later interviews. However the arguments for and against the approach were recognised at the outset and attention paid to the comparability issue.

2.4. Data acquisition: Danish projects

Initially, Danish projects from the Leonardo da Vinci and Youth programmes were to be used but this approach was too narrow as mobility projects involving disadvantaged people might also be financed via other channels. The Danish case studies were therefore selected by a questionnaire survey of educational institutions/training centres dealing with the target group and an investigation of project applications in the Leonardo da Vinci and youth programmes which targeted disadvantaged groups. The questionnaires were sent out to the production schools, day high schools and youth schools electronically through their respective umbrella organisations.

Production schools are training centres for young people under the age of 25 with no formal qualifications or who seek clarification as to their choice of career. Learning is organised around workshops which range from traditional crafts (metalwork, carpentry, etc.) to theatre and media. All workshops must produce real products, which are sold locally on the open market. Trainees can stay for up to one year at the school, during which they are offered individual guidance on a day-to-day basis. There are approximately 100 production schools

(or production high schools, as some are known) in Denmark; these form the association for production schools and production high schools (*Foreningen for produktionsskoler og produktionshøjskoler*). More information is given at: www.produktionsskoler.dk.

Day high schools are educational establishments whose primary aim is to offer courses in general education (reading, writing and arithmetic) and boost personal development (e.g. by offering courses in psychology, project work or placements) of adults over 18 with no or few formal qualifications. The aim is to prepare them for further training and education or the labour market. Courses at day high schools may last from 4 to 24 weeks according to the needs of the individual. The day high schools may also offer courses under other educational laws alone or in cooperation with other educational establishments (e.g. vocational schools). There are in total 109 day high schools in Denmark. The association of day high schools in Denmark (*Foreningen af Daghøjskoler I Danmark*) controls approximately 50 of these. More information can be found at: www.uvm.dk/voksen/daghoejskoler (only in Danish).

Youth schools are municipal educational establishments primarily offering general education and hobby-related courses to young people in aged 10-20 years. They may also offer full-time education, e.g. in connection with the integration of immigrants or the Open youth education (see below). There are 309 youth schools in Denmark, which are controlled by the US Centre. Further information can be obtained from: www.us-centret.dk (only in Danish).

All three types of institutions cater for the target group, even though the youth schools only do so as part of their overall activities. All have, however, in the past, organised transnational placement projects through either the Leonardo da Vinci or Youth programmes or with national funds. In order that the status of the questionnaire was recognised, it was distributed through the umbrella organisations, even though this meant only about half of the day high schools would be reached. It was kept short to ensure ease of completion, as the aim was merely to identify suitable projects for case studies. The questionnaire, identical for all three types of institutions, asked whether any transnational placement projects had been organised over the last three years and, if so, asked for information about:

- number of participants;
- length of placements;
- nature of placements;
- sources of funding;
- whether it was a one-off project or a recurrent activity.

The questionnaire, sent out in April/May, gave schools a deadline of one month to reply. Schools with nothing to report did not have to return the questionnaire.

The results of the survey were somewhat disheartening. Four production schools and three day high schools responded, and only two replies were received from youth schools. The

simultaneous search of projects financed under the youth and Leonardo da Vinci programmes brought a similar meagre result with two Leonardo da Vinci projects, both involving production schools. Both projects also replied to the questionnaire. It is surprising that so few production schools responded, since many have international contacts. It is possible that international projects are predominantly organised in frameworks other than placements, that sources of financing other than the Leonardo da Vinci programme are used or that not all production schools have reported their activities.

For the day high schools and youth schools, all the replies involved young people who had participated in the Open youth education (*Den Fri Ungdomsuddannelse*). This was created in 1995 to provide a way of reaching out to young people who did not fit into mainstream youth education (the 'residual group') and offer them a structured learning experience. An Open youth education course can last from two to three years, and leads to higher education or employment or into mainstream youth education. In the Open youth education, each course is individually structured and the participant will define his or her educational aims in an educational plan together with a guidance counsellor. This plan may involve courses at schools or training centres and placements at home and abroad, without geographical limitations. The participant is attached to an accredited Danish educational establishment for the duration of the education. This educational establishment may be a day high school, a production school, a youth school, a vocational school or other type of establishment. The Law on Open youth education was repealed in 2002, due to criticism that it was not reaching out to the intended target group, but being used by more resourceful young people to 'have a good time' rather than entering traditional youth education (upper secondary education). An evaluation carried out by PLS Ramboll Management seemed to corroborate this view (see: <http://pub.uvm.dk/2001/denfri/1.htm>).

A major concern was the transnational element, as nearly half of the educational plans included a stay abroad, many in exotic locations. The Open youth education is now winding down its activities. Between 1995-2000, 3 000 to 4 000 young people per year enrolled (except during 1995, when the number was approximately 1 500). For further information, see: <http://pub.uvm.dk/2001/denfri/4.htm>.

Given the number of students, the scale of transnational elements in the Open youth education and that both day high schools and youth schools can be accredited, it is surprising that not more schools have reported activities here. Possibly the word 'project' in the questionnaire may have been construed as 'groups of people' rather than individual placements organised under the Open youth education and that these were excluded or it may be that the stays abroad were organised in ways other than as placements (i.e. as courses).

The low number of replies raised the question as to whether the survey should be carried out again using other methods, e.g. by contacting all schools by telephone. This was decided against as it would involve much extra work and could not guarantee better results. However, an inspection of the replies revealed that there were suitable projects for the intended case studies and, given the limited numbers, selection was relatively simple. It was decided to take

two from the group of production schools and one each from the day high schools and the youth schools, since these were concerned with the same programme (Open youth education). For the production schools, the decisive factors were:

- the length of the placement,
- whether it was a continuing activity.

For the day high schools, the number of people who had been on placements was used as the factor. On the basis of these parameters, the following projects/institutions were selected:

- Korsør Produktionsskole,
- Svinnige Produktionsskole,
- Frederiksberg Daghøjskole,
- Unge i Vandtårnet (Youth schools - Århus).

All four projects were visited, key persons interviewed and documentation collected where this was available.

2.5. Data acquisition: the non-Danish projects

Projects outside of Denmark presented a different selection problem, as a survey involving all EU countries (or all countries participating in the Leonardo da Vinci programme) would need a different approach. A more diverse procedure, compatible with the Danish projects, had to be established.

The project carried out by the Austrian organisation Wien work identified itself immediately and was chosen to represent mobility projects involving disadvantaged young people at the Leonardo da Vinci valorisation conference in Stockholm on 3-4 April 2003. It concerns a first time project (like *Svinnige Produktionsskole*) and involves young people in initial vocational training. Two more likely candidates were detected during the literary survey: the German European year abroad programme, and the Swedish Interpraktik programme. Both were similar to the Open youth education and the experiences of the day high schools as they sent out young people individually, albeit their target group was young unemployed in a slightly different age bracket. Both had also been recently evaluated and much otherwise unattainable information was available. The final case study, the organisation u.bus, resulted from a 'snowball survey' and contained much relevant and interesting material. This case study, like Korsør Produktionsskole is not concerned with a single project, but an ongoing activity.

Other projects considered, included *Jeunes en situation précaire* a transnational placement programme organised by the Franco-German Youth Office and financed with ESF-funds; the Italian/Swedish/British Breaking barriers project (financed through the Horizon-initiative); the

Anglo-Irish Wider horizons programme; and the Eurojoker project (financed through the Konver II-initiative) from the Berlin/Brandenburg region. These projects/programmes were not taken up either because they finished over three years ago and key staff had moved on and/or relevant information was unavailable. The French Steer project (financed from the Adapt-initiative) though interesting, was excluded because it concerned people who had become unemployed for structural reasons (see above). With time, no doubt other projects could have been identified.

All four projects selected as case studies were visited, key persons were interviewed, and documentation gathered.

3. Case studies

3.1. Case study No 1: Frederiksberg Daghøjskole

Based on an interview with Ms Birgitte Koch, advisor, Frederiksberg Daghøjskole

The Open youth education was established by an act of Parliament in 1994. The target group was disadvantaged young people who could not or would not enter mainstream secondary education and training. The aim was for them to experience aspects of education and working life to assist in their choice of further education or career. The scheme was discontinued in 2001 after allegations that the most disadvantaged groups were not benefiting, and that it was being used by stable young people who simply wanted attractive subsidised time out before commencing study. The final intake of students are currently completing their course programme.

The course lasts between two and three years, half of which should be school-based education. It should contain at least three elements which, in addition to time spent in education and training institutions, could include voluntary social work, workplace positions, project participation, etc. Courses or placements may be taken worldwide.

Several educational establishments were recognised to run the Open youth education. Students would attend an introductory session lasting four weeks, where an educational plan, including any international element, would be prepared with an advisor. Once suitable courses or placement opportunities abroad had been identified, the advisor would assess whether they were suitable for the participant's needs. This assessment took place using material from the Internet, through leaflets, and/or by contacting personnel within the organisation concerned and through the advisors own informal network, where information could be exchanged.

The participant was eligible for a student grant, but had to pay all costs for accommodation, care, transportation, visa, etc. in connection with the course. This also applied to period(s) abroad. If the course or the placement took place outside of Denmark, course or tuition fees could be subsidised up to EUR 110 per week. If the placement was remunerated, however, either through direct payments or payments in kind (accommodation, etc.), this subsidy was not paid.

Of the 150 or so participants for whom Ms Koch has acted as advisor, nearly half included a stay abroad in their education plan. She considers that this number is not surprising, the main reason, in her view, being that the type of education or training being sought is not available in Denmark. Most of the participants opted for educational stays but some also undertook placements in companies. Ms Koch is positive about the scheme, in that it has greatly assisted participants in making their life choices with clear connections to later mainstream education and training. Though Ms Koch would consider many of those for whom she has acted as

advisor as definitely disadvantaged (either socially or psychologically) there have been no major problems with those who included a stay abroad in their education plan. However, before agreeing to them, some proposals for plans about stays abroad caused her some anxiety. She quotes the example of a young man from a definitely disadvantaged background, with no formal qualifications, whose only interest was kickboxing. He wished to become a kickboxing instructor and wanted to include a placement in a kickboxing training centre in Thailand in his educational plan. This was agreed to and eventually carried out. However, from his experiences there, he decided to set up his own training centre rather than becoming an instructor. He then realised that this needed different skills and he is now seeking re-entry into mainstream training.

Ms Koch ascribes the success of the Open youth education to three factors:

The availability of finance: once the course or the placement abroad has been agreed to, funding is instantly available. The need to apply for funding in advance is therefore obviated and as funding levels are identified at the outset any uncertainty is reduced, and participants can make realistic plans.

Importance of guidance: Ms Koch has experienced long-term training and school periods abroad (Jamaica and the USA) and is convinced of its benefits. She is therefore open to any suggestions put forward by participants focusing on opportunities rather than risks. In individual guidance sessions, she covers the practical matters with the participants but also points out the psychological effects of being away from home for an extended period (loneliness, home sickness, etc.).

Responsibility for own education and training plan: the participant decides where to go and what to do and has full 'ownership' of the plan. Participation in a 'project' has not been defined by others nor is carried out in a group. The participant has full responsibility which cannot be passed to others, nor are others blamed if something goes wrong. Ms Koch is available to give advice and encouragement via telephone and e-mail and is in regular contact with a person at the institution or the work place but she is not able to go abroad and help directly in the event of problems.

Ms Koch feels that, in addition to the real skills acquired, the main outcome of these stays abroad is the personal development of the participants. They return more self-confident, more mature and with a clearer view of their future goals and the determination to reach them.

3.2. Case study No 2: Korsør Produktionskole

Based on interview with Mr Gert Møller, director of the training centre

Danish production schools are training centres for young people which combine education and training and personal development with manufacturing. Young people in the age range 16-25 with no formal qualifications can spend up to a year there to help decide on their future

training and employment. Except for the Open youth education, where courses at production schools may be recognised and included production schools do not offer any formal qualifications although they may offer the Open youth education themselves. Korsør Produktionsskole dates from the early 1980s and currently has 115 trainees. Mobility, in the form of transnational placements and exchanges with similar European institutions, has been an integral part of its activities since its inception. Korsør Production School has recently been involved in setting up similar institutions in the former Yugoslavia (in Kosovo, both the Serbian and the Albanian part) with whom it has carried out exchanges. Trainees from Korsør Production school have also visited Italy and Brazil as part of the Open youth education. Mr Gert Møller has been the director for the past 15 years.

A scheme with Northern Ireland, where six to eight trainees per year from Korsør go on placements there for a period of four weeks, has taken place each year for the last 10 years. These placements have been financed through various sources, including the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The project is based in the same town each year and is organised by a contact person (guidance counsellor) at a local college and whose services are paid for by Korsør Produktionsskole. This contact has prior experience of mobility projects through the Wider horizons programme. Placements are with local companies and in vocational fields where the participants have some prior experience from the production school. They are not accompanied by a teacher/instructor from Korsør Produktionsskole. Participants stay with local families, preferably those with children the same age as the participants. Only one participant stays with each family, located, as far as possible, throughout the area. Participants are encouraged to socialise with local friends in free time rather than with other participants.

Mr Møller identified two motives for involvement in transnational activities. One he described as ‘external’, relating to the image that the school wishes to project of itself and its ‘products’ (or trainees) to local ‘buyers’, the businesses and educational establishments in the region. It is important to be able to demonstrate that the trainees have reached a standard that makes them a valuable commodity worldwide and their activities receive much useful media attention. The second he calls ‘internal’ and relates to the learning outcome of placements. Mr Møller considers that the greatest gain of a placement abroad is in personal development and he provides the following examples.

- Experience of other languages and cultures: greater proficiency in a foreign language and increased intercultural understanding is valuable in a local context.
- Clarification of goals and ambitions: trainees at production schools are often uncertain of their abilities and are unclear about training and career options. As a result of experience abroad, they are often more able to reach decisions about their future.
- Breaking barriers: the participants return with greater self confidence because they ‘survived’ the experience, which in turn encourages their self development.

- Trying new roles: while abroad the participant is not constrained by the usual expectations of their environment and can experiment with new aspects of his/her personality.
- Establishing vocational identity: participants often come home with a feeling of having ‘found the right shelf’, having a sense of belonging to a particular vocational field.

Mr Møller found it difficult to describe how the acquisition of learning occurred in this process and compares it to attempting to describe the dance of a millipede: impossible to capture with enough detail to allow recreation from the description. However he considers that the aspects highlighted above are particularly relevant.

It is important that participants are placed in real working environments, not e.g. in training projects, where they can have some responsibility and feel part of the process that leads to a tangible end product. Here they can also develop team spirit, which can extend worldwide in that particular field. Improvement of technical skills, however, is often negligible and could have been acquired at home.

The decision not to let a teacher/instructor from the home school accompany the visit is deliberate and not motivated by financial reasons. The presence of a teacher often constrains the trainee’s efforts to explore new aspects of his/her personality and encourages them to persist with their ‘old’ personality. The presence of a teacher may also tempt the trainees not to take any decisions and leave all responsibility to the teacher. However with some difficult cases an accompanying teacher may be necessary.

Participation in the project is voluntary but not all who apply are allowed to go, as applicants must be seen to have a reasonable chance of achieving success. Unsuitable candidates often opt out at an early stage after learning what is required of them. The contact person from Northern Ireland visits Korsør to help in the selection process and project preparation. This can be done very effectively because of past experience, but is mostly done on an individual basis. Participants are asked to write a self profile in English that is then sent to Northern Ireland to facilitate the placement. This also serves as part of the selection process as if the deadline for this profile is not met, the trainee cannot participate. During the stay, the participants keep a logbook of their stay in English and are generally encouraged to use that language as much as possible. This logbook is also used in the monitoring process.

The effect of the project is measured quantitatively, by the success of the participants in finding employment or enrolling in further (formal) education and training courses upon homecoming. Mr Møller states that the results are very positive.

3.3. Case study No 3: Svinninge Produktionssskole

Based on an interview with Mr Henrik Bendixen, director of the training centre and from information from the home page of the centre's website.

Svinninge Production School is a production school situated in the Northwest of Sealand, Denmark, covering eight municipalities in the region. It has between 50 and 70 full time trainees annually. Mr Henrik Bendixen is the director of the school.

In 2002, the school obtained a grant for a transnational placement project for six trainees to go Portugal for eight weeks. Mr Bendixen stated that originally 12 weeks duration was proposed but this was reduced to eight weeks upon the advice of the National Agency, which considered that a shorter period was more appropriate owing to the nature of the target group and that it was a first-time project. In retrospect, Mr Bendixen agreed that 12 weeks would have been too long. The school had considered several target countries including Poland, but decided on Portugal because of a contact in Albufeira on the Algarve and because English is widely spoken there.

The project's learning aims were primarily concerned with the personal development of the participants. The acquisition of vocational skills was a secondary issue but some participants used the stay to experiment in a field where they had no previous experience. Mr Bendixen considered the main benefits of the stay to be that it:

- prepared participants for later mobility inside Denmark: that they had 'survived' in a country so far from their own would make it easier for them to seek employment and/or education and training outside the region;
- increased their proficiency in a foreign language;
- gave them an understanding of other cultures: not only of the Portuguese culture and outlook but also of that of the local immigrant population;
- taught them self-sufficiency: the participants had to cope with difficult situations on their own, which increased their self confidence and feeling of self worth.
- put Denmark in perspective: the stay demonstrated that there is a world outside of Denmark;
- taught them to care about the way things are in Denmark: the participants learned, by making comparisons, to appreciate aspects of Danish society and culture previously taken for granted.

When the project was announced, 16 trainees applied, three of whom were immediately considered unsuitable. A consultation process helped to reduce the number to six. Individuals made their own preparations, but all gathered for a two-day residential intensive preparation course prior to departure. Here, action plans were formulated and discussed, and potential

problem areas identified and talked through. A Portuguese living in Denmark gave some useful insights into Portuguese culture and outlook, and although the means of communication during the stay was English, the participants had a short intensive course in Portuguese. The participants were told of several placement opportunities that were available.

The participants were not accompanied by a teacher/instructor, but the school had a local contact, a Dane, who had lived in the area for 20 years and spoke fluent Portuguese. He had identified placement opportunities and maintained contact with them, monitoring the participants' progress and helping to resolve problems if they arose. During the stay, the participants kept a logbook of their experiences, which was also used for monitoring purposes. The placements were unpaid. Three of the participants lived with local families, whereas the others shared a flat in town. Mr Bendixen considered that those living in the flat benefited most, as those who opted for home stay were pampered by their host families and did not assume full responsibility for themselves. Those living in the flat, however, had to learn to live and get on together which, although not easy, was an excellent form of social training. Participants were based in different work placements and their successful interaction with the workforce was crucial to the success of their project, several being given considerable responsibility.

Returning home was something of an anticlimax for the participants. Mr Bendixen stressed that the project was not over once the participants returned from abroad and, as a follow-up, the participants gave talks to other trainees at the school to share their experiences. Five out of the six participants are now in employment or training. One participant ended her stay prematurely and returned home after three weeks because of difficulties with other participants.

3.4. Case study no. 4: Unge i Vandtårnet

Based on an interview with Ms Annette Jochumsen, advisor at Unge i Vandtårnet

Eight youth schools in the Aarhus region have set up a joint guidance unit, housed in a picturesque old water tower on the outskirts of the city. Any young person wishing to join the Open youth education through one of the accredited youth schools would be assigned to a guidance counsellor here, with whom he or she would draw up their educational plan and who would follow them throughout the course. Ms Annette Jochumsen is one of three guidance counsellors attached to the Open youth education in this unit.

The Open youth education was very popular in Aarhus, which had the most students in the scheme in Denmark. Various educational establishments (youth schools, day high schools, production schools) could become accredited to offer the Open youth education, but participants from the youth schools were generally younger, typically from 16 years and upwards, whereas those from day high schools were typically 18 or more. Of the Aarhus youth school students, approximately one third included a stay abroad in their individual educational

plans, ranging in duration from 4 to 40 weeks. Thirteen went on placements abroad as far apart as Sweden and Guatemala, the activities including au pair, kindergarten, hotel and restaurant, beauty parlour, museum, shop assistant and farm work.

At the outset participants did not necessarily intend to go abroad, but became aware of the potential during the four week introduction course, being particularly encouraged by presentations made by former students. Guidance counsellors took a positive approach in attempting to meet the students' demands but it was the student's responsibility to establish contact abroad and make practical arrangements for the stay. This test of their communication skills gave an indication of their ability to cope generally and served as a useful measure in the selection process, since of the many students going abroad, only two returned prematurely. Preparation work was tailored to the needs of the participant and included language courses and research into cultural differences involving interviews with those from the host country living in Denmark. Generally, the stay abroad came at the end of the course, and so participants were over 18 when it commenced. Guidance is a key throughout the Open youth education element. In this context guidance is about helping the student to recognise the significance of what they are undertaking, and its value rather than simply providing factual information, and this is carried out before, during and after the stay.

Experiences with projects involving placements were overwhelmingly positive, except in one case where the participant clearly was exploited as cheap labour. The participant persevered but had a miserable experience necessitating psychological therapy later. Ms Jochumsen was generally astounded, however, at what students would tolerate regarding working hours, etc. especially as many could not cope with the discipline of mainstream youth education at home. Here they accepted the prevailing conditions and in some cases were given responsibility far beyond what they would normally expect. This was particularly the case in institutions for handicapped people where participants were routinely carrying out tasks that in Denmark would only be handled by fully trained staff. For many of the participants, given their age, it was the first time that they lived away from their parents and assumed responsibility for all aspects of their life. Ms Jochumsen quoted a remarkable example where a participant suffering from dyslexia, who had never bothered to do anything seriously about it, enrolled in a course on coping with dyslexia while on a stay in the UK and showed significant progress, even though the course was in another language.

One obvious gain from a placement abroad is the potential for increased proficiency in a foreign language. However, this cannot be taken for granted as young people who stayed in big cities often spent time with their compatriots, which impaired their learning. Also some who were staying 'au pair' with Danish families abroad had very little opportunity to practice the language and did not profit from the stay to the extent of others. Participants who were in a work situation, where they had to communicate with colleagues to get the job done, generally increased their language skills. Another benefit of the foreign experience was the awareness of cultural differences, primarily in realising that the world is a diverse place and that things are different from those at home. Experiencing diversity also meant that

participants came to appreciate their own Danish context more, recognising that things could be different - and not always better -and no longer take things for granted at home.

The major gains, however, occurred in the personal development of participants, especially with regard to self-confidence and self-esteem. As one remarked on returning home: 'Now that I've coped with this, I feel that I can cope with anything'. Ms Jochumsen also noticed a more open and flexible attitude in the participants upon their return, a willingness to embrace and explore the unknown, instead of instinctively rejecting it. Almost all participants used the stay to clarify personal and professional aims to test themselves in new situations, or perhaps to live out dreams and find out whether there was any substance to them. They were away from home and in an environment where they were not met with specific expectations as to behaviour, appearance, views, interests, etc. This made it possible to experiment with aspects of their personality in a zone where nobody knew 'what they really were like', i.e. where they did not have to live up to others' image of them.

While abroad, the participants were encouraged to keep in constant contact with their guidance counsellor and report on progress and any problems, etc. Ms Jochumsen made it a condition that if they did not remain in contact with her at least once a week during the stay, grants could be terminated. She was able to monitor progress and help with information and counselling if required. In many cases, intermediary organisations (organisations which had mediated the placement, language schools, etc.) were also involved, which could act in a supervisory function, or help in resolving students' problems. Ms Jochumsen saw the flexible nature of the stay abroad of the Open youth education as a strength in that it could be varied according to the needs and the capabilities of the participant. An individual's long term placement abroad in a foreign environment required a certain stamina and strength of character and there were those for whom it would not be appropriate, the chances of them returning prematurely with a sense of failure, rather than success, were simply too great.

3.5. Case study No 5: Wien work

Based on a written project description and an interview with Mr Wolfgang Sperl, director of the training centre

Wien work is a business enterprise with social responsibilities, which currently employs approximately 100 physically handicapped persons and provides training facilities for more than 100 young persons with learning and performing difficulties. Wien work is known as an integrative business venture, with eight 'social enterprises', one in almost every Austrian Federal Province. They are given the task of creating jobs for the handicapped and disabled and find jobs for them in what is called the primary labour market, following a period of on-the-job training and experience. A distinguishing feature is that Wien work achieves this by carrying out 'real work'; i.e. tendering for work under market conditions and is in competition with normal enterprises in the Vienna region. Consequently, the work carried out by the trainees at Wien work is for bona fide customers and not pseudo productions that are

dismantled when finished. Only young persons with minor physical disabilities are eligible for vocational training in crafts and trades. Approximately 10 % of the trainees are aurally impaired but the largest group, have learning and performing difficulties with below-average intellectual skills, combined in most cases with social problems at home. Most young people who join Wien work, therefore, come from special schools or O-level secondary schools with integrative classes. Admission to Wien work is decided on the basis of a psychological test, carried out to establish that they do indeed suffer from learning problems.

Training is available in the following fields and levels:

Skilled worker: apprenticeship

- locksmith, fitter,
- house painter,
- food services manager,
- cook,
- carpenter, joiner.

The apprenticeships lead to a recognised apprenticeship diploma but apprentices are allowed up to two years more to complete their training than are ordinary apprentices. During the course of the apprenticeship, the apprentices receive guidance from social workers and guidance counsellors at Wien work. About two thirds of the apprentices find regular employment after having passed their journeyman's test.

Semi-skilled employee: simplified traineeship

- facility service (cleaning, small repairs and maintenance),
- housekeeping and home economics (cooking, household service, cleaning),
- laundry/dry cleaning/ironing shop.

In 2001, Wien work carried out a three-week placement project in Germany, involving five apprentices. Through a local school, Wien work made contact with an organisation called JUL (*Jugend, Umwelt, Landwirtschaft* – Youth, Environment, Agriculture) in Weimar, Germany, a training centre designed for a target group quite similar to the one catered for by Wien work. During the course of discussions and visits between the management of the two establishments, it was realised that exchange was not only useful at management level but would also be beneficial for the trainee. Subsequently a successful application for funding from the Leonardo da Vinci programme was made for this purpose. The Wien work management set as a minimum five participants to take part in the project and exactly five trainees registered. Consequently there was no need for a selection process.

The scope of the project was vocational. In Weimar, trainees were involved in using a special process called dry mortarless construction, a technique increasingly used in the building industry. Their skills in this activity would supplement the crafts taught at Wien work. In exchange, young people from Weimar were given the opportunity to acquire manufacturing skills in the production of linked-casement windows to German DIN Standards, an area Wien work was experienced in, requiring not only special skills but the use of special tools.

In view of the special needs of the target group, careful planning was needed to prepare the participants for both the social and political conditions of the host country. The acquisition of skills and knowledge in dry mortarless construction was not the only objective of the project. Another aim was to become acquainted with German culture and history. Leisure activities, such as field trips and excursions with the Weimar trainees were arranged and a visit to the Buchenwald concentration camp left an especially vivid impression on the young people from Vienna. Due to the novelty of this project for Wien work and the nature of the target group, a member of staff was sent to Weimar with the group to supervise be available on site for support and assistance for the entire project period.

Three of the five participants, two carpenters and one house painter, have now finished their training at Wien work and are in employment. The two others, both carpenters, are in the final stages of their training. In addition to the crafts taught at Wien work, the knowledge and skills acquired in dry mortarless construction provide a good basis for a stable and sustained career as these skills are a valuable additions to the individuals' prime occupation. A carpenter, for example, who knows how to build a partition wall using the dry mortarless technique, or a painter who is able to erect a gypsum plaster board structure can be advantageous to prospective customers.

Apart from the technical benefits, the participants also gained valuable social experience, raising their social competence and improving their ability for independent initiative. The project organisers highlighted the following two learning situations in the project:

- the participants felt proud to show their friends from abroad their particular cities, their individual living environments and their training facilities: 'I have something I can show you, too';
- the empathy between young people experiencing prejudice due to their individual status (disadvantaged) in society. 'We too are capable of achievement; we too play important roles in our society'.

Following the conclusion of the project, various events were organised internally at Wien work to enable the participants to describe the project and talk about their experiences to staff and trainees. At panel discussions, participants told other trainees of their experiences at Weimar and answered questions, raising interest amongst others.

In 2002, Wien work was awarded a special Quality Award from the Austrian National Agency for the Leonardo da Vinci programme in recognition of their achievement with the mobility project, unique in Austria.

3.6. Case study No 6: u.bus

Based on written material from the projects ‘Route 99’ (handbook for organisers of transnational placement projects), and ‘Courier’ (quality assurance of transnational placement projects) and interviews with Mr Oliver Jentsch, Mr Klaus-Dieter Pohl and Mr Peter Umbsen, executives and project leaders at u.bus.

u.bus GmbH is a limited company that works with transnational projects in education and training and regional development. Started in 1988 under the name *understandingbus*, it was reconstituted in 2001 due to financial difficulties, under the name *u.bus*, with a core of staff from *understandingbus*. Of the three persons interviewed, only one (Oliver Jensch) had joined after the restructuring, but he had ample experience with mobility projects from a similar project organisation (BBJ). The two others have been with *understandingbus/u.bus* since its inception. *Understandingbus/u.bus* has organised transnational mobility projects, including placement projects for groups with learning deficits, since the start, using all EU programmes and initiatives available, including Youth for Europe, Petra, Leonardo da Vinci I and II and Youthstart, EQUAL, etc. The interview did not therefore focus on any one project but covered the overall experience of the organisation.

According to *u.bus*, the potential benefits of a transnational placement project for the target group can be detailed as follows (the scheme should be read vertically only):

Vocational skills	Methodological skills	Social skills	Personal skills
Work tools, methods, technology	Organising a trip	Communication skills	Learning to situate one’s life world in relation to that of others
Developing skills pertaining to a trade	Planning	Tolerance	Developing a feeling of belonging
Working conditions, work structure	Handling time	Conflict management	Concentration
Working in another country	How to orientate oneself when abroad	Heightened frustration threshold	Finding meaning
Dancing and music	Using means of transport	Reliance	Clarification of values

Language learning	Discovering new action patterns	How to cope when abroad	Coping with anxiety
Knowledge of another country (history, economy, etc.)	Non-verbal communication	Flexibility	Independence
Geography	Presentation skills	Ability to enter constructively into conflicts	Self-confidence
Social structures (own, foreign)	Exchange of experience	Broadening the horizon	Hygiene when travelling
Knowing another culture	Developing and mediating interests	Team work	
Food		Coping with interview situations	
Customs		Sociability	
Handling money		Decision making	
		Deconstructing prejudices, probing own attitudes	

Source: Route 99, p. 20

Another benefit of placements abroad is that they can lead to a professional reorientation, a chance to try out new fields or to rethink career plans.

Understandingbus/u.bus work with this target group was undertaken in groups with group interaction playing an important part in the success of a project, particularly how it can be used for the support of individual members, etc. Group dynamics is, therefore, a vital consideration in preparation. As well as sending out participants from Germany, *understandingbus/u.bus* also has much experience in receiving foreign participants

According to *understandingbus/u.bus*, quality in a transnational placement project has three dimensions:

- structure,
- process,
- result.

Structural quality is concerned with contractual arrangements between organiser and participants/partner abroad/host companies. The qualifications and experience of the people undertaking the preparation, monitoring and evaluation/debriefing, the facilities available for preparation, suitability and reliability of the partner organisation abroad and the host companies, the existence of a detailed personal training plan for each participant and the issue of a letter of recommendation/certificate from the host company to the participant afterwards are all important. Other vital aspects are the selection and composition of the participating group, the accommodation needed in the host country and the costs of the project.

Process quality is concerned with the events occurring within the framework thus established; i.e. preparation, monitoring and debriefing/evaluation (before, during and after). Preparation is strongly focused on linguistic and intercultural preparation, but should also include vocational preparation (i.e. about work methods and organisation in the host country) and, to a certain extent, psychological preparation (learning to cope with the fear of new challenges). Ideally for a 12-week project, four weeks should be used for preparation (i.e. four weeks' preparation and eight weeks' placement) two of which should be spent in the host country. During the placement, a coordinator (someone outside of the host company) is at hand to help with integration into the company and to mediate in the event of conflicts. He/she should also organise cultural events with the group in their spare time and ensure that the participants are not associating solely with their fellow countrymen, but also engaging with the local inhabitants.

Result quality is about the evaluation of the stay but not just as an overall judgement of the success or otherwise of the project at its end. Evaluation is also a formative exercise that should be carried out throughout the project (e.g. from completion of the preparation phase). Evaluation should also provide the opportunity for participants to write about experiences that may otherwise be difficult to express.

An important area of *understandingbus/u.bus's experience* concerns the methodologies and techniques to be used, e.g. in connection with the preparation of the participants (in particular the linguistic/intercultural preparation), the development of group dynamics and evaluation with the participants. Many of these techniques are described in the publication *Route 99* ⁽¹⁾, a manual for a training course for organisers of transnational placement projects. Another publication, *Courier* ⁽²⁾ is less practical, but tries to outline overall guidelines for quality in transnational placement projects.

⁽¹⁾ Borsdorf and Voigt, 2001.

⁽²⁾ Hegenbarth et al., 2001.

3.7. Case study No 7: Europäisches Jahr für Jugendliche (European year for young people)

Based on the evaluation study carried out by Dr Peter Wordelmann, an interview with Dr Wordelmann and additional information from Mr Reinhard Wilhelm, programme administrator in the Berlin Senate Department for Economics, Labour and Womens Issue.

The European year for young people (EJJ) is a transnational placement programme set up and run by the Senate of Berlin. The programme addresses itself to young, unemployed Berlin citizens below the age of 27 who have qualifications from initial vocational training and who have been unemployed for at least six months (people with qualifications from higher education are not permitted to participate). The programme covers a nine-month placement in another European country, preceded by a three month language course, of which one month takes place in Berlin and the remaining two months in the host country (in total 480 lessons). During this linguistic preparation issues connected to cultural differences and practical matters are also taken up. The definition of Europe is the geographical one, allowing placements in countries outside the EU. The most popular countries are Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom; but countries like Croatia and the Czech Republic have also been involved. The programme is cofinanced from the European Social Fund (ESF) and is open to all professions, the only possible restriction being the availability of placements.

The programme has been running since 1993 with over 1 000 young people having participated over the years. Due to the financial difficulties experienced by the City of Berlin, however, since 2000, participation has been cut back from approximately 120 participants per year to approximately 60. Mr Wilhelm states that there are currently approximately 100 applicants for the 60 placements which is considered low. Mr Wilhelm suggests that this is because many of the unemployed are unwilling to move away from their usual environment, even for a period. Selection is on the basis of a written application and a subsequent interview, in which the host countries promoting organisations participate to assess placement opportunities. During the placement, the participants are paid an allowance from Germany; i.e. they are not paid by the foreign host company. The total budget for the programme was approximately EUR 1 million in 2002.

The programme was originally conceived of as a sub-programme under the aegis of a larger programme called Berlin against violence (*Berlin gegen Gewalt*). The aim of the EJJ programme was to help prevent violence against foreigners in Berlin by sending young people abroad in order for them to acquire intercultural understanding. Later, however, this aim was somehow enlarged to include an employment dimension: during the placements abroad, participants would acquire vocational, personal and international skills that would make them more likely to find employment upon returning. In the latter years, the justification of the programme has evolved further along those lines, and it is now perceived as a way of providing the Berlin labour market (which is seen to underperform in exports abroad) with a labour force that possesses ‘international skills’ (foreign language proficiency and

intercultural skills) to cope with foreign contacts. A further aim added in recent years is, in view of the deteriorating employment situation in Berlin, to give to young unemployed the possibility to find employment abroad.

The evaluation in 1998 focused on the effects of insertion into the labour market. It was carried out as a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods: questionnaires to participants, analyses of participant reports, and interviews with participants and stakeholders (programme officials, placement coordinators, employers of former EJJ-participants). The aim of the evaluation was at the same time to provide information about the functioning of the programme as well as the effects on employment and skills acquisition in former participants. Here, the instrument was a questionnaire sent to a total of 540 former participants. As only 320 answers were received, however, the representativity is doubtful and results of this must be interpreted with a certain caution. However, out of the 320 respondents, 203 reported that they were now in employment (194 employed and 9 self-employed); 70 were undertaking further training or education; and 11 were doing their national service. It is furthermore interesting that 75 of these were in either employment or education/training abroad. Only 31 were unemployed at the time when they filled in the questionnaire. Of the participants in the 1997/98 group, 74 % had been unemployed for under six months at the time of departure, whereas 19 % had been unemployed between six and twelve months. Only 1 % had been unemployed for 24 months or more. The age range included 66 % at 20 – 25 years, 30 % at 25 – 27 years and 4 % under 20 years.

A more specific investigation of perceived skills acquisition was carried out with the most recent group of participants at the time of the evaluation; i.e. those that had been abroad in the year 1997/98. They were asked to rate the most important personal gains from participation as well as the gains in employability (vocational skills, intercultural skills, knowledge of other ways of working, specific skills for employment in Germany). Some 80 % viewed personal development as the most important gain from participation. Increased self-confidence (75 %) and self-reliance (60 %) also scored high. In addition, 40 % stated that the stay abroad had been important for them to clarify career questions (professional orientation). The participants were asked to indicate the most important gains in skills acquisition from a list: 91 % mentioned language learning, 71 % intercultural skills, 68 % other work methods, and 61 % the extension of vocational skills. Only 35 % mentioned that they acquired skills that are directly useful for a job in Germany. These findings were correlated with eight qualitative interviews with companies/employers who had a former EJJ-participant in their employment. It was clear from the information given here that employers appreciated above all the personal skills of the participants – the fact that they had demonstrated that they were capable of taking an initiative and making a sustained effort to reach their goals.

The placements abroad are found by the promoting partner in the host country, who is also responsible for monitoring the participants while they are abroad. The promoting partner in the host country is mostly an organisation (even though this role has also been played by individual persons), which is paid by the project organiser to provide these services. It is a fairly frequent occurrence that placements are changed because they do not live up to the

expectations of the participant or because the learning potential is exhausted. In 1997-98 this happened for 43 % of all participants. It is important to note, however, that a change of placement is not only caused by negative factors (e.g. bad correlation between placement and vocational training background of the participant, exploitation as cheap labour, lack of challenge, etc.) but also by positive factors such as participants wanting to develop skills further or get experience from larger companies, etc. Some 66 % of the participants rated the placements as either 'very good' or 'good', 24 % as 'satisfactory', 9 % as 'largely adequate' whereas only 1 % deemed them 'dissatisfactory'. Those working independently to a significant degree at their placements totalled 64 %, while 31 % say that they were occasionally working independently. Only 5 % stated that they were working under supervision only.

3.8. Case study No 8: The Interpraktik programme

Based on an evaluation carried out in the year 2000 by Mr Martin Westin, a follow-up in 2001, and information from Ms Tina Wolfgang, programme administrator at the International Programme Office in Stockholm.

Interpraktik is a Swedish programme, started in 1997, which gives grants ('scholarships') for placements abroad for young people in the age range 20-30 who are registered as unemployed with the Swedish labour market authorities. The programme finances six-month placements with no geographical restrictions (i.e. all over the world). Currently (2001), the most popular target countries are Denmark, Spain, the United Kingdom and the USA, but countries like Chile and Thailand are also popular destinations. Participation is open to the all unemployed in the age range, irrespective of their educational level. This also means that people with qualifications at university level may apply. Currently, some 500 scholarships are available per year. The budget was originally around SEK 47 million per year (approximately EUR 5.2 million) but has since been curtailed.

The aim of the programme is that participants acquire skills that enable them to find employment or continue in further education/training upon homecoming. These are vocational skills within their placement, proficiency in foreign languages, cultural skills (defined as an understanding of foreign cultures and an ability to function in such environments), and personal development (defined as an ability to cope with situations outside of work situations which require problem-solving skills and the ability to take the initiative). An evaluation undertaken in 2000 by the International Programme Office (questionnaires sent to people who participated in the programme from 1998 to 1999) indicates that these goals are reached for most of the participants: 75 % are in employment or studying after participation, compared to 55 % for the group who did not participate. The evaluation does, however, point to the problem of representativity: the people who use Interpraktik are likely to be endowed with more initiative and drive than those who stay at home. Moreover, their educational level is generally high: in a follow-up survey made among 200 randomly selected participants from

2001 (response rate 72 %), only 5 had no qualifications above lower-secondary level, whereas 31 (25 %) possessed qualifications at university level.

In 2000, it was decided to give priority to persons with low skills in the selection of participants. In 2002, the International Programme Office started up a project under the name Mobility for all, which uses Interpraktik-scholarships to send out physically handicapped young people on placements abroad. The project is cofinanced by the EQUAL-initiative, and runs until 2005. It is foreseen to send out approximately 100 participants through this scheme during these three years. A similar project, called *Interpraktik med Kamradstöd* (Interpraktik with 'buddy-support', 1997-98) tried to organise placements so that participants were sent out in pairs so that they could mutually support one another. This project represented an attempt to involve more people with low or no qualifications in the programme.

The statements from the participants in the evaluation of the year 2000 are overwhelmingly positive concerning their skills acquisition. Thus, 92 % state that their activities in the work placement were varied and meaningful, and 82 % deem that they acquired vocational skills during the stay. Increased foreign language proficiency is also reported by the majority of the participants. The acquisition of cultural skills is not explored in any greater depths in the questionnaire, but the comments made by the participants are overwhelmingly positive about the effects of the cultural encounter. This would seem to indicate that they have generally been able to cope with the new cultural environment. For both linguistic and cultural development the evaluation makes a possible exception for a small group of participants; namely second- or third generation immigrants, who use the scheme to spend a period in the country from where their family originates. Here, the linguistic and cultural gains are naturally not as pronounced. Over 80 % of the respondents state that they experienced personal development during their stay. The evaluation gives an example of participants who have been away from the labour market for a long time, and are suffering from a low self-esteem as a result of this. Through participation in Interpraktik, they have regained their self-confidence and are ready to look for employment with renewed energy. Another benefit observed is that participants are given the possibility to distance themselves from the (negative) role they are used to playing at home and try out new patterns of behaviour and thought. Finally, many participants use the period abroad for the purpose of a vocational (re-)orientation: to test out an area and find out whether it is really here that they want to pursue their future career, or to explore new possibilities.

Information about the Interpraktik programme is given out through various channels, but the job centres of the labour market authorities play an important role. A specific contact has been appointed in each job centre. Contacts have also been appointed in the municipalities and the regional authorities. Any unemployed person must apply here first for a screening, since it is a condition for participation that the candidate is long-term unemployed or in danger of becoming long-term unemployed. Once this status has been established, they may apply to the International Programme Office, which then makes the final selection on the basis of the written applications. The participants are expected to find placements themselves, even though the Programme Office in the beginning were able to help with addresses of companies abroad where previous participants have been. This 'placement bank' was discontinued,

however, when resources for administration were cut back, so that programme administration at the IP had to be downsized from five to one and a half persons. Participants may receive help from the Job Centres in this respect, however, but placement finding remains their own responsibility.

When they have been accepted for a grant, they may follow special preparation seminars or courses organised by the labour market authorities. These may in principle last for up to six months, but on average last 10 weeks. Not all municipalities offer this possibility, however, but the International Programme Office have concentrated their efforts on this particular aspect of the programme in an attempt to raise the quality of the individual stays. Drop-out rates for the programmes are between 10-15 %, with a downwards tendency (10 % in 2003). Every year, however, staff from the IP go on an 'inspection tour' where they visit several placements in a selected region to get an overall impression of how the conditions are.

4. Findings of the case studies

The common denominator for the eight case studies is that they are concerned with placements abroad for a target group that is labelled ‘disadvantaged’ according to the definition given in the preceding part and in the age bracket 16 – 30. However, a first reading of the case studies seems to indicate more differences than similarities. These differences are concerned with the ‘point of observation’ of the informants used in the case studies, the aims and outcomes of the activities, and the practical organisation of these.

The first difference appears because of the different reference points (or points of observation) from which the experiences of the projects and programmes are represented. We may divide the eight case studies into three groups according to the level at which this happens:

- at project level: experiences gathered from a single project (Svinninge Produktionsskole, Wien work);
- at institutional level: experiences gathered through several projects by an institution or organisation (Korsør Produktionsskole, Frederiksberg Daghøjskole, Unge i Vandtårnet, u.bus);
- at programme level: Interpraktik, European Year.

A likely consequence of this is a difference in the degree of sophistication of the statements. Informants from the two latter categories have more experience to base their statements on, and are therefore more likely to see patterns than those who only have one isolated project as source material. On the other hand, any categorisation of experience and subsequent ‘routinisation’ of tasks will necessarily also entail some deselection of data, and in this process something may be lost that is of importance to our particular concern. This is a particularly poignant observation for the last category, where the experience presented is harvested at programme level, i.e. by programme administrators who are not directly involved in the details of practical work with the placements. However, in both cases the programme administrators are experienced and have close contact with those in charge of the practical organisation, and – most important – both programmes have been extensively evaluated and the findings of these evaluations have been made available for this study. None of the activities of the other two categories have been through such an exercise. The nature of the information given at each of the three levels will thus be different, a fact which makes immediate comparison difficult; however, it also helps ensure that the information from each of the projects does not merely repeat itself, but that they also complement and supplement each other.

This difference we will merely take *ad notam* in the analysis, and not elaborate any further in the following.

The case studies also tell us about differences in aims and outcomes of the activities reported on. When we talk about ‘aims’ and ‘outcomes’, it is important to bear in mind that we are talking about two things that are not necessarily identical. ‘Aims’ represents expected outcomes; i.e. what organisers, administrators and decision-makers believe *ex ante* will come out of a given activity. ‘Outcomes’, on the other hand, represent the results that actually came out of the activity *ex post*, once it had been carried out. Aims have important consequences for the way in which the activity is carried out – the exact nature of the target group, the selection of participants and the practical organisation of the activity. Outcomes may or may not reflect this. If they do not, one of the two should be changed: either new goals should be formulated or new pedagogical practices introduced. The degree of concurrence between aims and outcomes is extremely interesting, and will be dealt with in detail in the next part. What we are concerned with here is the outcomes; what was it that actually happened with participants as a result of their participation in the project, as reported by the informants used.

A final level of difference concerns the practical organisation of the activities, i.e. the way in which participants were selected and learning within the placements actually structured. These differences can be expressed in pairs of juxtapositions that manifest themselves as:

nature of target group: no qualifications versus qualifications from education and training,

- duration: short-term versus long-term placements,
- nature of placements: self-organised versus organised placements,
- supervision: accompanied versus unaccompanied,
- mode of sending: group versus individuals,
- host country: remote or close host countries.

There are also differences in other aspects of the projects/programmes, even though these are not expressed in extremes. This covers selection of participants, motivation, preparation, and debriefing. In the following, we will analyse the case studies using these differences as a point of departure and describe outcomes and practical organisation as stated by the informants. The analysis is descriptive, however, and we will merely attempt to sift through and systematise the information given by the informants, not conjecture what they ‘really’ might mean or try and fill out gaps.

4.1. Project outcomes

Various types of outcomes are reported in the case studies. Initially, it may be useful to distinguish between concrete measurable outcomes and more ‘fuzzy’ outcomes in learning and personal development. As an example of a concrete, measurable outcome we can take the Interpraktik and European year programmes, where employment or further study/training

upon return is mentioned as the most important success of the activities. The evaluation of the Interpraktik programme found that 75 % of all participants were in employment or education/training at a given interval after their return to the home country. This success is reflected to a greater or lesser extent in all the case studies: the placement period abroad (or the programme into which the period of placement abroad is integrated) should ideally result in the participant losing the status of disadvantaged and entering mainstream employment or education and training. Another example comes from Wien work, which reports that three of the participants completed their apprenticeships and found employment in the ‘normal’ labour market, while the two other participants are currently finishing their apprenticeships.

Shedding the label of disadvantaged does not come as some kind of magical consequence of participation. The participants are able to find employment because they have acquired skills during their stay abroad, which have improved their overall employability, and they enter mainstream education and training because they have undergone a process of personal development as a result of their stay. In other words, long-term ‘outcome’ on employment or entry into mainstream education and training is a result of the short-term ‘output’ on skills acquisition and personal development (in the following we will subsume the two under the common denominator ‘learning’), which has come about as the result of their participation.

The case studies contain numerous attempts at defining more precisely the kind of learning that participation in a placement abroad may give rise to. The most elaborate definition comes from the organisation u.bus, which has drawn up the following list of skills that may be acquired:

Vocational skills	Methodological skills	Social skills	Personal skills
Work tools, methods, technology	Organising a trip away from home	Communication skills	Learning to situate one’s life world in relation to that of others
Developing skills pertaining to a trade	Planning	Tolerance	Developing a feeling of belonging
Working conditions, work structure	Handling time	Conflict management	Concentration
Job profiles in another country	How to orientate oneself when abroad	Heightened frustration threshold	Finding meaning

Knowing dancing and music	Using means of transport	Reliance	Clarification of values
Language learning	Discovering new action patterns	How to cope when abroad	Coping with anxiety
Knowledge of another country (history, economy, etc.)	Non-verbal communication	Flexibility	Independence
Geography	Presentation skills	Ability to enter constructively into conflicts	Self-confidence
Social structures (own, foreign)	Exchange of experience	Broadening the horizon	Hygiene when travelling
Knowing another culture	Developing and mediating interests	Team work	
Food		Coping with interview situations	
Customs		Sociability	
Handling money		Decision making	
		Deconstructing prejudices, probing own attitudes	

Source: Route 99, p. 20

This list represents potential, not an enumeration of the skills acquisition that happens in any transnational placement project. It can be questioned whether it is exhaustive (does it capture all the skills which a placement abroad may produce?) and whether it is a useful and intelligible way of describing those skills. As the most systematic of all the statements concerning skills acquisition in placement projects, however, it provides us with an inventory of skills that may be acquired during a placement abroad, and can thus serve as a useful point of reference in the following analysis.

There are other ways of cutting the cake. The evaluation of the European year programme introduces a different nomenclature, distinguishing between vocational skills, international skills and personal skills. The difference here is the term ‘international skills’, the components of which are contained in the columns of the u.bus scheme (notably under ‘vocational skills’

and ‘social skills’), but which has been highlighted as a separate category. ‘International skills’ comprise foreign language proficiency as well as the ability to interact constructively with people from a different cultural background, and the knowledge of foreign markets and working conditions. The fact that these are given a separate category in connection with the European year programme instead of being subsumed under other headings as in the u.bus scheme undoubtedly reflects a valorisation of exactly those skills: they are clearly seen as having a particular importance for the development of employability in the participants. The fact that they possess these skills gives them – according to the ‘programme theory’ of the European year programme – a better chance of finding employment in a labour market that is increasingly internationalised (or globalised). The qualitative interviews with former participants who are in employment and their employers do not seem to corroborate this theory fully, however. They are not typically employed in companies with many international contacts, and their international skills were not the main reason why they were employed; rather the fact that they had an unusual biography due to their stay abroad, and because they had demonstrated an ability to get by under difficult conditions (i.e. abroad). Other case studies mention outcomes on international skills, but they are not accorded any major importance. A possible exception to this is the Interpraktik programme, which operates with an outcome/output distinction where the outcome is employment/further studies and training, and the output composed of four partial aims, defined as foreign language proficiency, and cultural, vocational and personal development. The participants were asked to score their achievements in each of these four areas, and a large majority deemed this very high. The evaluation does not permit us to establish any direct causality, however. We thus cannot say whether all four achievements are equally important, or whether one carries more weight than the other; or whether there are other factors which may have influenced their situation afterwards.

Two more factors should be mentioned in connection with the ‘international’ aspect. One is mentioned under the heading ‘social skills’ in the u.bus scheme, namely the issue of deconstructing prejudices and probing own attitudes through the first-hand experience of another culture. We may describe this as some kind of European (or world) citizenship, as opposed to a nationalist attitude. This is also mentioned in the case study of Svinninge Production School, where an increased intercultural understanding is one of the results of the experience, not only in relation to other countries, but also in relation to immigrants and refugees living in the home country. The placement abroad thus becomes a way of combating xenophobia and racism. This was also one of the original aims of the European year programme; that participants should go abroad to learn about other cultures and adopt a more tolerant attitude. However, this aim no longer seems to rate highly and was not included as an object for investigation in the evaluation carried out in 1998.

The second factor is referred to in several of the case studies, and also in the table above under ‘personal skills’ where it is called ‘developing a feeling of belonging’. Thus the director of Svinninge Production School notes that the participants have learned to appreciate aspects of Danish society and culture that they had previously taken for granted. The same is echoed in the case study on Youth in the water tower; another project where clarification of aims is an

important issue. Through the comparison with other ways of doing things, they return with an appreciation of conditions in their home country, which means that they (in a positive sense) are more willing to accept conditions to which they had previously objected. This could, for instance, relate to conditions for following mainstream education and training.

The acquisition of vocational skills – i.e. concrete skills related to a specific trade or occupation – do not, on the whole, seem to have any greater significance in the case studies. Korsør Produktionsskole states that the outcome on technical skills acquisition is negligible, and could just as well have been acquired at home. The exception to this is the organisation Wien work, where the whole project revolved round the acquisition of skills in relation to a very specific technology, which was not available in the home country (or, at any rate, not readily available). This was indeed the main aim and *raison d'être* for the project, and the reason why it came about. A similar argument is registered in the case of Frederiksberg Daghøjskole, where the informant states that one of the reasons for including a stay abroad in the Open youth education is to get access to skills that cannot be acquired in the home country (as a general motivation for going abroad, though it is not clear to what extent it applies specifically to placements). For others, the placements offer valuable work experience in the course of which new skills are learned but these skills are not necessarily targeted from the onset. In the two cases where we can draw on extensive evaluations for the case studies (i.e. the Interpraktik and the European year programmes) the questions asked are too broad to give any real information on the acquisition of vocational skills. They are concerned with 'vocational development' and whether the participants experienced the placements as 'meaningful and worthwhile'. In the two programmes, the participants are mostly equipped with a vocational identity in the shape of qualifications from initial vocational training or even higher education (for some participants in the Interpraktik programme). In the case of Wien work, the participants are apprentices within specific fields, and are thus on the way towards recognised qualifications and a vocational identity. U.bus represents a more varied picture, as the experiences are harvested on the basis of a large number of projects, which include people with formal qualifications (or on the way towards formal qualifications) and people without. In all the Danish case studies, however, we have a target group that does not have any formal qualifications and consequently no established vocational identity. Here, a main purpose of the stay abroad is experimentation; as a way of trying out a vocational field to see whether it is something to base a career decision on, or confirming choices already made, but which are not yet binding (e.g. Korsør Produktionsskole).

The pivotal point in most case studies concerning learning outcome, however, is clearly in the field of personal skills. The term is used here in a very inclusive sense that encompasses most of the items listed under 'methodological skills', 'social skills' and 'personal skills' in the u.bus scheme above. A common point of all these items is that they do not pertain to any particular occupation or trade, but can be applied across the board in several situations, both in working life and outside, as a citizen in society and as a human being in personal relationships. Hence they are also known as 'transversal skills', 'key skills' or 'life skills'. The individual components making up this type of skills are very diverse in nature, and the borderline to other types of skills difficult to define with any clarity. It would not make a lot of

sense in this empirical study to go into a more extensive discussion about definitions and delimitations, and we will therefore use it quite simply as a repository for the learning outcome reported on that does not fit into any of the categories already mentioned.

The table of the u.bus organisation represents the distillate of many years of experience by a group of dedicated, reflective practitioners, whereas the experiences of Svinninge Produktionsskole and Wien work are based on mainly one project by people whose main task is not the execution of transnational projects. As such, the statements are not immediately comparable, but they should (and must) be accorded the same status in a qualitative study. Rather than basing the analysis on the list of u.bus and extending it with possible additions from the other case studies, we should therefore concentrate on similarities between the statements; of recurrent patterns of meaning that are represented in several or all the statements. An analysis made on this premise thus brings up four patterns, or clusters, of personal skills developed during a placement abroad:

The first cluster is concerned with the development of skills like independence, initiative, self-esteem, self-reliance and self-confidence. This development is aptly summed up in the words of a participant in the Open youth education who had been on a placement abroad (Unge i Vandtårnet): ‘Now that I have coped with this, I feel that I can cope with anything’. In the European year programme, 75 % of the participants reported that they had experienced an increased self-confidence after participation in the programme, and 60 % also reported of increased self-reliance. The case study from Svinninge Produktionsskole states that the participants quite simply had learnt to look after themselves.

The second cluster is related to this, and has to do with a heightened sense of responsibility, first and foremost with regard to themselves and their own learning. This is mentioned in the case study of Frederiksberg Daghøjskole and Unge i Vandtårnet – participants have negotiated a training plan with the guidance counsellor, but on the basis of their own ideas and wishes. Now they experience that it is entirely up to them to see to it that this plan is adhered to, being on their own in unknown surroundings. The case study of Wien work mentions a different kind of responsibility, that of the participants taking on a role as ‘ambassadors of their country’, eager to show it from its best side.

The third cluster has to do with a clarification of ambitions, of finding motivation and a sense of direction and meaning. This is a common statement in practically all case studies. Participants use the stay abroad to experiment with aspects of vocational preferences and personality, and in the course of this they are either confirmed in their previous choices or encouraged to go into new areas. Korsør Produktionsskole, for instance, mentions the fact that participants return with a sense of mission with regard to their continued training. They have ‘found the right shelf’, a sense of belonging to a particular vocational field. This issue also matters for people with qualifications: 40 % of all the respondents in the evaluation of the European year programme replied that the stay had been important to them for clarifying career questions.

The fourth cluster deals with social or interpersonal skills. This comprises skills like tolerance, the ability to work together with others, communication in the widest sense of the word, handling conflicts constructively, etc. The case study of Wien work talks of project outcome in terms of ‘invaluable experience in the social field’ and ‘raising their social competence’. This cluster features very strongly in projects involving groups of participants, where the dynamics in the group is used consciously (u.bus) or unconsciously (Svinninge Produktionsskole) as a form of social training. The latter refers to the example of three participants having to share a flat since it was not possible to organise home stays for all the trainees. The experience of having to find out how to organise living together was described as ‘an excellent form of social training’. In the case of u.bus, the organisation has consciously worked with this aspect and developed particular techniques for trainers and project organisers dealing with groups going abroad.

4.2. Practical organisation of the placement projects

The output (or learning outcomes) registered above is not merely an automatic consequence of sending trainees out and getting them back alive. It has come about in each case as the result of a specific practice that contains a good many parameters that have all influenced the learning outcomes in various ways. We should also bear in mind that learning does not always happen. Some projects and programmes have instances of premature return, where participants go back to their home country before the stipulated end of their stay. In the event where this is due to ‘acts of God’ (accidents, illness, or perhaps a tempting job offer), this is unavoidable and probably does not have an untoward effect on the participant. When it arrives as the result of a negative experience with the stay, this is much more serious. We are dealing with a target group that is labelled disadvantaged already, and who have enough problems in the first place. A feeling of personal defeat, of not having been able to cope with the challenge, is certainly not doing them any good. In fact, we may have achieved exactly the opposite of what we set out to do. But the fact that a participant has lasted for the duration of a project is no indicator of a successful learning experience. One of the case studies (Unge i Vandtårnet) reports on a participant who obstinately stayed till the end of a clearly miserable stay, but who needed therapy upon homecoming to get over the experience. Even when stays are nowhere as catastrophic as this, however, we should always be concerned with the quality of the learning experience – in other words, are we exhausting the full learning potential of the project, or could the participants have benefited more?

In the following we will look at the parameters that have (or may have) an influence on the learning outcomes of a placement abroad. We are dealing with quite different projects and many of the parameters - exact nature of target group, length of stay, identification of placement opportunities, mode of sending, supervision, and choice of target country, selection of participants, motivation, preparation, and debriefing after homecoming – may vary considerably. We will look at what the case studies have to report on them. It is, however, still

descriptive analysis: we will only report on what the case studies tell, and not discuss it any further nor bring in outside material.

4.2.1. Nature of target group

The case studies show a big variation in the nature of the target group, and this variation undoubtedly impinges on the choices made for several other parameters. Even though they are all disadvantaged, there are clearly degrees of disadvantage. At one end of the scale we find the participants of the project organised by the organisation Wien work. These are in initial vocational training (apprenticeship), but have certified subnormal learning abilities (identified via a psychological test) at the time of entry, and are consequently placed in a particular institution and are allowed one to two extra years to finish their training. At the other end of the scale, we find the participants of the Interpraktik programme, where no less than 25 % have qualifications from higher education (even though other participants may have no qualifications at all). Strictly speaking, these 25 % do not fall into the category of disadvantaged groups, since they are certainly not suffering from a low skills level. On the other hand, employability is made up of more than formal qualifications, and since they have all been unemployed for at least six months, one might argue that they are in risk of marginalisation. The target groups of the other case studies are distributed between these two, even though they are less easily put in categories. The participants from the Danish production schools and those opting for the Open youth education are mostly without any qualifications; but many of the participants in the latter are probably quite resourceful and, in some cases, very motivated and determined, and could have entered mainstream education or the labour market if they had wanted to. The target group of the European year programme are in many ways similar to the better-off segments from the Interpraktik programme, but more uniform in their qualification structure: they all have qualifications from initial vocational training, but are all unemployed, and many have been so for quite a long time. In some cases, this could be more out of choice than necessity, but we cannot ascertain whether this is really the case. The remaining 75 % of the participants of the Interpraktik programme are distributed along this line, even though only 4 % have no qualifications whatsoever.

Age is also an element here. Even though all participants are between 18 and 30, some projects deal with significantly younger target groups (Wien work, Svinninge Produktionsskole, Unge i Vandtårnet, Korsør Produktionsskole) whereas other mainly occupy the upper echelons (the Interpraktik and European year programmes).

4.2.2. Length of stay

In connection with the length of stay, we may argue that this is not necessarily synonymous with 'length of project'. In the case of the European year programme, the project also includes a two month (linguistic) preparation course, and in the Interpraktik programme, participants may undergo as much as six months preparation prior to departure. This variable is difficult to estimate in the other case studies, however, as the placement abroad is an integrated part of a

longer process, where it is difficult to say exactly when ‘preparation’ starts, or, for that matter, when ‘debriefing’ (see below) ends. To avoid complication, we will define this parameter as the time spent abroad, and discuss the time before and after below.

With this definition, we see a huge variety between the individual cases; from the three weeks of the Wien work project to the nine months spent abroad by participants in the European year programme. Again, the remaining projects distribute themselves along this line, with Interpraktik placements generally lasting five months, while trainees at the production schools are away four and eight weeks respectively. For the participants in the Open youth education, the length is decided separately for each participant, and ranges from 4 to 40 weeks. U.bus generally work for 12 weeks.

It is tempting to see a correlation between the degree of disadvantage and the length of the stay, but it may not necessarily be so. There is an interesting statement from the case of Svinninge Produktionsskole, where participants were abroad for eight weeks, but where the director and project leader afterwards estimated that twelve weeks would have been perfectly feasible. In the case of Wien work, the length of the stay was determined from the onset by the vocational goal of the project, and once the participants had acquired the necessary technical skills, there was no need to stay any longer. This does not preclude the assumption that they could have stayed abroad for longer, if the aims had been formulated differently.

4.2.3. Identification of placement opportunities abroad

The case studies here distribute themselves in two groups rather than along a line. Interestingly enough, the pattern of distribution is not quite what one might have expected. In one group, we have the cases where the participants have placements found for them by the placement organisers. This is the case for Wien work, the u.bus projects and for the production schools, but also for the European year programme. In the other group, we have the projects/programmes where the responsibility for finding placements lies with the participants themselves. This is the case for Open youth education (Frederiksberg Daghøjskole and Unge i Vandtårnet), and for the Interpraktik programme. This should not be taken to mean that the participants are left entirely to their own devices in this respect. Until it was closed down because of a shortage of manpower to update the entries, the International Programme Office (which is in charge of running the programme) operated a placement ‘bank’, where prospective participants could find the addresses of companies who in the past had taken trainees on placement. Similarly, Open youth education sometimes used intermediary organisations to identify placement possibilities and, in some cases, organise the stay (Unge i Vandtårnet). In both cases, however, the initiative has to come from the participant, and placement finding remains his or her responsibility. In the case of Unge i Vandtårnet it is a principle that all contacts must be made by the participant him- or herself as part of the selection procedure; the assumption is that any person unable to do so is not capable of handling the placement itself either.

4.2.4. **Mode of sending**

This covers the way in which the participants are sent abroad, whether this is done individually or in groups. Here we may also identify two opposite poles, with the other case studies distributing themselves along the line between these. The Interpraktik programme constitutes one end of this line, as participants are sent out individually, and also preparation before and debriefing afterwards is done in this way (to the extent that it takes place). In principle, the same happens in the case of the participants in Open youth education who go abroad on a placement. At the other end we find the Wien work project, where participants are together as a group continually. Close to this are the production schools, where participants are sent out as a group, but are distributed to different placements upon arrival in the host country; the same as with the typical u.bus project. In the European year programme, participants heading for the same country undergo a language course together in the home country, and continue this for the first month of their stay in the host country, before they are split up. During the stay, they may be more or less scattered geographically, even though they usually stay within a restricted area. There are differences in the degree of 'togetherness' during the stay, however. For Korsør Produktionsskole, it is a principle to try and make the participants spend as much time together with the native population as possible (e.g. by giving them individual accommodation with host families), whereas in the case of Svinninge Produktionsskole, three participants shared a flat together, as a result of which they underwent a different learning process from the others. The mode of sending can also be seen as depending on the target group. In the Interpraktik programme, attempts have been made to send the participants out in pairs for mutual support, to reach out to less resourceful types of participants who are not able to cope entirely on their own.

4.2.5. **Supervision of the stay**

In the Wien work project it was decided to send a member of staff along with the project for the entire duration, as this was deemed essential for a successful outcome. Korsør Produktionsskole makes a point of not sending a project leader along with the participants in their recurrent placement projects, but nevertheless thinks that this may be necessary for certain groups whose personal resources are simply too limited to cope on their own with the challenge of being away from home. Instead, they have a trusted local contact person who can intervene in the event of problems that the participants cannot handle on their own. This is also the method used by u.bus and Svinninge Produktionsskole. In the Interpraktik and Open youth programmes there are no provisions for supervision during the stay, even though in a few cases (Unge i Vandtårnet) an intermediary organisation has mediated the contact to the placement and is also in charge of supervision. In the case of Unge i Vandtårnet, one may also talk about a kind of 'remote supervising'. Participants are requested to contact their guidance counsellor at least once per week and report on the progress; either through e-mail or telephone. Failure to do so may be punished by the guidance counsellor withholding the grant from the participant until he or she reports back.

4.2.6. **Choice of host country**

Wien work again stands out on its own because it has chosen a host country, which besides being a neighbouring country also speaks the same language. Thereby there are no linguistic difficulties to deal with, but then again no learning outcome on foreign language proficiency either. Svinninge and Korsør Produktionskole have used European countries and so has u.bus for their projects, a natural choice, since funding is applied for through the Leonardo da Vinci programme. For the European year programme the choice of host country is made within Europe, but the main reason for selecting a country is whether it is possible to find a partner organisation, which can find the necessary placements, organise language training and supervise the stay. In the Interpraktik and Open youth education, the participants can choose from the whole world for their host country.

4.2.7. **Motivation**

Many young people do not feel at ease with the thought of staying in completely new and unknown surroundings, even if it is only for a limited period. U.bus uses former participants to give talks to potential candidates to alleviate their fears by telling about their experiences and how they managed. This method was also used by Wien work where the presentations of the participants after their return inspired the other apprentices to demand a similar experience. Without this stimulation, however, they would not have considered this as a possibility.

4.2.8. **Selection**

There is a general agreement in all the case studies that not all people are capable of handling the challenge of a stay abroad, or at least not in the form on offer. As all case studies operate with voluntary participation, a selection process is necessary. In the Open youth education, the guidance counsellors use the principle of always meeting the wishes of the participants with an open mind, but to leave the initiative and ultimate responsibility with the participant, so that he or she had to make contact with potential host company themselves. In this way, participants who were not up to the task tended to deselect themselves. Svinninge Produktionskole had guidance talks with the individual applicant where they explained what the stay implied as realistically as possible, and also what it demanded from them. Less motivated applicants then tended to disappear. In two case studies (European year and Korsør Produktionskole) the contact person (or a representative of the contact organisation in charge of supervision) participated in the selection process.

4.2.9. **Preparation**

In all the case studies, the stay is preceded by a preparation phase. The length and intensity of this varies, however, according to resources available. Within the Interpraktik programme, the amount of preparation may vary from municipality to municipality, whereas all participants in

the European year programme receive a uniform preparation of three months' duration, one of which is spent in the host country. In the Open youth education (Unge i Vandtårnet) the participants are actively involved in shaping their own preparation, e.g. by collecting information about the host country or region. Preparation in all the case studies (except for Wien work) contained a language learning element, most markedly in the European year programme, where this is of three months' duration. Language learning is not the only element in the preparation process, however. According to u.bus, it should also contain practical preparation (how to deal with various practical aspects), vocational preparation and intercultural preparation (learning how to deal with cultural conflicts caused by cultural differences).

4.2.10. Debriefing after homecoming

Several of the case studies also mention the period after homecoming as important for the entire learning process. In Open youth education, guidance is an essential element throughout and also after the stay abroad. Participants talk through the experiences with their counsellor and discuss the consequences of this for their future career path.

5. Pedagogical implications

In a sense, we cover the same ground as in the previous section. The central questions asked here are also ‘why are we doing it’ and ‘how are we doing it’, but the mode has changed from descriptive to discursive. Instead of merely analysing the case studies and presenting the findings, we discuss them and, in the process, draw on external material that can challenge or complement.

By way of introduction, however, first some general comments on the term ‘pedagogy’ and its role in this study.

We may approach the issue of the participation of disadvantaged groups in transnational placement projects from two angles. One is the angle of inclusion, the principle that disadvantaged groups should have the same possibilities for participation as other groups. We should try to improve conditions for participation for such target groups as much as possible. The second angle is that transnational placement projects hold a specific learning potential for disadvantaged groups, as an instrument with which we can achieve particular results in learning (the term ‘learning’ here is defined in accordance with Illeris (1999, p. 17) as ‘all processes that lead to a lasting capacity change, be they of a motoric (related to movements), cognitive (related to perception), or psychodynamic (related to emotions, motivation, and attitude) character’) which we cannot attain with other means. Whatever angle we use, however, the concept of pedagogy is central.

The term ‘pedagogy’ has many connotations according to the context in which it appears. For the purposes of this study we have adopted a very broad definition, in line with Mortimore (1999, p. 3), who defines it as ‘any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance the learning in another’. When we talk about the ‘pedagogical implications’ for transnational placement projects, we are simply trying to translate the findings of the study into practical guidelines for project organisers on how to achieve the maximum learning for the participants. But what kind of learning are we actually talking about? Ireson, Mortimore and Hallam (in Mortimore 1999, p. 213) make the general observation about pedagogy that:

‘A major problem at the heart of our consideration of pedagogy is that there has been little explicit discussion of goals within the education system. The question “What are we teaching for?” is surprisingly seldom posed or answered’.

Transnational placement projects are also part of the educational system (formal, non-formal or informal), and the remark is curiously apposite here as well. Why are we funding and organising transnational placement projects? What kind of learning is it that we want the participants to acquire by using this tool? In the past chapter, several learning outcomes have been identified in the shape of statements from project organisers or conclusions of evaluators. To what extent do these opinions and conclusions reflect official thinking on the issue? Not that this necessarily represents a well-ordered universe. Kristensen (2003) has

identified four different schools of thought – or discourses – on placements abroad in official policy papers and texts.

The first is the discourse of placements abroad as a vehicle for bringing about intercultural understanding. According to this discourse, a period of placement abroad will bring about a heightened understanding of different cultures in the participant, who will thereafter be less prone to national chauvinism, racism and xenophobia.

The second discourse is concerned with placements abroad as a way of preparing for later employment abroad. Placements abroad will help bring about both a willingness to and a capacity for seeking and holding down a job in another country than one's own, when opportunities are better.

In the third discourse, placements abroad are an integral part of the process of internationalisation of education and training. They are used to provide training opportunities that do not exist in the home country, and to instil so-called international skills: foreign language proficiency and intercultural skills, that have become necessary in an economy influenced by globalisation.

According to the fourth discourse, placements abroad are used in a more general sense to improve the overall employability of the participant. The focus is on the development of broader personal skills: communicative ability, self-confidence, tolerance, self-reliance, adaptability, initiative, the ability to make sense of a new situation, etc.

It is interesting to try to match these discourses with the situation as perceived in the case studies in the *ex post* statements of organisers and evaluators. Intercultural understanding as a way of preventing xenophobia and racial conflict is not a very strong motive, even though it appears in several of the case studies; most strongly in the European year programme of Berlin, where it indeed formed the very rationale for setting up the programme back in 1993. However, a new rationale has appeared, and the issue of intercultural understanding has been relegated to the background. Interestingly enough, it was not even considered in the official evaluation carried out, despite the genesis of the programme. The European year programme is also interesting in relation to the second discourse (placements abroad as a preparation for employment abroad) in the sense that it is the only case study where it is clearly stated that it is an aim that participants find stable employment abroad and stay in the target country rather than returning to the home country. In the Swedish Interpraktik programme, employment is also an important aim, but it is clear that participation is meant to improve their chances of finding employment in the home market. The reason for this difference is probably the fact that unemployment is much more of a problem in Berlin/Germany than in Sweden, but it is nevertheless an interesting divergence in aims.

The third discourse – on internationalisation – is most clearly represented in the Interpraktik and the European year programmes, where it is a stated aim that participants are expected to acquire international skills to enable them to find employment in a labour market characterised by globalisation. However, in the evaluation of the European year programme,

qualitative interviews with employers seem to indicate that the participants who have found employment upon their return to Berlin do not get jobs on the basis of these skills, but rather as a result of their whole personality and the ‘interesting biography’ they have acquired as a result of having spent a longer period of time abroad. Neither do they (for the most part) use their international skills in their daily work. The acquisition of vocational skills that are not available in the home country is a strong motive in one case study (Wien work), but it does not play a very prominent role in others. Rather, vocational gains are described more in terms of general work experience, which they might equally well have acquired at home.

Based on the cumulative evidence from all the case studies, however, it is very clear that the most important aspect of the learning outcomes lies in the personal development of the participants; i.e. in the acquisition of key skills, including psychodynamic factors like motivation and a sense of direction for a future career path. At this stage we should perhaps repeat the *caveat* from the first part of the study: that the conclusions rest on a small selection of case studies, which may be skewed, and that there is – as always when interviews are involved – a risk that the interviewer through his selection of questions, inflection of voice, etc. has influenced the interviewee and steered the interview in a particular direction. Such accusations cannot be absolutely refuted; especially because the interviews were not taped and transcribed as a basis for the studies: they were made on the basis of notes taken by the interviewer during the interview. Where the studies are based on official evaluations (the Interpraktik and European year programmes) we may also raise doubts – even in ‘official’ evaluations - about the outcome depending on the kind of questions that are asked and not asked, and the degree of consensus between evaluator and evaluand on the terms used (how do we, e.g. understand ‘personal development’?). Finally, it would also be legitimate to question the comparability of the case studies, involving, as they do, quite diverse target groups.

Bearing this in mind, however, there seem to be quite strong indications in the case studies as to where lies the real value of placements abroad for this particular target group; namely in the development of personal skills. This is a normative statement that is not necessarily shared by all the case study informants. Even though the organisation Wien work in their own description of the project talk about ‘invaluable experience in the social field’, the outcome on vocational skills was undoubtedly seen as more important by the interviewee, who is the director of the organisation. In the case of the evaluations of the Interpraktik and the European year programmes, we can read from the findings that a percentage deemed that they had increased their personal skills, language skills, vocational skills, etc. What we cannot read, however, is whether they considered one set of skills more important than the other at the time of the evaluation. However, the qualitative interviews with former participants of the European year programme and their present employers seem to indicate that it is the personal skills rather than their foreign language proficiency that landed them the job.

So how can such skills be acquired during a placement abroad? In some of the case studies we find statements that may help to shed light on this process or on aspects of it. First, however, we will turn for a while to a more general theory on how learning in placements abroad

happens (Kristensen, 2003). According to this, there are four general learning situations, or channels through which learning takes place, in placements abroad. These four are labelled immersion, responsabilisation, relativation and perspectivation respectively.

The first learning situation – immersion – can be more precisely defined as the degree of proximity to, and interaction with, another culture and mentality. The rationale behind this is not very sophisticated: the more the participants are exposed to the foreign environment, the more they are likely to acquire, notably, vocational and international skills and intercultural understanding. If they, conversely, remain mostly with their fellow countrymen (as is quite often the case in mobility projects involving groups staying in the same area) and are not properly integrated in the work processes at the company in which they are doing their placement, the learning outcome in this respect will necessarily be limited.

The second learning situation - responsabilisation - denotes the space that is available to the participant for autonomous decision making in their living and working environment. For many participants, this will be the first time that they experience ‘standing on their own feet’. They will not have their usual network of family, friends and teachers to offer instruction and examples on how to solve the numerous large and small problems of everyday life inside and outside of their placement. They will have to devise solutions for themselves. At the same time, many of the challenges have cultural causes and will be of a nature where they cannot draw on past models for their solution. However, the fact that they are alone in this new environment also means that they can act in an atmosphere where they are free from the expectations of others and can experiment with aspects of their personality that are normally not activated. In this situation they will stimulate the development of their self-confidence, their self-reliance, their creativity (to help them solve unfamiliar problems) and their entrepreneurship (since they have to take initiatives themselves to overcome these problems).

Relativation – defined as the opportunities presented for experiencing familiar objects and practices through the lens of a different cultural setting - is a complex concept. It is a normal, and in fact inevitable, occurrence during stays abroad (at least in the initial phase) that participants see and experience (and judge) different objects and practices through the lens of their own cultural setting. Here the tables are, so to speak, turned: relativation is about seeing how familiar objects and practices are used or done differently in another (cultural) context. The difference is an important one. The focus is not on foreign, but on own practices and the observations open up to reflections on how these might be changed and improved: they are no longer taken for granted and unalterable. This situation allows development of an ability to cope with diversity and change. In one of the case studies (Unge i Vandtårnet), the outcome of this learning process is described as an increased willingness to embrace and explore the unknown, instead of instinctively rejecting it.

Perspectivation can be defined as the possibility for reflection and follow-up on experiences of ‘disjuncture’ with previous conceptions of what is normal. Participants must be given the space to think about their experiences both during and after the stay, ponder on what these have meant and done to them, and if necessary be helped to act on them. It is not always that

such a reflection comes along by itself. Changes are often incremental and pass unnoticed by participants. They may need assistance and space to put words to these, and support and advice on how to capitalise on them in their present situation.

These four learning situations are mainly analytic constructs that cannot be seen in isolation from each other. They exist in any transnational placement project in a complex interplay that is very difficult to capture. In one of the case studies (Korsør Produktionsskole) the learning process is very aptly described in a metaphor as ‘the dance of the millipede’: it dances, but nobody can quite tell how. They share the common feature that they are all based on the premise that learners are taken away from their usual surroundings and placed in a different cultural context, in a different ‘reality’. But each (with the exception of the last – perspectivation – which is more a method for ensuring that any developments in skills acquisition are properly valorised) represents a potential for a specific type of learning, and the relationship between these can be developed differently in different projects. In line with this, we may describe placements abroad as a learning platform that offers the possibility for acquisition of a variety of skills through a variety of learning modes (‘learning situations’). They are all present as a potential in any given transnational placement project, but the degree to which they are unfolded depends on the nature of the project, including the nature of the target group. We will now proceed to look at how this is expressed in placement projects involving disadvantaged target groups, with a point of departure in the concrete case studies we have used for this report.

We noted above that the acquisition of personal skills is seen as very important in all the case studies, and that it for some of the informants represents the most important outcome of a placement abroad. In the analysis, we tried to describe the more exact nature of this concept in relation to the projects, and came up with four clusters of personal skills that the studies reported on. These skills were related to self-confidence, to responsibility, to a clarification of vocational aims and personal ambitions, and to the development of social (interpersonal) skills. Two of these clusters seem to figure quite strongly in some case studies, namely the increase in self-confidence and self-esteem in participants who have been on a placement abroad, and the clarification of aims concerning their future career and life situation in general. How is it that going through a placement project abroad can have these consequences?

The building up of self-confidence and self-esteem can be seen as coming out of a sense of achievement of having successfully overcome a formidable challenge. This sentiment is quite aptly summed up by a participant (Unge i Vandtårnet) with the remark: ‘Now that I’ve coped with this, I feel that I can cope with anything’. To realise exactly how daunting such a venture might seem, it is important to bear in mind that many of the participants have not tried to live away from their parents before, and certainly not travelled on their own except, perhaps, for the occasional package holiday. Living and working for a period in a completely alien environment and ‘surviving’ the experience inspires them with a heightened opinion of themselves; it encourages them to dare to do something else, and can be the beginning of a virtuous circle (e.g. Korsør Produktionsskole, Svinninge Produktionsskole).

The emergence of increased motivation, of a clarification of personal and professional aims, can be explained through the notion of the 'free space' (Schön, 1987). The fact that they are alone (or at any rate away from their usual circle of friends and relatives) means that they are deprived of one major source of advice and support, but it also entails a certain freedom: they do not have to live up to the usual image of themselves. Being among strangers, they can play with aspects of themselves that they have previously suppressed for fear of the reaction of the surroundings. This experimentation is also valuable for their professional development, most pronounced with the target groups who have not yet developed a vocational identity through previous training and work experience. Here they are able to pursue their dreams and establish whether there is any substance to them, or whether they are just dreams. In the case of the production schools, where participants have already gained some vocational experience, the stay abroad and the integration in the local community of practice is an experience that often confirms them in their choice and leaves them with a feeling of having 'found the right shelf' (Korsør Produktionsskole). Also for groups who already have a fully developed vocational identity, the element of experimentation is detectable. In the evaluation of the Interpraktik programme this is not measured directly and only appears through anecdotal evidence but in the European year programme, an indicator may be found in the fact that 43 % of the participants changed their work placement during the stay, and not just out of dissatisfaction. Many (even though we have no precise figure) report that they did so because they wanted to try out different situations.

There is – or can be – a connection between the two issues in the sense that participants are given the possibility to try out new aspects of themselves and their vocational preferences and the confidence to try and translate at least part of this into reality upon homecoming. This is expressed in the anecdote of the young man (Frederiksberg Daghøjskole) whose only interest was kickboxing and who wanted to become an instructor and did a placement at a kickboxing school in Thailand. During that stay he realised that he wanted to open his own training centre, and also that he needed other skills than the martial ones for that, and consequently orientated himself towards a different – and more broadly applicable – type of training upon his homecoming.

Both these issues are described above under the learning situation called 'responsibilisation', and 'responsibility' seems indeed to be a key term here. In three of the case studies (Frederiksberg Daghøjskole, Unge i Vandtårnet, the Interpraktik programme), responsibility may be said to constitute, in a sense, the very organisational principle of the projects. Here, the participants are given the responsibility themselves to identify and contact their work placements abroad. This task may at first seem completely beyond the capabilities of this target group but nevertheless seems to work. In the parlance of modern pedagogy, they are asked 'to assume the responsibility for their own learning process', a notion that is of central importance to the concept of lifelong learning. In the other case studies the participants also have to assume responsibility. They are on their own at a workplace and are integrated (or at least they should be) in the local community of practice, where they have tasks on whose correct execution others are dependent. They also have responsibilities *vis-à-vis* their life outside of the placement, for personal hygiene, nourishment, organising their leisure time, and

establishing and maintaining relations with the host family or the landlord, etc. It is undoubtedly of importance that these are real situations, not artificial ones created within the framework of a training centre and under permanent supervision of trained staff. All actions have real consequences, and, interestingly enough, most participants tend to live up to them. It is a thought-provoking statement (Unge i Vandtårnet) that participants in a placement abroad are willing to accept conditions that they would never have accepted at home. Why do they persist, when they have broken off other placements or vocational courses at home?

The fourth type of personal skills – social or interpersonal – may be seen as responsibility. In one project (Svinninge Produktionsskole) it was not possible to place three of the participants with host families as originally planned, and they were therefore placed in a flat together. Discovering a mode of living together on their own proved an enormous challenge for the three, and the project leader assesses that because of this process they actually gained more from the stay than those with host families. It may be argued that some kind of normative statement is implied in this *vis-à-vis* learning outcome. Staying together also means less immersion in the Portuguese environment, and hence less outcome in foreign language proficiency and intercultural skills. But the ‘social training’ acquired through having to negotiate the mode of cohabitation apparently more than counterbalanced this.

It is a consistent feature in most of the case studies that personal skills and a mode of learning that may be described as ‘responsibilisation’ is the major issue. Of course, this is not tantamount to saying that other modes of learning and types of skills are not present. They are, but more as a *nebenmotif* than a central element. Learning about another culture is important: the language, the mentality, geography, history, customs, vocational practices, etc. But learning through another culture is arguably more important: using the stay as a personal challenge and as a ‘free space’ for the development of self-confidence, motivation and drive, responsibility and heightened capacity for social interaction.

5.1. Consequences for the practical organisation of placements abroad

We have discussed the pedagogical aims and processes (‘learning situations’ or ‘modes of learning’) of placements abroad for the target group that concerns us. We will now turn to the practical organisation of placements abroad, and discuss the consequences for this of the above conclusions; i.e. focus on how we should go about issues of duration (length of stay), identification of placement opportunities, mode of sending, supervision, choice of host country, motivation, selection, preparation, and debriefing. This leaves out one of the parameters discussed in the previous section, namely that of the nature of the target group. All the participants involved in the case studies used for this report are labelled ‘disadvantaged’, but they are, nevertheless, quite diverse in many ways: in age, qualifications, and also very probably personal resources. ‘Disadvantage’ thus may be described as low learning abilities, low skills level, lack of motivation and drive, maladaptation, or merely as unemployment. The

reason for leaving it out as a separate category in the discussion (as opposed to the description) is that we cannot see this here as a parameter together with the other parameters; rather, it becomes a transversal factor that influences the way in which the entire project is organised and the other parameters set.

It follows logically from this that it is impossible to make any hard and fast statements in the shape of norms or standards for the way in which projects are practically organised. It will depend on the exact nature of the target group – the nature and depth of their disadvantages – and any project planning must take this into account. Therefore it makes more sense to speak of relative criteria in this respect; things that must be considered and included in any project, but in ways that are suited to the particular situation at hand. If we can generalise from the analysis of the case studies in this report to the general situation, however, we now have a more stable base for these considerations. We know (or at least we think we know) more about precisely what kind of learning outcomes we should focus on, and we know how this learning comes about (the mode of learning). On the basis of this hypothesis, we may revisit the parameters identified in the analysis of findings, and try to discuss these in the light of this.

5.1.1. Length of stay

It is often generally assumed that duration and the intensity of the experience are directly proportional to one another. This is the case if we posit as the main learning goals foreign language proficiency and intercultural skills, and also more complex vocational skills. When this is the case, the main learning situation is immersion, and immersion is certainly facilitated by lengthier stays. But for disadvantaged target groups, the real significance of the stay seems to be the acquisition of personal skills, and the main learning mode here is responsabilisation. Language learning and intercultural skills constitute a by-product. A very important learning outcome in transnational placement projects for disadvantaged groups is of a psychodynamic nature, arising from the sense of achievement of having coped with a challenge. What constitutes a challenge in terms of length will obviously vary, depending on the nature of the target group. In the case studies, the recorded lengths vary from three weeks (Wien work) to nine months (the European year programme). Wien work has arguably the most disadvantaged target group; subnormal learning abilities, in many cases compounded by social problems at home. Moreover, they are young, in some cases below 18. The participants in the European year' are older (66 % in the age bracket 20-25; 30 % in the age bracket 25-27) and have completed mainstream initial vocational training. To the type of young person who participated in the Wien work project, a stay of three weeks may very well represent a challenge that to him or her is equally formidable as the nine months abroad for the type who signs up for the European year programme, and the outcome in this respect may be the same, despite the difference in length.

Other aspects of the learning process require more time. Short-term placements abroad do not lend themselves readily to a process of clarification of aims, since they limit how much

experimentation one can do. Instead, the placement can be used to confirm a choice already made, as is reported in the case of Korsør Produktionsskole.

5.1.2. **Mode of sending**

Individual projects where participants are sent abroad on their own (Interpraktik, the Open Youth Education) require more from the participant from the onset, and there are target groups where this would not be deemed suitable: the chances of a negative experience and premature return are simply too great. Nevertheless, the experiences with this inside the Open youth education are largely positive, also in doubtful cases (see Frederiksberg Daghøjskole). In the Interpraktik programme, the percentage of participants returning prematurely is 10-15, but with a downwards tendency. Sending participants out in groups has certain advantages: it can persuade reluctant participants to go in spite of their original fears, and it is possible to use the dynamics of the group as a positive factor during the stay; a source of strength and comfort when things turn sour (e.g. u.bus). This is the line of thinking behind the attempts made in the Interpraktik programme to send out participants in pairs, to support one another. However, going away in a group can also have negative influences on the individual. First and foremost, there is a risk that the participants will tend to stay together for most of the time instead of integrating into the environment of the host country. In this case, there is obviously less immersion and gains in foreign language proficiency and intercultural skills are commensurately less. Being in a group with people who know each other (e.g. coming from the same institution) can also have another negative effect, however, as it may encourage retention of their usual roles, not being able to create a 'free space' where they can experiment with aspects of themselves. In the case of Korsør Produktionsskole, participants are sent out in a group, but care is taken to avoid their spending too much time in each other's company.

5.1.3. **Supervision of the stay**

Supervision is another way of ensuring a secure environment for the participants: help is at hand should they encounter problems which they cannot solve on their own. However, we may distinguish between active and passive supervision, where active supervision means taking proactive action to pre-empt possible problems, whereas passive supervision means establishing a preparedness for dealing with problems that the participants are unable to cope with themselves. Active supervision, taken to extremes, may actually be counterproductive to learning in a transnational placement project. By 'mothering' participants, their feeling of responsibility is diminished, and hence their ownership of the project and their sense of achievement at the end nullified. In the case of Korsør Produktionsskole, this is the reason for not sending a member of staff along with the project. Moreover, it makes it much more difficult for them to try out new roles: the supervisor may inadvertently prevent that because he or she brings along their preconceived image of the 'true' character of a participant.

5.1.4. **Identification of placement opportunities**

In the case of the Interpraktik programme and the Open youth education, the participants are required to identify and make the necessary practical arrangements themselves. This does not mean leaving it entirely up to them, however. In Open youth education, guidance counsellors are ready to assist with ideas and information gathering, but the responsibility for actually making the contact – picking up the phone and/or writing the necessary letters – lies with the participant. This can be seen as a practical necessity: having to find placements for all the participants (as happens in the European year programme) may require too many resources. It can also be seen as a conscious strategy for placing ‘ownership’ of the project firmly in the hands of the participant. It is their idea, and they have carried it out; and therefore the sense of achievement is accordingly greater.

5.1.5. **Choice of host country**

With a focus on the acquisition of personal skills, the choice of host country becomes less of an issue than in the projects where language learning is a paramount aim. This is obvious in the example of Wien work, where the project took place between Austria and Germany; two countries who speak the same language. This is a significant difference to mainstream transnational placement projects, e.g. in the Leonardo da Vinci programme, where the preponderance of English as the first foreign language in many European countries translates itself into a marked preference for the UK as the host country for placement projects. In projects involving disadvantaged groups and a learning outcome primarily in the shape of personal skills, the focus is on communication more than on proficiency: the participants must be able to get by linguistically to ‘survive’ the experience, but perfection is not a goal. In the case of Svinninge Produktionsskole, Poland was first considered as host country, but given up again as the level of English was not considered good enough. The second choice was then Portugal because of a good contact, but an English-speaking country (the UK or the Republic of Ireland) was not considered.

In the Interpraktik programme and Open youth education, placements are not only restricted to Europe, but can be done anywhere in the world. This does not seem to have any significant effects on learning, though it can be seen either as a political statement (that there is more to ‘abroad’ than Europe) or as a practical arrangement (enlarging the ‘market’ for placements).

5.1.6. **Motivation**

For many in the disadvantaged group, the idea of a placement abroad is not one that would suggest itself naturally, and even when given the opportunity, many would probably shy away out of a fear for the unknown and a lack of confidence in being able to cope with the challenge. For this group, it becomes very important to find ways and means for breaking down so much of this fear that they feel confident enough to take the decision of going on the placement. Some of the case studies have explored various ways of doing that; e.g. having former participants tell of their experiences and how they managed (Wien work).

5.1.7. Selection

All of the case studies considered operate with voluntary participation. A project where participants were forced to go abroad on a placement would be unthinkable. There may be cases, however, when there are more volunteers than placements available, in which case some kind of selection must take place. It may also happen that people who join up have a personality that does not meet up with the demands posed by the project. This was the case with Svinninge Produktionsskole, where sixteen persons initially wished to participate where there was only funding for six. Three of these could be rejected out of hand as clearly unsuitable; for the rest, a series of probing interviews combined with information about the demands of the project eventually whittled the number of participants down to the stipulated number.

5.1.8. Preparation

The role of preparation in an optic of responsabilisation may quite succinctly be defined as a way of ensuring to the largest extent possible that the participant is equipped to cope with the challenges posed by the project. In this definition, preparation does not only consist of language learning. It also covers information on practical issues (e.g. social security, insurance, etc.), of intercultural training (i.e. sensitising the participant to cultural differences), of vocational preparation (i.e. ensuring that the participant can enter the ‘community of practice’ at the workplace as seamlessly as possible), of pedagogical preparation (helping the participant to define and visualise the learning process) and mental preparation (how to deal with homesickness, frustration, etc.). This preparation may be done individually or in groups, depending on the nature of the project and the resources available. The organisation u.bus has worked a lot with preparation in groups and developed and refined techniques for using group dynamics in this process, whereas the participants in Open youth education are prepared individually and over a long period of time, as part of their overall educational plan. Both methods may have their strengths in particular circumstances; the important thing is that it happens, and in a way that is appropriate to the needs of the participants. In the Interpraktik programme, preparation is done individually and under the aegis of the municipal job centres. It may last for as long as six months and it is estimated by the programme administrators that the average length is around two months. But both quality and duration vary greatly from municipality to municipality, however, and generally this is a feature that the International Programme Office is trying to develop. The success of this – and also a possible indicator for the importance of good preparation in transnational placement projects – is that the percentage of premature returnees is reducing, even though more efforts have been made to induce lower skilled people to participate. Exactly what ‘good preparation’ is must necessarily be contingent upon the nature of the target group, and of course the availability of resources for this (financing, expertise) will also set limits. But its contents must be defined for each of the aspects mentioned above.

On the issue of linguistic preparation, a European study was carried out under the aegis of the Lingua and Petra programmes of the European Commission (Carpenter, Eglöff and Watters, 1995).

5.1.9. **Debriefing after homecoming**

This parameter is identified as an individual ‘learning situation’ in the general theory on learning in placement abroad used here, and its importance in projects dealing with disadvantaged groups can be rationally deduced from the focus on personal skills. It follows in particular from the notion of the ‘free space’, where participants experiment with aspects of their personality and vocational orientation in an atmosphere where this may be done relatively painlessly. Any less successful changes may be left behind at the day of departure and the participant may revert to his or her old ways. This is, however, also where the danger lies. Any new developments (or just the germs for these) in personality changes and vocational reorientation may easily be forgotten again or stamped out once the participants return to their original environments and are met with the former image of themselves, as reflected in the expectations of the environment. Especially in shorter stays, where such changes have not had the time to become so deep-seated that they can withstand this pressure from the outside, participants may need support and guidance to cling on to these developments and act on them. Essentially, this is a process of guidance, and as such it is built into some of the case studies, in particular those where the participants are from an institution or a programme set-up where guidance forms an integral part. This is the case in Unge i Vandtårnet and Frederiksberg Daghøjskole, but in also the production schools and the organisation Wien work. In the case of the Interpraktik and the European year programme, debriefing seems mainly to assume the shape of a written report, and not of an interactive process.

One important aspect of debriefing that may be much less sophisticated, but nevertheless quite important, is that of helping the participants to put words to their experiences and thus make them fully conscious of what actually happened (Stadler, 1994). It can be done through appreciative enquiry, or even through written reports but it is important that there is feedback afterwards. A complementary method is to use the participants to brief new applicants for the programme, which forces them to think systematically about what happened, and to answer questions from an interested and committed audience.

In general, however, there seems to be much less emphasis on preparation and debriefing after homecoming than the actual placement period itself, but it may be argued that in the case of disadvantaged participants, these elements are of crucial importance to the success of the project in terms of learning. Also the relationship between the two seems skewed, with generally much more emphasis being placed on preparation than on the debriefing after homecoming. Even in the case of a highly experienced organisation like u.bus, this imbalance is quite obvious, with preparation being given considerably more attention.

6. Conclusion

Concluding on this study is difficult, for what conclusions can we draw from our analysis of the empirical material? Quantitatively, eight case studies are too few to allow us to generalise; qualitatively, we have not attained sufficient depth to validate our findings according to the accepted practice of research. What we have done can perhaps be described as an exploratory study, a heuristic exercise, the aim of which is to arrive at a hypothesis, or perhaps even the delineation of a theory, of the use of placements abroad for disadvantaged groups.

If we were, however, to sum up the essence of the work, it may run as follows: placements abroad can be described as a learning platform, which offers a range of potential learning outcomes by means of specific 'learning situations'. These learning outcomes and learning situations may be valorised and adapted to particular target groups and skills needs. For disadvantaged groups, the main value resides in a sense of achievement, which builds up self-confidence and self-esteem, and the presence of a 'free space' which allows experimentation with aspects of the personality and the vocational orientation of the participants. In addition, participants may acquire international skills (foreign language proficiency and intercultural skills), vocational skills (technology and knowledge of foreign markets), intercultural understanding, and a capacity to deal with change and diversity.

This theory may be correct, partially correct or perhaps even fundamentally wrong, but it represents a first step on the way to an understanding of how participation in placements abroad may benefit disadvantaged groups. As is evident from the literature survey, very little has been done in the way of dedicated research and development, and even documentation of practice is extremely sparse. This means that project coordinators setting out to organise placement projects for disadvantaged groups are required largely to harvest their own experiences and proceed in a process of trial and error. This consumes considerable resources, and probably in many cases means that the full learning potential of these placements abroad is not adequately exploited. This can only be rectified if practices are studied and causes understood, and the 'tools of the trade' documented and made available. There is an interesting indication in one of the case studies of what a professionalisation of practices may do to a programme. In the Swedish Interpraktik programme, there is a rate of premature return of between 10-15 %. In recent years, however, this percentage has been diminishing, despite the facts that efforts have been made to include more participants with 'heavier' disadvantages into the programme (lower skills levels, longer period of unemployment). This decrease appears in tandem with an increased focus on preparation of participants, and it is tempting to see a connection between these two factors.

What is very clear from the case studies, however, is that the term 'disadvantaged' covers a very diverse target group, even with the precisions and exclusions made initially in this study. These differences make it impossible to produce a 'one-size-fits-all' pedagogical model for the involvement of disadvantaged groups in transnational placement projects, if by the term 'pedagogical model' we understand a detailed user instruction that can be applied to any

situation. The pedagogical model presented in hypothetical form here is rather a deeper understanding of what participation in a transnational placement project can do for disadvantaged groups, and consequently where the focal point of the attention should be. It is not merely a matter of 'inclusion' or 'equal rights'; i.e. of ensuring that an acceptable proportion of the total sum of participants in the Leonardo da Vinci programme comes with the label 'disadvantaged' attached to them, so that we can avoid accusations of elitism. There are some very real and tangible benefits to be achieved, but this requires that practical organisation is adapted to the target group at hand. In the case studies included in this report, an array of models and tools are presented and described, even though not in sufficient detail to be used for more than inspiration by would-be organisers. But it is very obvious how organisers have used different models and tools for different variations of the target group 'disadvantaged'. It is hoped that more detailed descriptions will be made and disseminated in the future.

Finally, some remarks on two questions that almost inevitably are going to be asked at the conclusion of such a study. The first concerns the use of placements abroad as a tool. Placements abroad are resource-demanding, both in time and money. Wouldn't it be possible to arrive at similar results but through other, and less costly means, for instance by using placements in a national context? Perhaps, but this would happen at the expense of a very important element in the learning process, namely that of the 'free space'. Even when moving participants to another town for their placement, the cultural stigmatisation as 'disadvantaged' would most likely follow, and roles may be reinforced rather than changed. Also the sense of achievement may be replicated in other surroundings. In that sense, there is nothing new under the sun. Bungee-jumps, trekking tours in the wilderness and skiing trips have been (and are) used as didactic tools with disadvantaged youths to give them the feeling of having coped with a challenge and achieved a success experience that may spark off a virtuous circle. There are horses for courses, and there are very probably target groups for whom a placement abroad is not a useful instrument. But placements abroad seem to offer a powerful learning potential, and should (in view of the mainly positive experience reported in the case studies) at least be considered as one of the tool in the educational toolbox we use for this target group.

The second question concerns the risk inherent in sending disadvantaged groups abroad. No matter how professional we become, we can never eliminate the risk that some participants will fail the challenge and return prematurely with a sense of defeat and dejection rather than achievement and re-orientation. Risk of failure is a necessary ingredient in any challenge, but what exactly is 'risk'? The Interpraktik programme operates with a rate of premature return between 10 and 15 %, and this can be said to be high. But this should be held against the fact that between 65 and 75 % of the participants seem to benefit from the experience and find employment or continue in mainstream education and training within a short period of time after homecoming. Furthermore, it can be argued that also mainstream education and training is risky: there are also significant drop-out rates here, where participants leave with feelings of rejection and incompetence, and we consequently need alternatives.

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Disadvantaged groups in transnational placement projects

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“Inclusion” is a key issue in European education and training policies, and should consequently also be applied to the possibilities of access to transnational mobility projects undertaken for learning purposes. Yet many times these involve only the most competent and motivated of the potential target group. How do we involve so called “disadvantaged” persons in stays abroad, and what are the specific benefits of these activities for this particular target group?

This study investigates these issues on the basis of case studies of 8 projects and programmes from 5 Member States, which all concern disadvantaged groups and placements abroad. It concludes that there are great potential benefits to be reaped from such activities – notably in the shape of increased personal competencies – but that they also pose specific challenges to the pedagogical set-up of the projects. A period abroad will not in itself produce the desired effects, unless it is underpinned by a consistent pedagogical methodology, which covers not only the placement, but also the time before and after the stay.

Disadvantaged groups in transnational placement projects

P A N O R A M A



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