
Lasting Impact of Study Abroad Experiences

Revealing the meaning that a study stay abroad has for the personal and academic development of students is the main theme of this article. A brief reflection about the stereotypes that are found in an encounter with the stranger, introduces us to the fragments of the interviews made to four students at the end or after their experiences abroad.

Based on these experiences, we will delve into the processes that occur in the encounter with the other.

By situating the study stay in the university context, aspects related to the internationalization of universities and student mobility are described.

The encounter with the stranger

Within the framework of international cooperation between Mexican and German universities, study stays have been organized for several years with the aim of promoting intercultural education, which means: education in interaction and exchange and openness to the cultural values of the various human groups

A stay of study abroad confronts each student with their prejudices against strangers. The examples presented in this article include experiences of a Mexican student in Germany, a German student in Mexico, and a Mexican student and a German student in China.

The starting point for the appreciation of the other is the moment of how one is self-placed against the other.

The starting point of the interviewed students was reflected in their judgment about the encounter with the others in the mentioned countries. The stereotypes with which the contexts were linked played an important role, and are imaginary with respect to the characteristics and behaviors, which are ascribed to a certain group of people. They are behavior models that reduce and fragment complex realities to simpler schemes. In the concrete encounter one can discover the confirmation of the stereotype or find exactly the opposite

First impressions

German student in Mexico: "The arrival in Mexico City was a real cultural shock, you do not

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know what you have to do, luckily there was someone who helped me, took me to the taxi and told me what to do”

German student in China: “My first impression was of selfishness, an unexpected individuality, the Chinese have no sense of team, social relations are catastrophic, there is chaos, they spit where they want, they are not respectful, conflicts are not resolved. You cannot trust anyone, everyone does what they want, there is no protection and legality, injustices are endured”.

In the 4 examples, stereotypes are reflected in relation to the countries that hosted and that are manifested in the first impressions of the students (with chaotic traffic). For Mexicans there is the image of Germany as a country with a very advanced technological development, with a very rigid order, and cold human relations.

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