Kapittel 12
Being international and not being international at the same time
*The challenges of peer relations under mobility*

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**SAMANDRAG** Denne artikkelen tar for seg ungdomsgruppa som flyttar på seg i samanheng med elevutveksling på vidaregåande skule. Fokuset er retta mot jamaldерgruppa og spesielt effekten av å vere saman med jamalder frå same heimland under utanlandsopphaldet. Jamalder frå same heimland har ei mangesidig rolle under mobilitet. Dei kan fungere som eit ankerpunkt som skapar tryggleik i vertslandet, men kan også danne ei nasjonal «kulturfelle» som held ungdommen borte frå den nye kulturen og nye relasjonar.

**ABSTRACT** This paper draws attention to the mobility of young people who move abroad in the context of pupil’s exchange. It focuses on peer groups and the effect of compatriot peer relations in the host country. Compatriot peer relations play a multifaceted role during mobility. They help pupils tackle the challenges of the new situations and ease the costs of social investment, but they may also function as a cultural trap, preventing the mobile young from embracing the new culture and new relations.

**NØKKELORD** ungdom | mobilitet | elevutveksling | jamaldergruppa

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1. This paper is a part of the on-going research on youth mobility in Europe within the European H2020-project «Mapping mobility – pathways, institutions and structural effects of youth mobility in Europe (MOVE)», which aims to contribute to the research on European youth mobility; it discusses initial results of the qualitative research. The MOVE project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 649263.

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INTRODUCTION

Peers are a vital aspect of young people’s transition to adulthood (Reitz, Zimmernann, Hutteman, Specht, & Neyer, 2014; Sletten, 2013; Tepperman, Albanese, & Curtis, 2008). However, the role of peers in youth mobility has rarely been considered. In the following, which uses an explorative account on how young people ground their mobility, we want to focus on interview sequences that address the interlinkage between peer relations and mobility.

Most of the young are part of a peer network which is central in both institutional and non-institutional settings. Since young people spend a significant part of their daytime hanging around with their peers, those relations play a central role in the young people’s identity formation, knowledge development, world views, and behaviour (Little, 2014, p. 152–153). Furthermore, peers have a strong impact on social integration and thus on social capital, and they function as a factor against marginalisation (Sletten, 2013, p. 131). As a kind of social capital, peers supply information, assure information flow, and help to access further sources of information.

However, drawing on current empirical evidence, we propose that peers – especially in respect to their cultural and social capital – account for very different experiences under mobility, with regard to accessing new cultural contexts. If young people develop intercultural connections and exchange with young people in the host country, they establish a basic precondition for intercultural experiences, learning and practice (Campbell, 2012). However, if the mobile pupils instead stick together with their peers from their country of origin, intercultural experiences and learning processes based on intercultural exchange are hindered and in some cases even blocked (Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, & Williams, 2014, p. 21).

Hence, the aim of this article is to shed light on the relationship between peers and the cross border mobility of young people – in our case pupils from grammar school tracks. In doing so we present both positive and negative reflections of the young mobile regarding the role of their peers in their encounter with a new culture before, during, and after mobility. By using interviews with four pupils and one expert (out of a total of 15 pupils and two expert interviews in the Norwegian

2. Authors in alphabetical order.
3. Spencer et al. (2014, p. 21) call it «compatriot friendship». 
sample) from the ongoing international project MOVE being carried out among six European countries (Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Norway Romania and Spain), we will point to certain dilemmas that result from peer relations under pupil exchange mobility.

**SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF PEER RELATIONS UNDER MOBILITY**

One of the challenges of the term «peers» is that it lacks a clear-cut definition as a result of differences in focus in different disciplinary traditions. Depending on the (theoretical or empirical) frame of reference, different characteristics such as status, age, attitudes, behaviour, contexts of social exchange, etc. are seen as central to the concept. Things become further complicated with regard to the type of people who are included in the category peers: close friends, friends, comrades, colleagues, children of parents’ friends, young people in the neighbourhood etc. (Reitz et al., 2014, p. 280).

Sociologists, psychologists and economists have investigated peer effects for a variety of peer types including schoolmates, roommates, classmates, college course mates and friends. While Chan and Lam for example, identify three major peer networks of secondary school students: friends, study mates, and seatmates (Chan & Lan, 2014, p. 2). Reitz et al. (2014, p. 279) define peers more broadly: «They entail a broad range of people who surround us in our everyday lives from early childhood until old age. Members of the same classroom, community, work or sports team constitute important and highly salient peer-group contexts». This already shows how complicated it can be to define peers and to identify them empirically (Reitz et al., 2014, p. 280). However, using a broad concept of peers – same age span, social relation/interchange, similar social status, similar experiences – we will discuss in the following how young mobile people address peers in the context of their mobility.

According to socialisation theory, peers are an important factor in personal development and behaviour (Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2013; Reitz et al., 2014). They influence the transition from youth to adulthood, give (or block) support, help (or hinder) in times of crises, and guarantee – if available – a range of forms of social embeddedness and integration (Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2013, p. 174–176). In addition, peers significantly influence the forms of leisure activities, give structure where leisure activities take place, and influence strategies to cope with leisure time challenges. In the view of Hurrelman (2013, p. 175) peers are characterised by four key dimensions. Firstly, they give members the possibility to draw
a line between the peer group and the world outside (mostly the adult world). Secondly, they significantly affect pupils’/students’ belongingness, identity, and connectedness (Tran & Gomes, 2017, p. 4–5) and thus frame actions within and outside the peer group. Thirdly, they trigger needs, which are oriented on the structure and social exchange within the peer group, and, finally, they exist mainly outside institutional settings such as schools or other adult initiated or dominated institutions.

In intercultural situations, peers might have an ambivalent function, especially if the young continue to spend most of their time with peers from their own origin – compatriot peer relations (Spencer et al. 2014, p. 21) – and less with peers from the host country – non-compatriot peer relations. We assume that if mobile pupils hesitate to get in contact with the home students, they will miss intercultural contact, will only partly participate in intercultural learning situations, and therefore will have only minimal cultural experiences. According to Harrison (2015, p. 412) the same counts for home students who resist intercultural interrelations with international peers. In comparison to those with open attitudes, intercultural contact and exchange, they miss «transformative experiences and powerful knowledge.» (Harrison, 2015, p. 412). A restricted intercultural contact hinders «intercultural sensitivity» and «sociopragmatic awareness», blocks modes of accessing the new culture, and does not promote «intercultural empathy» as «intercultural sensitivity» (Jackson, 2008, p. 349). On the other hand, «non-compatriot friendships are associated with greater engagement in social activities and with greater satisfaction in building good contacts for the future.» (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014, p. 22). Hence inter-cultural friendship, cooperation, and communication foster the wellbeing and social and cultural adjustment of the young (Bista & Foster, 2016, p. 229). In an overall summary of research Gareis (2012) writes «International students who make friends with host nationals have stronger language skills, better academic performance, lower levels of stress and greater life satisfaction. Friendships also aid overall adjustment and improve attitudes towards the host country» (Gareis, 2012).

In the context of mobility the choice of the host country is, beside individual preferences, highly affected by the institutional frame of exchange, that is the kind of organisation and the form of school cooperation (King, Lulle, Moroșanu, & Williams, 2016). Pupil exchange in Norway is mostly organised through two main paths: pupils go abroad either through an exchange organisation or under the framework of a cooperation program between schools in and/or municipalities in host and sending countries (Tungesvik, 2016, p. 10). The exchange organisation or the institutional context of the cooperation determines where the pupils can go and where not. That on the one hand creates a kind of national embeddedness of
pupils during mobility – and thus a kind of compatriot social integration. On the other hand, however, this might create a kind of nationality trap in relation to pupil mobility with regard to the role of peers in this context.

Against that background it can be assumed that the kind of peer relations in which young people are embedded will become important particularly in the context of young people’s cross border mobility. If, for example, young people move with the whole or parts of their class in the context of student exchange abroad and have no or only restricted opportunities (Eller, Abrams, & Gomez, 2012) to establish contact with pupils in the host country (Harrison 2015), the odds of continuing a «compatriot peer relation» or «compatriot friendship» (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014, p. 21) investment are high. If the young moved by themselves, the situation would certainly be different. This would count for both the perceived incentives for (further) investment in intercultural relations and the actual commitment in respect to social non-compatriot peer relations or friendships (Eller et al., 2012; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014, p. 21). Hence, young people can be international4 and at the same time can be not international5 if they in fact continue with their compatriot peer relations or friendships.

METHOD

To tackle our research question, we use an empirically grounded, explorative perspective on peer relations in cross border youth mobility. The interviews have been carried out within the context of the Horizon 2020 framework research project «MOVE: Mapping mobility – pathways, institutions and structural effects of youth mobility in Europe» 6. The aim of the project is to cast light on the experiences of the young mobile and to understand what promotes or prevents young people’s mobility. The MOVE project operates with six youth mobility types: student mobility for higher education, cross-border volunteering, employment mobility, mobility for a vocational training, pupil exchange, and entrepreneurship mobility. This article focuses on cross border mobility within the context of pupil exchange. In order to gain insight into the role played by peers – non-compatriot and compatriot peer relations or friendships – under mobility, we have chosen a method that offers the possibility to disclose the subjective role of peers under mobility in a relational perspective.

4. In a restricted sense of moving from a place A to a place B abroad.
5. In a broader sense of intercultural contact, exchange, and learning.
The target group of the project consists of young people who became mobile within the context of pupil exchange. The Norwegian sample comprises qualitative narrative interviews with 15 young pupils and two experts. The criterion of the participants’ selection for youth was their experience of pupil exchange mobility during their upper secondary education (Videregående skole). The criteria for experts’ selection were their relevant research and practical work experience in the field of youth mobility. The interviewees include both incoming European students to Norway and outgoing pupils from Norway to other European countries. With all interviewees, qualitative narrative interviews combined with network maps were conducted. All of the interviewed young mobile were at the time of data collection in the age group 17–21. According to a national report on pupil mobility in Norway (Tungesvik, 2016), significantly more females than males choose to go on an exchange abroad – 74% females and 26% males. Because of this unequal distribution, we recruited fewer males than females in our sampling groups (10 female pupils and 5 male pupils).

During the interviews, we introduced our sample group to the concept of a network map (Altissimo, 2016). This method was launched in the early stages of the interview, during a particular discussion of relationships and their relevance for mobility, in order to keep track of the relationships that were particularly meaningful to the pupils on the move. While talking about relationships important to them when they were abroad, they would note down names, groups of people, organisations, programs, ideas, etc. on post-its and place them on the map, according to their importance to them. The network map concept was an important tool that helped to open up the discussion and encouraged the interviewees to organize their thoughts about the role of relations before, during, and after mobility (Altissimo, 2016).

In the following, we introduce the role of peers before, during, and after mobility. Here we focus on two contrasting cases – Emma and Sara – in a particular discussion of the «compatriot peer effect». By using Sara’s and Emma’s narratives we can illustrate the positive aspects of peer relations pre-mobility. By comparing these two cases and their different attitudes to compatriot friends during mobility, we will demonstrate how young pupils can be both international and not international at the same time during their exchange. The discussion will also include sequences from two other interviewees – Amanda and Clara – demonstrating matters brought to our attentions by incoming pupils to Norway, Norwegian pupils going abroad, and a youth mobility expert.

7. Those most important – closer to the centre of the map; those less important – further away from the centre.
8. The names are pseudonyms chosen by the researchers.
CASES AND CONTEXT OF PUPIL MOBILITY

In the following, we will demonstrate the effect of compatriot peer relations in meeting a new culture in the host country when studying abroad. By using first-hand accounts of two young mobiles, we focus on the role of compatriot peers in an international environment where these relationships can either promote or block interaction with local pupils and social integration.

Sara is a 19-year-old pupil from Norway who went on an exchange year to the U.K in her second year of upper secondary school (Sara was 18 years old at the time of the exchange). She went abroad as a part of an exchange program along with five other pupils from her school. While guiding us through the process towards mobility, Sara described her exchange organisation as highly institution-alised. Upon her arrival at school in the U.K, she discovered there were in total 80 Norwegian pupils from all across Norway. A large amount of fees had to be paid in advance to cover all the costs related to school and the host family. Sara’s exchange was partly financed by the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (Lånekassen) and partly with support from her parents. In return, she got to be an exchange student and was followed up by her organisation throughout her stay in the U.K. Sara considered getting out of the small town and making new friends as a key factor and motivator in her choice to go abroad. She further highlighted the importance of compatriot peers during her stay in the U.K.

Emma is a 20-year-old pupil from Norway who went on an exchange semester to Italy in her second year of upper secondary school (Emma was 18 years old at the time of her exchange). Emma considered travelling to Germany, because of family relations there, but instead she chose to follow an exchange program offered by her school and travel to Italy. She stated that the exchange organised through her school was the easiest choice due to financial factors and a clear institutional framework. The established cooperation between the sending and hosting schools made it therefore also the safest choice. Emma’s school is a part of a specific exchange program where pupils from different countries exchange host families. In the following semester, Emma’s family took on an Italian student in reciprocation for her going to Italy. All the costs, such as study fees and host family, were therefore covered by the exchange organisation. She travelled in a group of five Norwegian girls from her local school, and they were the only Norwegian students at their school in Italy. During the conversation about her time abroad, Emma highlighted her motivation to learn about new cultures and new languages. She considered an exchange to Italy as «a very good opportunity». A fascination with the Italian way of life made her want to experience it and live it to the fullest while she was abroad.
Sara and Emma represent the two contrasting cases of this paper’s analysis on peer effect during mobility. In addition, the cases of pupils Amanda and Clara are introduced in order to broaden and support the arguments made about the compatriot effect. Nineteen years old, Amanda was on the same journey to the U.K. as Sara; they came from the same school and attended the same classes while abroad. Amanda’s exchange was arranged through an exchange organisation, in which she travelled together with a large group of compatriots. Amanda’s case is cited to deepen the understanding of points mentioned by Sara and other pupils in the same situation. Clara, on the other hand, represents one of the incoming students to Norway. She is a Dutch 17-year-old who travelled to Norway through an international organisation. She was among the youngest interviewees and came to Norway alone (not as a part of a larger group of Dutch pupils). However, upon her arrival she discovered other Dutch pupils who were attending the same school, and we will later present some of her initial reflections on this fact. In addition to those of the pupils, some comments taken from one of our expert interviews about pupils’ exchange mobility will be included in the analysis.

COMPATRIOT PEER EFFECT – PRE-MOBILITY

The information on peers and their effect on the decision to move derives from the narrative parts of the interviews. In the cases below, the interviewees implicitly state the role of classmates(peers at the beginning of the interviews. Hence, peers played an important role in the decision to become mobile; they trigger the idea and allow the pupils to start the process of realizing their exchange year abroad.

I had a classmate who was planning to go and then I was like «oh, that sounds fun!». So I just, yeah, I just decided and went. But actually, she didn’t go, I don’t think she could afford it or something. And then her parents wouldn’t let her, so yeah. So I went by myself with five other students from my school. (Sara, line, 2–6)

At first my family were like «nah, you’re not allowed», and then they said «well, you’re allowed, but we think you won’t do it». They thought I would change my mind just before I would leave, after we had to pay and stuff. But I did it. (Sara, line, 41–43)

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9. All of the following quotations are used on a check against delivery basis.
In the interview, Sara states she got the initial idea from her friend; however, in the narratives she also underlined several times how she came to terms with her family about her decision to go. A year abroad, with a constant follow up from the exchange organisation, costs more than other, shorter exchange programs. Therefore, Sara needed to convince her family and get support for this experience. Even though the initial idea to become mobile was triggered by Sara’s classmate, her narrative indicates the importance of family support to achieve it.

Similarly to Sara, Emma also mentioned that her mobility decision was affected by peers who had gone on exchanges before and told her about their positive experiences abroad.

I knew some girls who had done it some years ago and it seemed like they enjoyed it very much and then I thought it was a very good opportunity (Emma, line, 3–4)… I was fascinated by the Italian way and I really wanted to live it while I was there. (…) And when I look back at it now I see I was very, like, obsessed – I really wanted to learn as much as I could about Italy while I was there (Emma, line, 127–133).

As previously mentioned, Emma had a three-month pupil exchange in Italy fully funded by the exchange program. In her narratives, we see that her peers framed the mobility idea. In addition to that, Emma seems strongly driven by her individual plans, strongly focused on learning more about the Italian culture and way of living.

In both cases, we see compatriot peers as an initial motivational factor for becoming mobile. They are the source of the idea to embark on such an exchange and trigger preferences for it. Positive experiences of peers who have been on exchanges abroad generate an influential stimulus for mobility decisions.

COMPATRIOT PEER RELATIONS – DURING MOBILITY

During mobility, compatriot peer relations play a multifaceted role. Firstly, they help pupils tackle the challenges of the new situations and ease the costs of social and cultural investment. In doing so, they can function as a specific national group while encouraging pupils to continue with a form of homeland common-sense practice (e.g. gathering with pupils of their own nationality/culture). Secondly, our data show that compatriot relations quite often function as a cultural trap during the exchange year, keeping the mobile young away from the new culture.
BEING IN THE SAME BOAT, BEING TOGETHER

The interviewees stated that their exchange year was the first long-term mobility in their life. Being away from their families, being a student in another education system, having a different everyday life in a new cultural setting, and living with a host family were the things pupils looked forward to. These were also factors that made them concerned about their exchange year. The interviewees mentioned that travelling with compatriot friends in this exciting journey brought a sense of safety and reduced the feeling of loneliness during their mobility.

My Norwegian friends just made my year during my exchange year. It was fun. It was nice to have Norwegian friends to talk with, and other people in the same place and experiencing the same thing as you are. They’re still my friends (Sara; line, 219–221).

As the quote indicates, compatriot peer relations are seen as a positive factor for social integration under mobility. They help pupils deal with negative consequences of mobility such as homesickness, feelings of alienation, cultural disturbances, insecurity, language barriers, and other challenges. This is valid not only for Norwegian pupils abroad; our data shows that the international students who came for an exchange year to Norway also mention the importance of their compatriot peers during their mobility. The positive aspect with compatriot peers abroad – the sense of being in the same boat – provides support and a remedy against homesickness. Clara from the Netherlands told us about her way of getting over homesickness during her mobility.

We have one more Dutch girl in my year, and one more girl in the 1st year, so we are three. It is very nice and we are like a small family and if one of us gets a little homesick, then we just make like, some Dutch pancakes for them and we just sit together and do some Dutch things together it’s just really nice. (Clara; line 198–201).

HINDRANCE OF INTERCULTURAL CONTACT AND NEW CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

As previously mentioned, compatriot peer relations hinder the progress of intercultural learning and understanding. Mobile pupils often stick together with pupils of the same nationality, continue with their cultural praxis and thus create a diaspora in the context of pupil mobility. In the narratives of the pupils, we observed this hindering effect of compatriot relations.
I had mostly Norwegian friends, and we would hang out together. We didn’t speak that much English actually. It was pretty much Norwegian all the time.» (line, 75–77)… When we came, we were that many Norwegians that we could just be with each other and we were talking in Norwegian to each other in class. (Sara; line, 532–532).

The compatriot peers constituted Sara’s main network during her mobility. She mentioned the activities they did together and told us about how they enjoyed being abroad together. The case below also illustrates pupils’ appreciation of the compatriot relationships during their mobility.

It was easier to relate to the Norwegian students so it was natural for us to hang out. I guess it is a bit weird to go to England to hang out with the Norwegians. But I felt like I learned a lot from just being with the Norwegians, because I have always been living in the same place in Norway, so I also met people from all across Norway and I have learned a lot from them. But I had some subjects where there were not so many Norwegians so I was the only Norwegian in two of my classes, so I got to know some English students and it was very nice and I don’t think I would have the chance if I was not the only Norwegian one there. (Amanda; min. 10:15–11:09)

As the quotation indicates, meeting with different Norwegian students from various parts of Norway during the mobility in the host country helped Amanda to broaden her knowledge of her own culture. However, at the same time, her narrative clearly shows that she sees her relationship with compatriot friends as a hindering factor with regard to making contacts with the local pupils in the host country.

In both these cases, the pupils spent most of their time with their compatriot friends and did many activities with them. They did not perceive that as a problem during their mobility. They travelled as a group of Norwegian pupils and experienced new things together without having much contact with the local pupils and culture in the host country.

One of the experts in our sample group, who works for organizing pupil exchanges in one private company in Norway, also pointed to strong compatriot peer relationships during mobility as one of the hindering factors for developing intercultural experiences during the pupil exchange.

They hang out with each other, they don’t make friends with the local kids, because there are thirty kids, why would they make friends with anyone else
when many of them travel to same place? And why would anyone wanna walk up to them and get to know them when they’re like thirty, thirty scary foreigners? …Even if you live in a host family, you’re still talking Norwegian with your friends that came with you, and you still, you’re doing your classes with the kids that came with you. It doesn’t give you the same sense of independence, and I don’t think it gives you the same cultural immersion. (Expert, line 453–460).

Peers from the same nationality under mobility have a tendency to «stick together». Presumably, this is a key characteristic of pupil exchange.10 Nevertheless, as we will show now, using Emma’s case, this mobility type also includes a kind of anti-type: pupils who tried to be as independent of such kinds of peer relations as possible. The quotations below illustrate a case of a pupil who had another relationship with her compatriot peers during the mobility. Emma draws a line between herself and her compatriot peers in order to get the ultimate intercultural exchange experience.

I think that I just had a different attitude from the other Norwegian girls when I got there. I was very excited. I was like «this is three months and I want these three months to be great», but they were more sceptical about it. They were very much together as a group and then they did not make that many Italian friends, and when you are together and you kind of «suffer» together, then it gets even worse. I think maybe if they had not come together but had come alone they would have a different perspective» (line, 176–181)… I learned some Italian so after three months, I could have small conversations and I like very much learning languages but the other Norwegian girls didn’t learn so much (Emma; line, 90–92).

Emma defines her attitude during the exchange semester as different from her compatriot friends. She had a clear goal, she knew what she wanted from her mobility, and she was very open to the new culture. She chose to spend less time with «the other Norwegian girls» and made more contact with the local pupils, and

10. Quantitative analysis of the MOVE Mikro data indicates that the majority (76%) of the mobile young continue with compatriot friendship during their stay abroad. Thus, a significantly lower portion of the mobile young manages to establish social relations with young people in the host country during their stay abroad. When it comes to international relations with young people from other international countries during international mobility/stay abroad, the chances for contact or social relations are even lower (20%).
managed to create a good relationship with her host family. Her restricted contact with her compatriot peers increased her chance to spend more time with non-compatriot peers, which helped her to develop her language skills and gain cultural experiences in the host country.

The Norwegian girls that were there, they were like a group of four friends that wanted to go there together. I was kind of alone. At the start, we were quite much together but they did not like it very much being in Italy and they didn’t get so good along with their host families. They very much longed to go back to Norway and they skyped very much with their families at home and very much criticised the school (Emma; line 167–172).

Emma’s case shows an awareness about the compatriot peers «trap» and a choice to explore the host country with the locals. She noticed the lack of interest of the other girls she travelled with to integrate or to learn about the new culture. They «suffered» together as a group (quote from the interview). Emma made a choice to distance herself from this group of Norwegians girls in order to discover the «true life» of Italians. Emma believes that the other Norwegian girls would have had a better experience and would have developed a better intercultural sensitivity if they had gone on this exchange by themselves rather than as a group.

I became very good friends with my host sister. We were a really good match and I’m still in contact with her. I visited her again afterwards and she visited me again in Norway this summer so we have had a lot of contact. Also, I became friends with some of the other Italian girls that had been in Norway before and also some in my class (Emma, line, 54–57)

REFLECTIONS POST-MOBILITY

Interestingly, the pupils most commonly reflected on the effect of their relations with compatriot peers after their stay abroad. They became aware that compatriot pupil relations appear as a kind of natural thing under mobility, but after mobility they are perceived as something weird.

It was easier to relate to the Norwegian students so it was natural for us to hang out. I guess it is a bit weird to go to England to hang out with the Norwegians. But I felt like I learned a lot from just being with the Norwegians (Amanda; min. 10:15–10:30)
Amanda’s narrative is similar to Sara’s in relation to the importance of compatriot friends during mobility. In both cases, the appreciation of compatriot relationships during mobility was mentioned frequently in their narratives about their exchange year. However, during the interviews, when they were asked what they could have done differently, both reflected on the possible blocking effect compatriot peers had on their openness and effort to make friends with the locals. Sara regrets not trying harder to integrate with the local students. Most of her time abroad she communicated in Norwegian and spent much of her time with other Norwegians.

When we came, we were that many Norwegians that we could just be with each other and we were talking in Norwegian to each other in class. Some of them wanted to be our friend, but they didn’t like «Oh I want to be your friend». So if I could change one thing I would be more open and maybe try a little bit harder to make friends with the English people. (Sara; line, 532–536)

Emma, on the other hand, made a real effort to get in contact with non-compatriot peers. She highlighted her friendship with her host sister as the most valuable achievement during her exchange in Italy. During the interview, she also reflected on the topic of her problematic relationship with her Norwegian compatriot peers with whom she had travelled. To step away from the original group of Norwegian girls was not an easy decision, but in her case it was necessary in order to discover the new culture and develop friendships with non-compatriot peers.

I think the best thing was the friendship with my host sister, because this is something I have gained for life maybe. We have seen each other so much the last years and every time we are together it is the same as it used to be then. To have a friend in another country is a very nice thing. (Emma; line, 185–187)

I think it was very hard for me that I was not getting along so well with the other Norwegian girls. (…) I didn’t think it was so bad when I was there, but when I got home and got back to my other friends at home and like talked a lot about it, I saw that I had kind of suffered quite a lot. (Emma; line, 190–192)

The reflections made by pupils post-mobility point to the dilemmas created by peer relations during mobility. The cases presented here show that pupils made varying degrees of relationships and friendships with the non-compatriot and compatriot peers. Sara’s post-mobility reflections illustrate the lack of the actual commitment in respect to making non-compatriot friendships during her time abroad. Sara’s experience puts into question the notion of internationalisation in
the context of pupil exchange. In her case, the international dimension – intercultural relations and learning – became marginal, and not the central concern of the exchange. Emma, on the other hand, represents a case of strong commitment and a desire to establish intercultural relations. Her overall experience in Italy – language learning, social interaction, and strong intercultural sensitivity – points to the intended internationalisation scenario. However, in order to achieve these mobility goals, she had to break out from her compatriot peer group.

Internationalisation in the context of pupil exchange can be seen as something to be done by the international students to help them fit into the host culture (Spencer-Oatey et al. 2014, p.6). We believe, however, that this is a mutual responsibility between the international students and the domestic students and staff. Schools in the host countries, with international pupils surrounded by and interacting with domestic peers throughout the school day, play a great role in pupils’ motivations for intercultural openness. It is important to point out that educational institutions have a great influence to promote this mutual responsibility during the exchange period. Some institutions (mostly in higher education) have already developed certain practices to integrate international and domestic students, such as «buddy»/mentor programs, international cultures workshops and various organised activities including staff, domestic and international students (Young, 2014). Our data show that in the cases of Emma and Sara, integrational practices were poorly developed and made international pupils establish their own strategies for relationship-building with compatriot and non-compatriot peers during the mobility experience.

**SUMMARY**

In this article, we focused on the perceptions of compatriot peer relations under mobility in unlocking a new culture before, during, and after mobility. We assumed that the kind of peer relations young people are embedded in becomes particularly important in the context of young people’s cross-border mobility. Peers account for a variety of different experiences under mobility, especially as concerns accessing new cultural contexts. If pupils stick together with their compatriots, their chances of building intercultural relations with non-compatriot peers can be disadvantaged.

Based upon the evidence drawn from qualitative narrative interviews with pupils who became mobile within the context of pupil exchange, we can state that peers play an important role in the decision regarding mobility. Furthermore, we discovered that compatriot peer relations play a multifaceted role during mobility.
On the one hand, compatriot peers create a feeling of being in the same boat, and foster a sense of safety and a cure for homesickness. On the other hand, they hinder intercultural contact and new cultural experiences. This paper points to certain dilemmas that are the result of peer relations under pupil exchange mobility – being a part of a compatriot group vs. breaking out from it, being in a safe but closed environment vs. opening up for the unknown and taking the initiative to establish intercultural relations.

In the case of Sara, her international experience was mainly through contact with her compatriot friends. Considering social interaction with the locals as one of the key factors of internationalisation, we found Sara being international and not being international at the same time. In the contrasting case, Emma established strong intercultural ties with her host family and other non-compatriot peers at her school. Furthermore, in order to achieve her mobility goals of learning to live the Italian way and making intercultural relationships, she had to isolate herself from the group of the Norwegian girls she had travelled with on her exchange. Hampered intercultural contact based on compatriot peer relations and friendship obviously hinders intercultural experiences and development, blocks intercultural learning and modes of accessing new culture. Like other young mobile pupils and experts on the field in our sample, we conclude that young people, especially in the context of pupil exchange, need to be made aware of the compatriot peer effect prior to their move in order to make more informed decisions. More focus on organisation of settled meetings and activities between local and international pupils are vital in order to increase intercultural exchange between the young pupils.

The compatriot peer-effect has a large impact on intercultural learning and relation building. The practices of internationalisation in the context of education, especially with the youngest group of pupils targeted in this study, need to be reconsidered. We suggest a greater focus on peers in youth mobility studies in order to explore further the multifaceted role of peers and the ways to deal with the dilemmas met by young people on their first long-term mobility experience. Furthermore, we would benefit from further research including evaluation of current practices to integrate international and domestic pupils at schools, as well as exploration of established models for mutual responsibility in the educational sector.

LITERATURE


