Why is it so difficult to include "inclusion"?

Why do I need to be talking about inclusion? Is that something that comes as part of my role in the European youth work field? Or am I genuinely interested in talking about it?

Who benefits from my being involved in the conversation about inclusion? Am I contributing to some overall shift in the field? And do I benefit myself?

Answers to these questions could potentially help us confront difficulty when including inclusion in our mobility conversations.

How can I focus on inclusion without feeling that I need to squeeze it into some boxes and add it to mobility programmes or any other existing activities?

If I am so interested in talking about it, but don't feel competent enough, how could I gain more confidence?
Should I go and try to do (some more) work in the field of inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, in particular through mobility programmes? Or should I read more about it? Or perhaps something completely different?

Do I know the reality of working with young people with fewer opportunities enough to be able to talk about it freely and provide evidence of what works and what doesn't?

Am I ready to admit defeat and reflect on potential failures in my attempts to work with the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in mobility programmes? In addition, am I ready to challenge existing practices and demand real proof that inclusion is happening as the organisers claim it is?

WE FOCUSED ON BUILDING UP THOSE KIDS SELF-ESTEEM

TO BE ABLE TO SEE THAT I'M WORTH SOMETHING.

WHO AM I? WHERE I AM FROM?

YOU NEED TO BE ABLE TO KNOW YOURSELF BEFORE GOING TO MOBILITY PROJECTS

IF YOU WANT TO INCLUDE PEOPLE IN NEEDS YOU HAVE TO GO LOOK FOR THEM

YOU ARE PERSON FROM THE WORLD!

Illustration by Siiri Taimla

Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?

By **Özgehan Şenyuva**

The added value of youth mobility, in particular the skill-developing benefits of international mobility, is well documented. Rigorous research – as conducted for instance by the RAY network (Research Based Analysis of Youth in Action) – provides sufficient evidence that young people develop various competences through their participation in learning mobility schemes.[1] After their mobility experience young people, in general, have acquired a more global mindset, stronger self-confidence, intercultural teamwork skills, and a higher degree of individual responsibility.

1. Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Erasmus+: Youth in Action' (RAY), implemented by a network of Erasmus+: Youth in Action National Agencies and their research partners currently in 29 European countries http://www.researchyouth.net/publications/

Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?

Given these incontestable benefits, there is a major effort among European youth circles towards making mobility schemes more accessible for young people from disadvantaged social backgrounds with fewer opportunities. And there is a good reason for this: in study after study, research reveals that the majority of the participants in learning mobility schemes correspond to a certain profile. They are better educated and have already adopted an international perspective. In other words, those who are already well equipped with the prerequisites for the acquisition of the competences that mobility will provide them.

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As educators we would, of course, like to believe that personal development is exactly why they participated in the first place. In other words, we assume that young people proactively participate in developing their competences. I believe there is a certain degree of wishful thinking in such an assumption. Mobility holds more promises than meet the eye. By focusing on the development of social and interpersonal competences we are missing a very large group of young people who participate in mobility schemes for two major reasons: having fun and escaping from reality.

And these are perfectly legitimate reasons! Being a young person is not easy. And it is getting more difficult. To put it in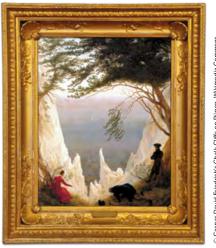 the terms of a dilemma of classical economics, young people have infinite needs and desires, but very little resources. The ongoing global crisis and its negative impact on societies are making these resources even scarcer. Young people have to put up with economic and political problems for which they are not responsible, but whose consequences they have to suffer. For a reality check on the deteriorating living conditions of young people in Europe, the recent findings of the EU Youth Report 2015 are particularly striking.[2] In such a moment, if someone offers you the chance to go away, leave it all behind and discover something else… why not? Maybe the grass is really greener on the other side? And even if it isn't, it still could be nice to have a break, spend some time in a different place, and have some fun with different people.

Come away with me on a bus
Come away where they can't tempt us
With their lies

Norah Jones, "Come away with me" (2002)

2. EU Youth Report 2015, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/report_en.htm, accessed 28 November 2015.

German is a complicated language. And, to the surprise of many, it is a beautiful one with a very rich vocabulary to describe emotions. Certain words have such complex, multi-layered meanings that people consider them untranslatable. In the context of our topic, there are two wonderfully relevant examples. *Sehnsucht*, for instance. Wikipedia, the most common reference at the moment, defines *Sehnsucht* as "thoughts and feelings about all facets of life that are unfinished or imperfect, paired with a yearning for ideal alternative experiences". Does this not perfectly apply to young people facing challenges in their societies? Happiness is necessarily out there, in an alternative experience, probably in an alternative place. Another term, *Fernweh*, means literally "faraway-sickness", a longing for places never travelled to.[3] As Talia Gutin describes: "*Fernweh* is an ache for experiences never had and sensations never felt. Where homesickness is a yearning for the familiar, *Fernweh* is a yearning for the complete unknown — a place free from the limiting confines of our familiar society and home."[4] Don't our youth mobility schemes offer a window of opportunity to respond to this yearning? Go somewhere, just do it. They offer a chance to make the "strange familiar and the familiar strange".[5] *Sehnsucht* and *Fernweh* – two major, perhaps underestimated, motivations to go abroad through mobility programmes.

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Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high
There's a land that I heard of, once in a lullaby
Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue
And the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true

H. Arlen and E.Y. Harburg from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)

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Following the end of the Cold War and the historic reunification of Europe, young people across the continent heard the call to seize the opportunity to travel. They could now go freely to places that had always been inaccessible before, and meet with similarly minded (or not) young people speaking different languages.

However, this has never been as easy as it sounds. Just consider Moldova, where the average salary per month is €181, or Hungary where it is €503. Even if the strict visa policies, which made it practically impossible for a young person to travel are no longer valid for many countries (though still a nightmare for some, including Turkey, with one of the biggest youth populations in Europe), going mobile still remains very difficult.

3. Talia Gutin, "Fernweh" at www.fernwey.com/fernweh/ 14 November 2015.
4. Ibid.
5. Megan Melissa Machamer, "Making the strange familiar and the familiar strange: Stepping into the shoes of an ethnographer" at http://peepsforum.com/making-strange-familiar/ 29 December 2015.

>>> **Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?**

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This is where organised mobility schemes, such as youth exchanges or voluntary service, step in. They offer a very affordable opportunity to travel. They also provide a purpose to the travel: the time abroad is not only spent consuming, but producing something. Furthermore, organised mobility schemes offer a comfortable environment, where the young person can focus on the theme rather than mere everyday survival (there is a programme, there are food and accommodation arrangements, there are in-group mechanisms for making decisions, etc.). On top of that, in a mobility programme, social interactions are greatly facilitated (at least in the beginning). In the case of group exchanges, there are name games, parties, ice-breakers and energisers. Compared with formal learning at schools, there is a great deal of non-formal and informal learning that takes place, and the young people are in active control of their learning process. They undergo it voluntarily, rather than having it imposed on them. It all sounds good, and it generally is. Once you get the taste for such an environment, it is difficult to let it go. This explains the well-known phenomenon of "professional participants", who jump from one project to another, always the most active. They simply can't get enough of that environment.

*Is this the real life?
Is this just fantasy?
Caught in a landslide,
No escape from reality.*

Queen, *Bohemian Rhapsody* (1975)

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One of the most dangerous moments in space travel is always the re-entry into the atmosphere on the way back to planet Earth. This is also a very popular subject in sci-fi movies: the starship or shuttle shakes and rattles; it glows all red with fire outside and the protagonists scream and swear. And all of a sudden it's over: they look outside the window and are greeted with amazing blue skies and clouds. It is a very important climatic moment that symbolises that the unknown is over: you are home, you are safe.

Returning from a mobility programme is a similar experience. The longer the mobility, the harder it becomes to re-enter. All the youth workers engaging with volunteers know when to watch out for the pre-return depression. As they get closer to the end of the project, the volunteers start worrying and becoming slightly depressed about … going back home. It is rather understandable: once you are abroad, you always have home as a security option. If everything goes wrong during mobility, you can escape to home. But what do you do when things go wrong at home? That is why a majority of EVS volunteers for instance try to prolong their stays or even wish to continue living in their newly adopted host countries.[6]

The re-entry syndrome also points to the need for the development and implementation of post-mobility programmes and training for young people. In well-managed multinational corporations, reintegration after work placement abroad is recognised and planned for as it is a delicate process, which is an essential part of the whole mobility experience. Post-mobility training programmes would not only ease the reintegration of mobility participants, but would also facilitate the self-recognition of competences acquired.

Overall, mobility schemes offer young people a possibility to meet the yearning they feel for a change of time and space. Lucky are those who have the information, time and resources to participate in such programmes. Millions of young people, unfortunately, are not even aware of the possibility to benefit from mobility, and they continue to shoulder their own realities, whatever they may be, trying to endure their *Fernweh*. It is when these young people are entitled to their "escape from reality" (which, incidentally, also develops precious competences) that the purpose of mobility programmes will have been accomplished.

6. REVS Competences for Employment research project full report at
www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusiontraining/PastInclusionCourses/evsskillsandemployability, accessed on 14 November 2015.