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VOLUNTEERING ABROAD IN POLAND AND GERMANY, ITS IMPLICATIONS ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE RESPECTIVE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRY, AND ITS EFFECTS ON IMAGES OF EUROPE

INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE HAS AN IMPACT ON THE IMAGE OF THE OTHER COUNTRY, AND ITS INFLUENCES ON VOLUNTEERS' THOUGHTS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION ARE OFTEN A DECLARED BUT RARELY EVALUATED EFFECT OF SUCH PROGRAMMES.

RESEARCH ON POLES AND GERMANS DOING LONG-TERM VOLUNTEERING SERVICE IN THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRY IN 2013 SHOWS THAT BESIDES PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT REGARDING SOCIAL COMPETENCIES IN GENERAL AND THE CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS CAREER ORIENTATION, YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN A LOT ABOUT THE HOSTING COUNTRY THROUGH SUCH SERVICE, COUNTERACTING POSSESSED STEREOTYPES, INCLUDING ONES RELATED TO THE DIFFICULT SHARED HISTORY OF BOTH COUNTRIES.

MOREOVER, VOLUNTEERING IMPACT ON THE IMAGE MODIFICATION OF THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRY IS ALSO WIDER, REACHING THE VOLUNTEERS' PEERS AND FAMILIES AT HOME, AS WELL AS MEMBERS OF THE RECEIVING SOCIETY ENCOUNTERED DURING THE SERVICE.

VOLUNTEERS FROM BOTH COUNTRIES, DUE TO LIVING IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY AND IN AN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT, ALSO LEARN WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MEMBER OF A DIVERSIFIED EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND HOW ITS VALUES ARE UNIQUE FROM OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD. IN ADDITION, THEY ALSO LEARN WHAT ABOUT THE OBSTACLES GOVERNING SUCH CULTURALLY DIVERSIFIED SOCIETIES THAT MIGHT BE RELATED FOR EUROPE.

THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF VOLUNTARY SERVICE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES CAN STILL BE EXTENDED DUE TO MODIFICATIONS THAT MIGHT BE TAKEN UP BY DECISION-MAKERS ON A EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL LEVEL WHO SHAPE THE SET-UP OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES AS WELL AS PRACTITIONERS IN SENDING OR HOSTING ORGANISATIONS IN POLAND AND GERMANY. HOWEVER, THESE RECOMMENDATIONS MIGHT BE ALSO INTERESTING FOR PEOPLE INVOLVED IN TRANS-BORDER VOLUNTEERING IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER COUNTRIES.

INTRODUCTION

With our research project we explored the effects voluntary service has on images about the country in which the voluntary service took place. Additionally we addressed the question of whether and how voluntary service affects thoughts and attitudes about Europe and the European Union.

The research findings are based on an online survey. The sample consisted of 28 Poles and 31 Germans doing long-term volunteering service in either Poland or Germany in 2013. Within this sample, 19 participants were selected for in-depth interviews.

In this policy paper we introduce our main findings. These may be of interest for decision-makers on a European and national level who shape the set up of voluntary programmes as well as practitioners in sending or hosting organisations in Poland and Germany. However, our conclusions might be also interesting for people involved in trans-border volunteering in the context of other countries.

BACKGROUND

Ten years after new member states from Central Europe joined the EU and 25 years after democratic transitions in Central Europe, the level of integration between neighbouring countries might be considered improvable, at least when it comes to knowledge and attitudes about the respective neighbouring countries.

This is also still relevant for Poland and Germany, even though much has been accomplished to bring the two countries closer together. The last “Polish-German Barometer 2013” conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs shows continuous improvement in the level of both countries’ recognition amongst their inhabitants. However, this trend is rather slow and there are still many people with rather little and stereotypical knowledge of the respective neighbouring country.

In addition, for several years Europe has been facing difficult moments in its development. In times of economic crisis, while the conditions related to the quality of life for many Europeans get worse, people lose their belief in the concept of an integrated Europe.

New efforts need to be undertaken to bring inhabitants of European states closer together which shows why being together in the EU matters.

In order to counteract mutual stereotypes and a lack of knowledge as well as overcoming the difficult past of countries such as Poland and Germany, we need new, common ideas at the EU political agenda level. Voluntary service can be one tool to foster the development of stronger ties between European countries.

VOLUNTARY SERVICE AS A DOOR OPENER TO DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF RESPECTIVE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES AND EUROPE

It can be stated that doing voluntary service is a valuable experience for all volunteers in our research. One of the main results shows that such a stay in a foreign country fosters knowledge and reflection of stereotypes about the respective neighbouring country and its inhabitants. There is also a considerable multiplying effect, as friends and family visit volunteers and, therefore, get to know the neighbouring country themselves, or learn more about the other country through stories, blogs, and reports by the volunteers. The research has shown that images about Poland and Germany have been altered and a deeper understanding has been gained.

By profiting from unrestricted travel the volunteers have experienced benefits from the EU (especially while compared to volunteers from non-EU countries). This experience could still be enhanced through a better understanding of the European citizenship concept. On one hand, people from a country such as Poland, who are still learning what it means to be a member of the EU, better recognise what the idea of the EU is about. On the other hand, inhabitants of the “old” member states such as Germany realise what it means to live in a diverse European society with different levels of economic power and development.

Besides gaining knowledge about the above-mentioned issues we have gathered data that offers additional insights: some volunteers faced challenges from their voluntary service. Some of these were related to the cultural shock of living abroad, while others were rather linked to shortcomings regarding how their voluntary service was organised. As these are aspects that could be improved, we will return to this in the recommendations section.

However, at the end of the day all of the interviewed volunteers would recommend taking on long-term voluntary service to others, which illustrates the general success of this kind of programme.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

Within our study, quantitative and qualitative data were gained from young adults who have done at least six months of voluntary service. In the first stage, 28 young Poles and 31 Germans, who had just started voluntary service in the respective neighbouring country, filled in an online questionnaire in their native language. The survey comprised issues such as the volunteers' motivations and expectations regarding the project; Polish-German relations and mutual perceptions of Germans and Poles; attitudes towards and identifications with Europe; demographic data of the respondents and general information about the volunteers' project.

Participant recruitment was quite difficult, as there is no central place where data of all the volunteers is gathered. Therefore, the researchers had to identify and contact sending organisations and ask for their support in finding suitable volunteers.

After analysing the data of the quantitative part, the results were used in designing the questionnaire for the semi-structured qualitative interviews. Ten interviews with Polish volunteers and nine with German volunteers were conducted at the end of their voluntary service. The interviews covered the volunteers' experiences within their voluntary service, changes of attitudes towards the neighbouring country and its inhabitants, perceptions of Polish-German relations, as well as changes of attitudes towards Europe and identifications with Europe.

Only persons involved in long-term volunteering were considered for the research. This includes persons that carried out voluntary service for a period of at least six months. Forty-one volunteers, who have filled in the online-questionnaire, even stayed in the respective neighbouring country for 11 or 12 months. The others stayed either up to ten months or longer than 12 months.

Most of the 59 participants from both countries were female. Twenty-one German and 21 Polish women compared to seven German and five Polish men. The remaining persons did not state their gender.

In addition, the volunteers from both countries differed to some extent regarding their age-range. While the Germans were aged between 19 and 23 years, the Poles were aged between 24 and 30 years. Nevertheless, these differences influenced volunteers' current life situation: while 26 (out of 27) German volunteers answering this question did their voluntary service after finishing secondary school, 16 (out of 17) of the Polish volunteers had already finished professional education (in most cases, university studies).

MAIN FINDINGS

Motives for volunteering vary

Volunteers' motivations to engage in voluntary service in their neighbouring country differ. Polish volunteers often named learning the language and getting to know a new country or new people as their main motivation. They were also interested in the project and often wanted to gain work experience. In some cases, the Poles had also hoped for job opportunities in Germany, while being faced with a lack of professional opportunities at home.

The German volunteers mainly wanted to go abroad after finishing school, to perform practical activities or to gain clarity about their future plans. Those who have Polish roots also stressed learning the language as a reason for going to Poland. They were interested in the project and wanted to overcome their knowledge gap regarding their neighbouring country and to set an example for peace and reconciliation, as well as strengthen the ties between Germany and Poland.

Family and friends: Germans wonder about the choice of country, Poles about the decision to volunteer

The reaction of family and friends of the volunteers from both countries regarding the plans of their children or friends varied. While the parents of the German volunteers were quite neutral or happy about the decision of their children to go to Poland, friends often mentioned prejudices and stereotypes they were aware of, i.e., Poles stealing cars or drinking too much alcohol. The plan to do voluntary service itself was not questioned at all, friends were only surprised why volunteers did not choose a "more interesting" or exotic country.

In Poland, doing voluntary service is not as common and popular as it is in Germany. As a result, the parents of the Polish volunteers sometimes supported their decision, but most of them were worried about their child's professional future (especially in a situation when their children quit their job in order to go abroad for voluntary service). Polish volunteers' friends were mainly surprised by the decision of going abroad and doing voluntary service in Germany. However, the reasons for their attitudes differed and

were related to stereotypes. Some grandparents still associate Germans with Nazis, while some parents of the volunteers still thought of the east of Germany as the GDR and have not adapted their mind-set beyond the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Initial knowledge about the neighbouring country is higher in Poland than in Germany

For most of the German volunteers, Poland was a “white spot on the map of Europe” before they started their voluntary service. During their stay in Poland, this gap was filled with colour, thus a picture of Poland was formed. A few German volunteers had Polish origins and already knew Poland. They reported that their image of Poland was mainly confirmed.

The Polish volunteers already had a better knowledge about Germany, when they started their voluntary service. The majority had already previously been to Germany, some of them even several times. However, their visits were generally of a touristic nature and they did not have many occasions to meet Germans and interact with them in daily life.

Staying abroad changes the image of the receiving society

While previously having had quite an idealistic picture about Germany and Germans, this picture changed for Polish volunteers during their voluntary service, and stereotypes about Germans were confirmed or overcome. As a result, after several months of living abroad, Polish participants described Germans as being less spontaneous and more distant than Poles. On the other hand, Polish volunteers experienced Germans as more pragmatic, and more active and involved in their communities. Some further differences they named were that Germans are generally more open-minded and tolerant. Altogether, German and Polish societies are considered quite similar and close. There were more uniting aspects than dividing ones.

Sharing stories and experiences of the neighbouring country with parents and friends, as well as visits by parents and friends to the respective countries, also helped to change prevailing images and stereotypes of the respective country. Thereby, the German volunteers, in particular, tried to give a preferably positive picture about Poland to their family and friends, realising how stereotypical their knowledge is, and sometimes wondered whether they should talk at all about negative experiences they had had.

Polish volunteers did not aim to act as “ambassadors” of their country, but tried to show a “normal” or realistic picture of Poles and Poland while in contact with Germans. The German participants mostly did not have the feeling that there are Poles to whom they could present a new picture about Germans and Germany by acting as “ambassadors”. Their colleagues at work often knew Germans before, e.g., former volunteers, thus it was not a new experience to work with Germans. Some of the interviewees got to know Poles outside of work, which were often surprised about the German volunteers’ open attitude and friendliness. Finally, some of the German volunteers tried to give Poles a more realistic picture of Germany and replace their idealistic image that “everything is better in Germany”, e.g., to clarify that not everyone in Germany is wealthy.

Getting to know people from the hosting country requires effort

Expectations about contact with people from the receiving country ranged between “very high” and “no expectations at all”. Having such relations seemed to be rather more important for Polish volunteers, who declared an interest in learning about German culture and meeting people. The possibilities for doing so were related to the quality of assistance by hosting organisations and the volunteers’ individual approach to getting to know other persons. Especially due to mentorship, it was easier for volunteers to get to know peers from the neighbouring country as well as practising a hobby or live in flat sharing communities. Thereby, having a circle of friends consisting of other volunteers sometimes seemed to make it more difficult to get in touch with young people from the receiving country. Altogether, the volunteers described finding German or Polish friends as difficult, especially for Polish people who stayed in rural areas in Germany.

Being abroad enhances the sense of European perspective and at the same time fosters recognition of one’s national background

Polish volunteers perceived identification with Europe especially when they benefit from opportunities the EU offers, such as travelling to other European countries without problems and having the opportunity to live, work, and study there. Many Polish volunteers stressed that “feeling European” was easier while being in Germany: to live and work in an international environment, to face other cultures and “otherness” itself, allowed them to reflect on the diversity that is associated with European identification. They also started reflecting about their Polish identity, for example recognising that religion is more important for them than for Germans.

For the German volunteers, their national identity seemed to become more important during voluntary service. Both prevalent cultural differences and being characterised by others as “typical” Germans, e.g., regarding their punctuality, and identifying themselves with this attribution led volunteers to feel more German. In addition, the feeling that German was the native language that gives security compared to not speaking Polish very well was mentioned. Simultaneously, German volunteers talked about the coexistence of national and international identification, and feeling related to people from other European countries was often named at the end of voluntary service.

Europe becomes more tangible through staying abroad

On a mental level, most of the Poles and two Germans separated Europe (as a continent) from the EU (as a political system). Volunteers from both countries associated the EU with the benefits it offers, especially while being in contact with non-Europeans. In addition, volunteers from both countries mentioned different kinds of freedom such as travelling, working, and studying in other European countries. In general, categories such as freedom of choice were pointed out by two Polish volunteers, while freedom of speech was mentioned by another.

One of Polish volunteers also spoke about the “freedom of being able to stay anonymous” in such a large entity as compared to living in a small village

or city. A few volunteers thought about the future of Europe, hoping that European countries would both develop and come closer together. During their service, the volunteers got in touch with persons or volunteers from different countries. The volunteers experienced the diversity of European cultures and societies, while perceiving that they have much in common. The EU's motto "United in diversity" seems to best describe volunteers' feelings, and they started reflecting on this: How can we become united with all this diversity? Is it possible to share common aims despite our differences?

The level of support in hosting organisations varies

The support of the hosting organisations was evaluated differently. Three of the German volunteers reported about fast and uncomplicated support when it was needed. Two persons faced difficulties getting support or the support was not sufficient. Some volunteers positively emphasised the preparation courses, which mostly took place in Germany. Other courses that took place in Poland were part of a traditional tandem project, where a German and a Ukrainian did an exchange in Poland, working in a team. For the Polish volunteers, the support in acclimatisation depended on the experience of the organisation. Some of them were very well prepared, others very little. Some hosting organisations did not have time to adequately deal with a new person, including introducing them to their tasks. In the case of one person, who did not speak German, the support from the organisation was not satisfying in terms of communicating the requirements. Furthermore, linguistic hurdles created communication barriers. Some volunteers also had to find useful tasks on their own, in the case of the hosting organisation not providing adequate or sufficient work. None of the volunteer asked their sending organisation for support, but they felt they could have done so, if necessary. One of the sending organisations offered a pre-departure meeting, which was considered useful.

RECOMMENDATIONS: HOW TO IMPROVE POLISH-GERMAN PERCEPTIONS AND HOW TO DEVELOP IMAGES OF EUROPE THROUGH VOLUNTEERING

If voluntary service schemes received more political recognition and if practical modifications were implemented in the organisational part of the trans-border volunteering programmes, its effects regarding attitudes towards Europe and Polish-German relations would increase. In order to improve the setting of voluntary service and enhance opportunities for intercultural learning as well as reflection upon Europe and European identity, we recommend different actions at the policy level and regarding programme implementation.

Policy Level

Creating a joint database to gather information on international voluntary programmes in Europe

It is difficult to find data about volunteers in international programmes beyond the European Voluntary Service (EVS) and to continuously observe developments in international/European voluntary programmes. Therefore, the establishment of a joint database at the European level that gives an overview of outgoing and incoming volunteers doing voluntary service, either with EVS or national programmes, should be considered. The efforts dedicated to establishing such a database for EVS has already been taken up by the European Commission. Even though they failed, it is still worth considering trying again or finding out whether a similar tool could be established in the Polish-German perspective, fostering and easing the work of entities involved in Polish-German cooperation.

This would help researchers and policy-makers to gain better knowledge about the number of young people taking up voluntary service and to observe how the choice of destination is spread out over the different European member states and non-EU states that also take part in European voluntary programmes. Pooling this data would also enable evaluation beyond the level of specific programmes and simplify getting an overview of the various voluntary service programmes that are offered outside volunteers' own country within Europe.

Further research and training methods about European identity-building required

Within our research project, it has been challenging to capture the topic of European identity building within voluntary service. A lot of attention is given to fostering the understanding of other countries' national cultures and on diversity/intercultural understanding in general. However, the civic perspective and national differences on being part of Europe or the EU seem to lack practical implementation as well as training tools that are implemented on a wider scale, especially focusing on European issues on a pan-national level. Since voluntary service opens the horizon of volunteers and makes the advantages of Europe come alive, it forms a solid base to foster thinking in European dimensions and to build on the creation of a stronger European citizenship.

Expand national voluntary service programmes in Poland as well as specific Polish-German programmes

Evaluating the status of volunteering in Germany and Poland shows considerable differences. In Germany there are many national programmes supporting different kinds of voluntary service. While some of them have been implemented for decades and are well recognised in society, there are no comparable structures in Poland. Civic engagement and volunteering itself is still relatively weak (e.g., in comparison with "old" EU member states) after years of communism and fast enforcement of the market economy, where most people think about their own career. Under such conditions, one cannot expect high societal recognition of volunteering in the Polish-German perspective. Thus, especially in Poland, a lot needs to be done to promote civic engagement. Moreover, some new schemes for trans-border volunteering are needed, enabling young Poles to do voluntary service in other European countries, besides the European Volunteering Service which forms the main scheme enabling Poles to volunteer abroad. This could be an important contribution to foster Polish-German cooperation. Good practice in German-French exchange scheme operation could be transferred to German-Polish cooperation.

Better recognition of foreign volunteers' roles at the national and European level

More effort in order to support better recognition of foreign volunteers in any country participating in international volunteering programmes should be carried out. People volunteering in a foreign country, even a neighbouring one, quite often seem to be left alone in what they are doing. Volunteers staying in another country might be seen as ambassadors of their own state in the receiving society: they reconsidered knowledge they had before and share new experiences to their relatives and friends at home. The role they play in bringing different countries closer together might also be valued at the political level and reflected in the structure of the programmes that enable their activities abroad.

For example, an award for outstanding volunteers, perhaps even in the field of Polish-German dialogue, could be introduced. Apart from the recognition of volunteers that receive an award, it might help to promote voluntary programmes in countries such as Poland that do not have a long tradition of voluntary action.

Fostering knowledge and education about Europe and European countries

As knowledge about Europe and European countries is rather limited, it might be advisable to include education about member countries of the EU as well as knowledge about Europe in school curricula to a larger extent. This could help to raise awareness of the diversity and commonalities of EU members.

Programme Level

Diversity of motivations and skills of volunteers should be captured

Comparison has shown that the biographical situation of Polish and German volunteers differs. Polish volunteers had often finished their studies and decided to take up voluntary service in Germany – or a German speaking country – with the interest of doing something towards their professional development and possibly finding a job in the host country. This implies different expectations towards the hosting organisation and life in Germany.

For Germans, it is common to start voluntary service directly after finishing school as a gap year. One important aim is to have new experiences and start living outside the parental home. Thus, the expectations for work and way of life differ. Even though it is challenging for hosting and sending organisations, these differences should be considered, especially when, in the new EVS programme era, the age limit is higher. In addition, past experience has shown that people from European countries suffering from the economic crisis often do international voluntary service.

Fostering access of wider societal groups

Corresponding to the level of education and volunteering in general, most people doing voluntary service abroad have passed high school exams or have even finished university-level studies. Therefore, adopting new activities that would attract more people with lower school certificates to voluntary service schemes should be considered. Activities such as fostering the exchange of professionals in the field of youth work in order to raise awareness for voluntary service and its opportunities can be seen as one step towards creating more openness towards not so well educated societal groups these multipliers are in touch with. Perhaps a good practice that takes place in Germany, which offers voluntary service in combination with a formal school education, could be transferred to the international level within a model programme.

Linguistic barriers should be overcome

For many volunteers, their stay in the neighbouring country posed a challenge either due to a lack of language skills or a lack of opportunities to practise them. Therefore, it seems advisable to emphasise the importance of, at least, basic linguistic knowledge. Through this, communication with staff both at the workplace and outside of work might be easier and thus create more opportunities for volunteers to meet inhabitants of the receiving society and understand the hosting society's culture, including its

way of living. This can also facilitate reflection on the stereotypes related to a society.

Sending a volunteer to another country without even basic knowledge of its language can strengthen the feeling of alienation.

On the other hand, volunteers arriving in the hosting organisation without proper language skills could be offered special assistance from a volunteer's coordinator at the hosting organisation. Having such function within the organisational structure together with respective procedures related to dealing with different kinds of volunteers should be an access criterion for joining a volunteers' exchange programme. Moreover, the implementation of such solutions within hosting organisations should be evaluated by the authorities supporting volunteer exchange.

Contact with peers contributes to the feeling of integration

Getting in touch with peers from the hosting country was not always easy for the volunteers. Peers help volunteers feel more at home in the receiving country and also contribute to a better understanding that there is a pan-national youth culture, which forms the basis for mutual understanding. Thus, it seems worthwhile to support contact with peers.

For this reason, the idea of a peer-mentoring scheme where former volunteers act as mentors should be increased. In addition, local youth that have not done voluntary service could be enrolled as mentors to help volunteers become acquainted with local people more easily. For local youth this could be a way to make international contacts. Additionally, guidebooks to the different hosting countries could be prepared by former volunteers in order to support future volunteers' preparation. They are already available in Germany, but could be disseminated more widely and could be introduced to Polish volunteer programmes. Stories and reports on special adventures that have happened to the volunteers could be collected via competitions and be used as the basis for guidebooks.

General Comments

Fostering general interest about Poland in Germany

Poland was not the country ranked first on the list of destinations for most of the volunteers. However, being in Poland has raised general interest in the country, about which volunteers' initial knowledge was rather limited. As Germany is closely linked to Poland regarding history, there are many programmes and much effort to strengthen the ties between these two countries: in recent years, newly appointed German ministers of foreign affairs have all made their first official visits to Poland in order to stress the interest Germany has in having close relations with Poland.

Following the example of the foundation of the German-French Youth Office in 1964, the German-Polish Youth Office was established in 1991 in order to strengthen ties to former war opponents – especially among young people. There are several official initiatives (to some extent supported by the authorities of both states) fighting with the legacy of the difficult common past, which still interferes in relations between both countries. For example, the Joint Polish-German Schoolbooks Commission (Gemeinsamen Deutsch-Polnischen Schulbuchkommission), and activities funded and implemented

by the Remembrance, Responsibility and Future foundation (EVZ Stiftung) in Germany and the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation (SdpZ) should be mentioned. Working on different levels, they are leading or supporting the activities aimed at fostering exchange of members of both countries. However, with respect to Germany, the wider public does not seem to have a sound general knowledge of Poland. Therefore, more effort to raise awareness should be made. In recent years, humorous reports about the experiences of Germans living in Poland have been published – with some being bestsellers. New approaches on the issue of Polish-German understanding seem worthwhile exploring in order to attract a wider public.

Knowledge about Germany on the Polish side

The level of Poles' knowledge of Germany could also be improved. The "Polish-German Barometer 2013", which proves the continuous increase in the quality of the relations between both societies (47% of Poles surveyed in 2013 feel sympathy towards Germans), shows at the same time that there still is work to accomplish in order to overcome the mutual difficult past. Most common associations that Poles have with the word "Germans" are related to history, mainly the Second World War (25% of all declared associations). Family members and friends of Polish volunteers presented similar opinions. This was especially distinct amongst members of the "older generations" and peers who had a conservative worldview. Moreover, it seems that something needs to be done with respect to the image of the eastern part of Germany in Poland. In particular, the generation of the parents of Polish volunteers still associate this region with the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). They seem to think that Eastern Germany has not changed much since the era of the communist state in this part of the country. And the GDR itself was considered to be a worse socio-political system. This could be related to superiority towards Germans from the eastern part of the country, which could be an obstacle in strengthening mutual contact and fostering understanding.

Polish participants of voluntary service programmes saw that "everything is better" in Germany compared to the situation in Poland. Here, it is important to form a realistic picture about the diversity of life-situations in both countries. Seminars that prepare volunteers for voluntary service and evaluatory meetings could take up this issue more intensely.

Fostering the experience-exchange of sending and hosting organisations

This project has shown that hosting and sending organisations are not always aware of hosting and sending organisations in other countries. Therefore, it would be helpful to foster an exchange of experience across borders. Perhaps the preparation of volunteers could become more international and capture the peculiarities of living and working in different countries.

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ANALYSES

OPINIONS

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