



## Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



# *The value of learning mobility and its impact on communities*

*Desk research, December 2018*

*By Justina Garbauskaite-Jakimovska*

The preparation process and need of the field for the topic of the EPLM Conference “The Power of Learning Mobility: changing lives, changing society” shows that it is time to acknowledge that learning mobility **impacts on many more players than the individual participants** and their personal or professional development.

Desk research was carried out at the end of 2018 to assess the current analysis of the value of learning mobility and its impact on communities. Here are a few key summary points that came from that desk research:

## **How do mobility projects reach the community and have an impact on it?**

There are **3 main approaches**:

1. Most of the time, impact on the community is achieved **by involving community members in the activities** of learning mobility and direct interaction with the participants;
2. The **“multiplier effect”** impact is achieved by participants taking action in their home communities. This means that the participants improve their competences and acquire certain values during their mobility. Afterwards, they either get actively involved in various activities targeted at creating a more active, responsible and cohesive society, or they simply share their knowledge and newly-gained points of view with their families, friends and other peers.
3. The impact on communities might embody itself in **visibility measures** or in the **dissemination of results** targeting the local communities. As a result, these communities would be engaged in and informed about the issues that the organisers of the project intended to address.

## Short-term mobility activities

- For **short-term** actions, the impact on communities is usually not specifically targeted, but it appears in studies considering the general impact of mobility programmes. It is mostly presented in an abstract way, formulated very often as “there is (positive) impact”.
- **Short-term** programmes are usually focused on the personal development of the participants in the mobility activity. Therefore, the research on impact on the broader society or communities is more often directed to the home (sending) communities and relies on a multiplier effect.
- The impact on the communities or society in general is less direct, more difficult to grasp and requires a complex research methodology which, especially in **short-term** projects, is not the main aim.
- In **short-term** projects, the impact of learning mobility is less obvious and tangible immediately after the learning mobility, but can have significant impact on the long-term perspective and contribute a great deal to the development of local or national youth work practices and policies – although it can be difficult to prove.

## Long-term mobility activities

- In long-term international volunteering (including work camps), which is usually directed at working with local communities, the **impact is more visible and appears more often** in studies or in the presentation of the results of the project.
- The general impact studies indicate that most of the gain by the community comes from long-term volunteering activities when foreigners are **immersed in local communities**.

## Local communities

- The impact on local communities is often **not measured, but implied**. It is tightly connected with: communication, direct actions of volunteers in order to benefit the communities or, in the case of closed small communities, living together, being present among other members.
- The impact of learning mobility on the community level is **stronger and more positive** in the case of communities that have **not had many prior interactions** with foreigners.

- The local host communities do actually benefit from interaction with the participants of learning mobility and it **helps the communities** to become more open to differences in people, perspectives or needs.
- A fairly common feature in publications on the topic of impact on communities is that it is known to experts, participants of the learning mobility projects, and might even be obvious to the communities themselves. However, **the lack of actual empirical research**, numbers or real stories shows a **lack in proof** that learning mobility has an impact not only on the participants' personal and professional development, but is also valuable to society.
- Most of the **research does not involve the community members themselves**, but is researched through the participants of the learning mobility or through the organisers of projects (initiatives). They are often asked for their opinion on how their learning mobility project affected the local community or the broader society.
- The impact of learning mobility on communities is to the most extent **implied, but rarely supported by data, evidence or actual research** with the members of local communities.
- There is a **need for further research** directly tackling the impact on communities as the data that is currently available is most often formulated with "might have", "can have", "potentially", "intuitive".

### Some quotes from research

- Returned volunteers "possess a massive ability to shape attitudes, change mindsets, and give global perspectives to domestic situations" (Thomas 2001)
- "the impact on local communities is also remarkable: 98% of interviewed representatives registered a positive impact on cultural/intercultural competence in their communities, and 79% in the participation of local people in the daily life of the community" (Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations 2016)
- "as a result of their participation, young people felt they could try and bring about change in society and their participation had impacted on their sense of who they were and their understanding of political and social issues" (Stanley 2005)
- "volunteering allows people to gain competences valuable for the labour market and enhances societal cohesion; it promotes active citizenship and facilitates participation in society; it safeguards the democratic foundations of European societies, and is deeply rooted in their nature" (Shalayeva 2012)
- "mobility experiences give young people the vital skills they need, not only for future employment, but also to be citizens and active participants in society" (Garrahy 2013)

- “A majority of ... EVS volunteers (75.5%) declared that they did intend to participate more actively after their periods of time abroad”. (Ančić and Brajdić Vuković (eds) 2017)
- “youth exposure to cultural diversity does not only benefit the individuals directly involved but also the communities concerned, as well as families and peers. It helps spread a culture of openness, solidarity and tolerance which has an impact beyond the individual participants directly involved” (Lejeune 2013)
- “Youth Exchanges are specifically appreciated for bringing an intercultural dimension to the local project environment <...> but at the same time they rank low for involving the local community in the project – a challenge for short-term projects with multilingual/multicultural groups” (Fennes et al. 2011)

### **If you want to dig deeper - a selection of the bibliography used for the desk research:**

1. Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations (2016), What is the impact of workcamps? Available at <http://www.alliance-network.eu/what-is-the-impact-of-workcamps/2016/3108/>
2. Barta O. et al. (2018), Ray LTE: Long-Term Effects Of Erasmus+: Youth In Action On Participation And Citizenship. Draft Interim Transnational Analysis 2018. Main Findings From Interviews And Surveys Between 2015 And 2018. Available at <https://www.researchyouth.eu/download?id=241>
3. Brakel K. (2012), Local impact of the Youth in Action programme Action 3 in Euro Mediterranean co-operation. Available at <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3189/Youth%20in%20Action%20EuroMed%20Impact%20Study.pdf>
4. Brunner S. (2016), Impact compendium on youth exchange: An overview of scientific research results on the impact of intercultural exchanges. Available at <http://www.intermundo.ch/Wirkungskompodium-Englisch.pdf>
5. Fennes et al. (2011), Research-based Analysis of Youth in Action. Results from the first series of surveys with project participants and project leaders between October 2009 and June 2010: Transnational Analysis. Available at <http://www.researchyouth.eu/download?id=28>
6. Jezowski et al. (2016), The impact of European Voluntary Service on local communities. Available at <http://czytelnia.frse.org.pl/media/The-impact-of-EVS-on-local-communities.pdf>
7. Powel S. and Bratovic E. (2007), *The impact of long-term youth volunteering service in Europe: a review of published and unpublished research studies*, AVSO, Brussels.

### **Some options for next steps in response to these findings**

- a) Use a 360-degree feedback model to assess impact from different perspectives. Use self-assessment tools and cross-assessment frameworks (peer evaluation);
- b) Gather real experiences from host communities that were impacted by learning mobility: conduct interviews, focus groups or surveys with the family members or friends of those directly involved in the learning mobility activities;

- c) Re-balance the focus on short-term mobility and its impact on the communities - not only on mid- and long-term mobility;
- d) Co-operate with the participants of learning mobility activities, train them and include them into societal impact assessment as researchers in their home communities;
- e) Initiate a longitudinal study that would start with surveying the representatives of host communities of volunteers before and after learning mobility activities. In order to implement this strategy on research, a very close co-operation with the national agencies and the co-ordinating and hosting organisations would be crucial.

*...and what would you add? What else should be done? Tell us at the conference!*