

The role of international educational exchange in cross-cultural understanding

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Abstract

The research studies changes in attitudes of Russian students who spent half a year studying at one of the universities in Northern Norway. The research attempts to answer the question “How does the international educational exchange contribute to cross-cultural understanding and peace?”

Theory of intergroup contact serves as a theoretical basis of the analysis. The main hypothesis of contact theory says that through the contact between representatives of different cultures an individual gains knowledge and experience that positively changes his\her attitude towards them.

Nine former participants of Russian-Norwegian student exchange programs were interviewed. They shared their experiences before, in the course of and after the sojourn. The study of interviews showed that subjects’ attitudes towards the group focused on (Norwegians) did not change after the sojourn. The analysis explains such results by low extent of interaction due to the lack of common social settings; by initial attitude formed by the experiences of others; by the need to belong that strengthens “home” identity and leads to high extent of interaction with compatriots.

However the main gain of the international exchange is the formation of translocal subjectivity that is shaped according to the place where the person resides. Having acquired knowledge and personal experience students changed attitudes towards their own society and themselves stepping out of ethnocentric cultural brackets.

Key words: international education exchange, contact hypothesis, attitude change, extended contact effect, translocal subjectivity

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Intercultural encounters have attracted considerable attention in recent decades. Every day we hear about conflicts related to cultural misunderstanding issues. The question is what the reasons are for this phenomenon and what possible solutions there are to this problem. This paper opens up the discussion of the role of people-to-people interaction in peace-building processes. The focus of the paper is placed on international student exchange and its role in cross-cultural understanding. To be more precise it is an attempt to answer the question of how the knowledge and experience that students gain in the process of studying abroad can influence the relations between members of different cultures.

1.1 History of international academic exchanges

International student mobility is not a new phenomenon. It traces back to the Middle Ages: if we take a look at the oldest European University of Paris or Bologna, we will see the international character of the medieval university and the degree of the international mobility that existed (Gürüz 2008). Scholars and teachers from all over the world came to these institutions; they were divided into “nations” in accordance with their mother tongues and places of birth. For instance, there were four nations at the University of Paris, namely, the French, the Normans, the Picards and the English. The language of instruction was Latin that fostered student mobility or “academic pilgrimage” (lat. peregrinatio academica).

However, it was not until the 20th century that the phenomenon of international academic cooperation was given serious attention. After experiencing the scourges of the First World War, statesmen considered the potential of education to prevent wars and contribute to peace. In the year 1919 the League of Nations (LN) was established, proclaiming the aim of international peace and security¹. Three years later in 1922 under the auspices of LN, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) started work as an advisory organization, aiming to facilitate international understanding. The ICIC was the basis for the foundation of national organizations of international cultural exchange in different countries: Germany – the Goethe Institute in 1933, Great Britain – the British Council in 1934, Japan – the Center for International Cultural Relations in 1934 (Saikawa 2009).

¹ league of Nations Covenant, Preamble: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp

Later the mission of the ICIC was overtaken by UNESCO. UNESCO Constitution² states that the purpose of the organization is to “contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms”. In the year 1960 the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations adopted a resolution directed to UNESCO stating that “contacts between peoples and knowledge of each other’s ways of life and thinking are a prerequisite for peace and improvement of international cooperation”³.

An active policy of educational exchanges was firstly introduced in the USA with the establishment of Fulbright program in 1946, proclaiming the aim of increasing mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries⁴. Thus, the process of learning about other cultures by means of academic exchanges made it possible to resolve problems that arise from the cultural differences (Allaway 1994:66). This process is personalized and that makes educational exchanges much more effective means of cultural understanding in comparison to mass media or any other sources that form our perception of the world. Being a student in a foreign country presupposes *experiencing* its culture. Moreover, personal experience may result in friendship with members of other cultures that again sets apart educational exchanges from other ways of learning about the outer world.

Furthermore, when it comes to mediation in the conflict there is a need for people with intercultural communication experience; that in turn may be acquired through educational exchanges.

The ultimate goal of international educational exchanges is to contribute to understanding among peoples. However one should not forget about other goals that the student and institutions are aspiring to reach. Goals connected with technical cooperation, success in academia, increased knowledge about cultures and preparation for high-profile careers (Klinberg 1970).

To concretize the area of the research I would like to define the international student exchange.

² UNESCO Constitution adopted in London on 16 November 1945: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15244&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

³ U.N. Economic and Social Council. 30th session. International relations and exchanges in the field of education, science and culture. 1132d plenary meeting (E\3422\1960\803)

⁴ Fulbright program fact sheet: http://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/fulbright_fact_sheet.pdf

1.2 The scope of the research

To simplify the task of confining the framework of the research the notion “international student exchange” can be divided into three key words: exchange, student and internationalization.

What does the word “exchange” imply? Oxford Dictionary says that exchange is “an act of giving something to somebody or doing something for somebody and receiving something in return”⁵. One can see the major feature of exchange; that is reciprocity. However, one should not forget about potential inequality of giving and receiving especially when thinking in terms of quantity. The flow of students, teachers and scholars one way can be bigger than the other way. But it does not diminish the role of exchange. Those who are engaged in processes of academic exchange are aware that “the essential element is not equivalence but reciprocity, or mutual advantage gained by concerted action in pursuit of common or complementary goals” (Marshall 1970:5). Even if the exchange is reduced to one-way trafficking of students, it does not necessarily mean the failure of exchange, as students in this case will return home and bring back the new knowledge and experience they gained in host country and that they most likely share with compatriots.

Furthermore, teachers are also influenced by international students as teaching presupposes interaction and cooperation. Even if the exchange is only one-way in terms of people-trafficking students inevitably give something in return, something different in kind, and perhaps also in magnitude from what they receive.

Thus, exchange should be considered as a very complex phenomenon which must be reciprocal. However, the reciprocity can be expressed and achieved in different forms and through different ways.

The primary focus of this paper will be on *students*. In order to evaluate the effects of international student exchange on attitude change we should take into consideration that there is no such thing as “the foreign student” (Klineberg 1970:53). There is a myriad of individuals who have different characters and their experience of sojourn can vary dramatically.

Internationalization of higher education defined as a process of “integrating international and cultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution” (de Wit 2010:8) has two dimensions.

Firstly *Internationalization at home*: “activities that help students to develop international understanding and intercultural skills – curriculum, extra-curricular activities, liaison with local ethnic groups and research activities. The second type is *internationalization abroad*: all forms of education across borders, mobility of students and faculty, mobility of programs, projects and

⁵ Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary: <http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/exchange>

providers. This research paper focuses on a group of Russian students participating in an educational exchange with Norway.

Taking a liberal institutionalist perspective, international academic exchange is understood as “a form of transnational collaboration between the intellectual communities of two countries, that plays an important role in international relations and can contribute to the eventual resolution of conflicts between nations” (Alzugaray 2006:43). Student in this case is an “instrument” or a culture carrier: “for students, carefully planned experiences abroad can have a lifelong impact on values and concern for and understanding of other cultures” (Burn 1980:133).

Thus, the paper focuses on a specific form of internationalization of higher education abroad, namely on educational exchange among students, that may be unequal in terms of quantity but at the same time reciprocal when it comes to cross-cultural understanding. In this research the term “educational student exchange” will have a wider interpretation as an exchange of experience and knowledge between students on one side and any kind of agent on the other (e.g. institution-student, teacher- student, student-student).

Although the focal point of paper is the potential of student exchange to build intercultural understanding we should not forget about other goals it aspires to attain. Thus, Klineberg (1970:51) listed three major goals of exchange of persons according to Abrams: 1) The intellectual and professional development of the student in his specialized field of study, 2) the general education of the student, 3) the discussed in accordance with the third goal, however, all of them will be taken into consideration. These goals may vary depending on the actor. For instance, for programs under the auspices of UNESCO the primary goal is peace-building, yet, for an individual it may be improvement of language skills and so on.

1.3 Problem statement

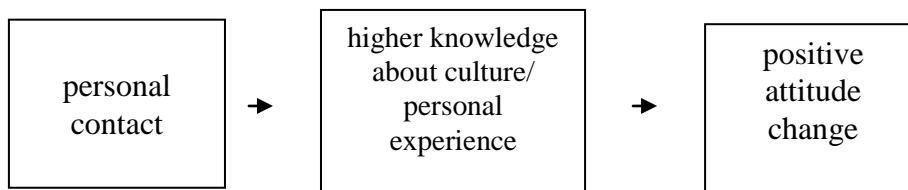
The study focuses on the role of international student exchanges in peace-building processes. The hypothesis is that it has a positive influence on constructing and keeping peaceful relations between nations. The research asks if personal contacts occurring during the sojourn between the representatives of different cultures lead to a higher knowledge about each other and this in turn leads to less prejudices, attitude change, presumably positive change towards each other:

“International educational exchange represents a form of human experience that can be readily transformed into understanding and skills that can contribute to a more peaceful world in the future” (Allaway 1994:66).

Certainly thinking that exchange-of-persons’ programs will inevitably lead to positive attitude change among the participants is an oversimplified assumption. “There is considerable evidence that the sheer fact of having been in another country even for an extended period of study, has quite limited effects on attitudes toward that country” (Selltiz and Cook 1962:10).

Based on the contact theory, the case-study where Russian students participate in an exchange program with Norway will try to analyze the following variant of contact hypothesis:

Figure 1: Contact, knowledge, attitude change.



In accordance with the above mentioned problem the research paper aims to answer the following question: how do the international student exchanges influence cross-cultural understanding? By cross-cultural understanding I mean the ability of people to interpret and tolerantly react to people or situations that are prone to misunderstanding for the reason of cultural differences, that can be obtained in the process of education about or experience of another culture. To find an answer, the following supplementary questions are posed (they are divided into three sections according to the perspective).

Theoretical perspective:

- What does the concept of international educational exchange imply?
- What does the concept of peace-building imply?

Peace studies perspective:

- How does the theory of intergroup contact explain the importance of educational exchanges in cross-cultural understanding and peace-building?

Empirical perspective:

- What are the results of Norway-Russia exchange programs implementation?
- Do these programs promote mutual understanding, cultural tolerance and peace?

The theoretical framework of the research is discussed in the following chapter.

So my primary goal is to discuss the above on the basis of data collected during the fieldwork.

Chapter 2. Conceptual framework

This chapter presents the conceptual and theoretical framework of international academic exchange. It consists of three main parts. First, the concept of educational exchange is addressed, drawing attention to its complexity and relationality to cultural exchanges. The second part presents the socio-psychological perspective on the role of international educational exchanges through the intergroup contact theory, its limitations and proposes the theory of attitude change as complementary to the research. And finally, the third part is devoted to the peace-building concept and the multi-track diplomacy approach providing both advantages and disadvantages of this approach to peace and opens the discussion of international academic exchanges' potential in peace processes.

2.1 The concept of international educational exchange

The concept of international educational exchange is already partly presented in the introduction; however there are still two points that should be addressed. The first one is that when it comes to the concept of international **educational** exchange it is often mixed with the concept of international **cultural** exchange. It is not surprising though, as they overlap each other. Such overlap is probably caused by the overlap of the concepts of education and culture itself.

“Culture shapes the minds of individuals...assigns meanings to things. Although meanings are in mind, they have their origins in culture...It is culture that provides the tools for organizing and understanding our worlds in communicable ways” (Bruner 1996: 43). With the help of culture we learn about the world, about other cultures. Education in turn has a possibility to usher people into culture on which life depends. “Education is a complex pursuit of fitting a culture to the needs of its members and of fitting its members and their ways of knowing to the needs of the culture” (ibid 43).

These two notions are indeed interdependent. Learning about culture (beliefs, values, customs) creates an individual perception of culture, as a person not just accepts the culture as taken for granted but has his\her own experience that influences the metamorphosis of culture. Thus, one can say that culture “may well be what education produces” (de Lima 2007:238).

While growing and developing as a person, he\she goes through several stages of socialization and learning about culture. Hence, both of these notions can be used in the same context, as they complete each other. There is no culture without education, and no education without culture.

There is also a necessity to differ international **education** and international **educational exchange**. International educational exchange is the movement of persons across national boundaries for educational purposes (Tierney 1977). These purposes encompass different kinds of activities exchange programs, workshops, seminars/conferences. While international education is defined as “any organized effort to affect values and capabilities which are international in terms of perspective or in terms of mobility” (Frankel 1965:10). The difference is in the word exchange that implies two-way traffic, in case of academic exchanges the two-way traffic of students, scholars and teachers.

So in this research the term international student exchange encompasses both educational and cultural dimensions, stemming from the fact that these two fields are tightly connected.

The concept of cross-cultural understanding

Due to the broadness and centrality of the concept of cross-cultural understanding in the present research I would like to show what it is in this context and how it is to be analyzed. Klineberg (1981:133) suggests two interpretations of understanding. The first one refers to “cognitive content”. To get to know if cross-cultural understanding has been developed we should answer the questions of what do we know and what have we learned about other culture? The second aspect of international understanding has emotional tone. We should ask ourselves how do we feel about the other group, have our feelings become friendlier after the sojourn?

The concept of cross-cultural understanding in this case is analyzed both from cognitive and affective perspectives.

2.2 Intergroup contact theory

Central to the concept of international educational exchange is the intergroup contact theory. According to the main theorists (Allport 1954, Pettigrew 1998), contacts with the members of another group can lead to anxiety reduction, empathy and re-evaluation of the out-group and thus can be the instrumental in the reduction of stereotypes and prejudice (Novotny 2011: 674).

Allport (1954) marks out four conditions for effective interaction when dealing with intergroup conflicts: equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation and support of authorities, law or custom. The optimal frequency and intensity are crucial to an effective contact.

Later, Pettigrew (1998) enlarges this theory. He highlights four processes of change (learning about the outgroup, changing behavior, generating affective ties, ingroup reappraisal) and generalization of effects. As long as one studies the effects of educational exchanges on the attitudes towards different cultural outgroups and speaks about the facilitation of the relations between these groups, not just individuals, it is essential for contact to generalize from individual

to group. As, presumably, cross-cultural understanding occurred in the process of communication between two individuals will project onto other members of their cultures.

Pettigrew introduces three types of generalization. The first one is the generalization across situation, stating that if two groups are found in particular situations, communicating openly-mindedly, the attitudes developed in the course of communication project onto other situations. For instance, foreign student communicate in a friendly way with the host student at the university when they study together; the reformulated contact theory claims that this friendly attitude towards each other will be preserved in other situations outside the university.

Another type of generalization is “from outgroup individual to the whole outgroup” generalization (Pettigrew 1998:74). It states that interpersonal outgroup contacts can affect the attitudes to the whole outgroup. However, those who interact must be typical members (sharing group’s interests, having similar features) of their groups and show their membership notably so that generalization could be possible.

There is a third type of generalization - “from immediate outgroup to other outgroups” generalization. This type is less likely to be fulfilled, as it is almost impossible to provide four above mentioned conditions when it comes to more than two groups, but there is evidence that “having an ingroup friend is related to a greater acceptance of minorities of many types” (ibid. 75). The data taken of the 1988 Euro-Barometer Survey №30 was aimed to prove or disapprove several hypotheses; one of which was “intergroup friendship effects will generalize to other outgroups” (Pettigrew 1997:179). The data analysis showed that despite the fact that Turks are not a major minority in France and Great Britain compared to Germany and the Netherlands, the desire of the respondents to have friendship with Turks for the four countries is similarly high. The same is true for North Africans in Germany and the Netherlands. North Africans are not the biggest diaspora in these countries, but still people in the Netherlands and Germany are tolerant to them and wouldn’t mind being friends. This data shows the potential of contact to generalize its effects onto other outgroups.

According to Pettigrew, emotion is critical in intergroup contact. In the case of Norwegian-Russian student exchange and many other situations, friendship plays an important role. There is evidence that those who have outgroup friends are less prejudiced (if prejudiced at all) to other members of the outgroup. What is necessary to highlight is the “extended contact effect” (Pettigrew 1998:75), the knowledge of a member’s friendship with the outgroup member can provoke positive attitude from the ingroup towards the whole outgroup. So, if another Norwegian student sees his Norwegian friend communicating nicely with the Russian student he\she presumably gets more positive views on the outgroup as a whole.

2.2.1 Intergroup contact theory: Critique

This theory was introduced in the 1950s. Despite this fact, little theoretical advancements have been made since that time (McClendon 1974).

Having studied the works of different supporters of contact theory one can barely notice any negative results of the research. For instance, Pettigrew and Tropp (2011) combined the results of all the studies of the 20th century and came to the conclusion that the vast majority of research confirmed the general hypothesis –personal contact leads to the reduction of stereotypes.

However, a number of scientists such as Amir (1969), McClendon (1974), Ford (1986), Reicher, Levine and Hopkins (1997), Connolly (2010) were very critical regarding the potential of intergroup contact to promote positive change of attitudes.

The discussion presented below derives from the previously mentioned hypothesis. Many assume that negative attitudes are the results of the lack of information; however, it may not always be true. In the following section I will introduce critical studies of the contact theory and present alternative theory that can also be used as complementary.

Critics of the contact hypothesis explained potential negative effects by the fact that “group differences were, for the first time, brought to light” (Reich and Purbhoo 1975:325). However, they do not reject the idea of favorable result of the contact. But to foresee the outcome one should take into consideration some conditions.

Taking into consideration some of the contact theory limitations, theory of attitude change can be used as a supplementary as it takes a closer look at the role of attitudes in forming the perceptions of particular groups.

2.2.2 Theory of attitude change

This theory (Allport 1935; Fabrigar et al. 2005; Schwarz and Clore 2007; Bohner and Dickel 2011) deals with the effect of the contact and how it can be forecast. In compliance with the theory, attitudes affect information processing; furthermore: “attitudes determine what people see, hear, think, and do” (Bohner and Dickel 2011:407). This means that attitude guides information processing and influences behavior; then it would be useful to foresee what contact leads to what attitude. According to McClendon (1974:56) to predict the attitude change we first have to know the psychological function of an attitude. The functional theorist of attitude change, Katz (1960), pinpoints four functions of attitudes.

1) The instrumental adjustment (utilitarian function) means that people elaborate positive attitude towards rewarding objects and unfavorable attitude towards objects that punish.

2) Ego-defensive function implies that attitudes protect the insecure person from external impulses.

3) The knowledge function means that with the help of attitudes we order the world around us and perceive ourselves and others.

4) The value-expressive function purports that attitudes give expression to our central values and self-concept. This means that attitudes show our seeing of the world to others, it shows who we are and what our principles are.

The combination of attitudes is of course possible and more likely. But when we know that one attitude is more explicit than the other we can figure out what conditions will lead to what attitude change.

Based on these functions McClendon (1974) derived 3 types of prejudices from Simpson and Yinger's (1972) discussion of prejudice.

The function of *dogmatic prejudice* is ego-defensive function. It means that dogmatic prejudice disappears as long as the opponents notice similarities in beliefs and the other groups are not perceived as threatening. However, McClendon (1974) states that contradictory beliefs may coexist in the dogmatic personality. Thus, the contact only creates the potential to change the attitude.

Realistic prejudice is used as a "weapon in group conflict" (Simpson and Yinger 1972), when one group threatens the interests of the other. Whenever there is a competition such prejudice exists. For example, the competition on labor market between the locals and the immigrants increases the realistic prejudice among the representatives of competing groups. Whenever they feel threat by an outside group prejudice is used as a weapon, allowing people to reject or avoid the punishing group. If the situation when the groups are no longer perceived as punishing but rewarding comes into play then the prejudice no longer serves its utilitarian function.

Cultural prejudice is the one that is learnt from your group. Particular beliefs are based on the need for knowledge. Prejudices help us to see the world in order and to perceive other groups. Obviously under the condition that other knowledge will be provided such kind of prejudice will be destroyed; and this is where Allport's theory can be applied. However, one should not forget that a person may have quite realistic preconception about the group and in this case the attitude will unlikely change.

So, the contact between the representatives of different groups may lead to a **positive** attitude change if prejudice can no longer serve its function, meaning that the favorable conditions for prejudice preservation must be eroded.

When does the **negative** effect occur?

It happens when the contact is stimulated and is imposed by authority or any other institution, when the participants feel threatened and where competition exists. "Superficial contact makes

attitudes move to a more negative position as true group differences become apparent” (Reich and Purbhoo 1975:336).

The functional approach of attitude change theory shows that there is a possibility for both positive and negative results of the contact. Now it is reasonable to address the question of four conditions for an effective contact. *Is it really mandatory to fulfill all of the four conditions that theorists talk about? Are there any other conditions that should be taken into consideration?* Another question that naturally arises “*is generalization applicable to every case?* “. These questions are discussed in the case-study analysis chapter. However, some considerations may already be presented below.

2.2.3 Summary

We should not have unrealistic expectations of what contact can achieve. Some may argue that contact does not lead to a favorable attitude change when it comes to intergroup conflicts. Hewstone (2003) gives an example of conflict in Yugoslavia. Several ethnic groups were mixed in one country; however, it did not prevent “ethnic cleansing”. Even intimate social ties and friendships offered no immunity from violence. That does not mean, however, that it is ineffective, or that it is not worth attempting. It would be naïve to think that any contact can lead to positive results, although most of the studies as was previously mentioned showed exactly such results. However, one should not forget about the publication bias problem (Pettigrew and Tropp 2011:274). In this case the reader and the reviewers are in danger to draw wrong conclusions from the research (Rothstein et al. 2005). There is a tendency to publish only positive results of contact studies.

The effect of the attitude change depends on the conditions it has taken place under. Change may imply not only change in the attitude direction but change in the intensity of the attitude. Amir (1969) provides us with an example of Guttman and Foa’s (1951) study of attitudes towards officials in Israel. The research showed that the attitudes of the respondents did not switch to positive with the increase in amount of contacts. But, the intensity of the attitude did. Initially, a person may have a positive or negative attitude towards someone or something and then may switch from positive to negative and vice versa, but the fact is that people tend to strengthen their pre-existing attitude.

When it comes to the generalization function of contact, change is very often confined to a specific area as was proved before. This discussion also showed that a positive attitude towards one of the outgroup representative does not necessarily lead to the change of attitudes towards the whole group. The possible reason for the preservation of prejudice is that the outgroup member was perceived as a non-typical member of the group, meaning that one shares the

interests and beliefs of the ingroup. People with common interests usually have a more favorable attitude towards each other, and, on the contrary.

More comprehensive discussion of intergroup contact theory and its limitations and application to case study will be presented further in the data analysis chapter.

2.3 The concept of peace-building and international educational exchanges

The following section explains the relation between international exchanges and peace-building process by addressing several issues. First of all the definitions of peace and peace-building process are provided, as we move further there is a need to describe the conflict transformation techniques and draw closer attention to multi-track diplomacy and people-to-people approach to peace.

2.3.1 Peace and peace-building

After the end of the Cold War the countries who had been on the opposite side for more than 40 years found themselves in a political vacuum, forced to rebuild the relations with former adversaries (Tay and Choo 2011). Their aim was to build negative peace, which Galtung (1996) defines as the absence of direct violence that can be achieved by not always peaceful means. At the same time “positive peace” was presented by Galtung as a higher ideal than negative peace (Grewal 2003). “Positive peace” includes the “increase in social justice and the creation of a culture of peace among people within and across societies” (Abdi 2012:59).

Galtung offers a tripartite typology of peace activities: peacekeeping⁶, peacemaking⁷ and peace-building.

This research is focused on the *peace-building* process, even though all three activities are intertwined. According to Galtung (1995) peace-building concentrates on the social, psychological and economic environment at the grassroots level. The goal of peace-building is to construct peace that is based on cooperation, “positive” peace. The relevance of the peace-building process to the international educational exchange phenomenon can be explained by the

⁶ *Peace-keeping* has its aim in maintaining the absence of direct violence. Peace-keeping includes various activities. As UN⁶ states the role of peace-keeping operations is “to facilitate the political process, [protect civilians](#), assist in the [disarmament, demobilization and reintegration](#) of former combatants; support the organization of elections, protect and promote human rights and assist in restoring the [rule of law](#)”.

⁷ *Peace-making* refers to high-level diplomacy aimed at ending the conflict and achieving a peace agreement. There are different peacemaking strategies; the most common are negotiation, mediation and conciliation (Abdi 2012, Gawerc 2006). *Peace-making* refers to high-level diplomacy aimed at ending the conflict and achieving a peace agreement. There are different peacemaking strategies; the most common are negotiation, mediation and conciliation (Abdi 2012, Gawerc 2006).

fact that peace-building activities can be applied both during the conflict and in relatively peaceful societies (Abdi 2012). Abdi lists three dimensions of the peace-building processes:

- altering structural contradictions, which implies state-building and democratization measures, the reform of structures that reproduce conflict, economic and sustainable development
- improving relations between the conflict parties that includes programs of reconciliation, trust-building and transitional justice
- changing individuals attitudes and behavior

The last dimension is of interest for this research, as it implies strengthening individual peace capacities, breaking stereotypes, healing trauma and psychological wounds of war.

Successful peace-building is not possible without sustainable development and the precondition to sustainable development is conflict transformation (Warnecke and Franke 2010).

2.3.2 Conflict transformation

The purpose of conflict transformation is to build a “legitimately governed and economically viable peaceful society based on the rule of law” (Warnecke and Franke 2010:73). According to Miall et al. (1999), there are five forms of conflict transformation⁸. The personal transformation type is especially relevant to this research, as it is focused on the changing of attitudes: “the conflict arises from self-distorted perceptions and it can be transformed by broad vision and clarity” (Miall et al. 1999:157).

What is important to highlight is that the peace-building task is to create conditions for sustainable peace; and civilians are strongly encouraged to participate in this mission. If people are the ones who cause conflicts and maintain it then it is people who can make a change. “Only human beings can transform hostility into relationships of peace...conflict is not just a clash among institutions, as it has often been depicted traditionally, nor is peace made by governments alone” (Saunders 1999:4). In the recent years more and more peace-building initiatives are implemented by ordinary people (Gawerc 2006, Warnecke and Franke 2010).

Orjuela (2005) explains this tendency by the deep engagement of civilians in the “structures of war”. Gawerc (2006) agrees that in democratic systems popular support is a necessity as leaders can be pressured for either peace or war. Thus, all of the levels should be included in the process of peace-building and conflict transformation: top, middle-range and grassroots levels.

⁸ Five types of conflict transformation: context transformation, structural transformation, actor transformation, issue transformation and personal and group transformation.

2.3.3 Multi-track diplomacy

The notion of *multi-track diplomacy* was first introduced in the 1960s and developed in a number of works by Herbert Kelman (1976), Edward Azar (1986), John McDonald (1991), Johan Galtung (2000) and others. It includes diplomacy on both official and non-official levels (Track 1 and Track 2 diplomacy, later Track 3 diplomacy has been developed). The second track diplomacy was gaining attention as an “essential component in a multi-layered diplomatic process aimed at transforming the contentious power dynamic of complex, protracted conflict into process of constructive engagement and joint problem solving” (Davies and Kaufman 2003: 3). Track Two diplomacy has never been viewed as separate or independent from official diplomacy, rather as complementary, it includes both “grassroots and middle leadership who are in direct contact with the conflict” (Mapendere 2000:68). Later on Track 3 diplomacy was distinguished, implying people-to-people initiatives.

Multi-track diplomacy means joint participation in the process of building and sustaining peace, held by actors on different levels and in different spheres of life. Interest in second track diplomacy as well as in third track diplomacy can be explained by “the awareness that states and communities on the planet are interdependent... Cross border flows of information, people, goods, money, weapons, drugs, pollution ... Interstate relations are multidimensional involving all sectors of society” (Davies and Kaufman 2003:4). The essence of multi-track diplomacy lies in the involvement of government, non-governmental organizations, business, education, media, religious organizations, private citizens and other actors into the process of building sustainable and lasting peace.

All of the mentioned above actors can be divided into three levels. The top level is government and governmental officials who directly take part in decision-making processes. According to Davies and Kaufman (2003), second track diplomacy includes scholars, journalists, leaders, former governmental officials, in short, influential individuals that can make an impact on political decisions and society, yet, not officials “so they have more flexibility to participate in the process and will be more open to change” (Gawerc 2006:444).

It is important for the study to provide a comprehensive description of grassroots level diplomacy.

Track three diplomacy

The concept of multi-track diplomacy pays considerable attention to the local level including people-to-people activities.

Saunders (1999:50) discusses the role of ordinary people, saying that very often people “begin dialogue across the lines of the conflict – a public peace process, paving the way for

official peace talks”. Many of these ordinary people are engaged in activities that are focused on social realm, including education and communication. These initiatives are aimed at building the understanding of the other side, “building the sense of common humanity” (Gawerc 2006:446-447).

Very often the active participation of ordinary people in a peace process and implementation of local initiatives is called track-three diplomacy. At the same time McDonald (1991) suggests to subdivide multi-track diplomacy into five tracks: Track one – governmental officials, track two – educated, informed influential citizens, track three – business- to – business, private sector, track four – citizen-to-citizen exchange programs: scientific, cultural, student, educational etc., track five – media-to-media aimed at educating people of the existence of different cultures and world perceptions.

Thus, the phenomenon of international educational student exchange can be classified as a track-four diplomacy technique and defined as the means of intercultural communication; students studying abroad inevitably find themselves in a new cultural reality and play the role of “cultural carriers” (Klineberg 1970:47). They may become a sort of bridge between cultures; therefore it’s paramount to develop the cooperation in the field of international educational exchanges.

As was previously mentioned peace-building practices can be applied not only in conflict areas but also in relatively peaceful societies, as the process is aimed at attaining “positive” peace, which can be both means and ends of peace builders. Throughout the long history of relations Norway and Russia have never been at war (Nielsen 1994). What the reasons are for such peaceful coexistence and if there is any possibility that this peaceful state will end – are the questions for a separate research. Although Russia and Norway never experienced direct confrontation with one another, there is always an aspiration to positive peace. Thus, the Norwegian-Russian policy of international educational exchanges and its results can be well interpreted from a peace studies perspective.

2.3.4 Multi-track diplomacy: limitations

Before moving further to the discussion of methodological framework of study, there is a necessity to consider the limitations of multi-track diplomacy, specifically the people-to-people approach to peace-building processes.

In order for people-to-people initiatives to become an effective tool of peace-building there must be a strong link between all of the levels of multi-track diplomacy. However, what we are sometimes witnessing is the problem of “transfer” meaning that different actors function separately from each other (Gawerc 2006). There must be a strong capacity to transfer people’s

knowledge into governmental political decisions. Gawerc (ibid.) highlights the role of middle-range actors in solving this problem.

Some scholars (Salomon 1997, Gawerc 2006) point to the problem of horizontal capacity. Peace-builders sometimes argue that there is uneven funding, poor connection between the actors, different goals and orientations.

What is necessary to emphasize is that multi-track diplomacy cannot be applied in any case, but rather in those cases where the “peace process is oriented towards integration” (Gawerc 2006:457), not separation of opposing sides. That’s why the case of Norwegian-Russian relations and positive peace-building process between the two nations can be scrutinized within the framework of people-to-people approach of multi-track diplomacy.

2.4 Summary

Recently, conflict transformation and peace building techniques have come into the light in academic literature and in practice. People-to-people initiatives, or third-track diplomacy, have gained considerable attention in the last 20 years along with the establishment of new relations with Cold war period adversaries. The problem of evaluation naturally arises: how effective are these initiatives and how can the effectiveness be estimated? The partial aim of the research is to answer this question taking an example of international student exchanges between Russia and Norway.

The presented above discussion demonstrated the conceptual framework of the study, it showed the complexity of international educational exchange phenomenon, and at the same time theoretically confined the research to the following key points:

1) Intergroup contact theory is central to the research as it supports the primary thesis that says: personal contacts between the representatives of different cultures lead to a higher knowledge about each other and lead to attitude change, presumably positive change. However, limitations of the theory and attitude change theory presented above widen the horizons of the discussion and these critical points are taken into consideration in the following chapters.

2) Introduction to the problem of peace-building, in present case, of positive peace-building was addressed. Without seeing the whole tripartite system of peace and showing the importance of multi-track diplomacy techniques, the study would not be able to define the role of international student exchanges in building peace.

3) The limitations of multi-track diplomacy draw attention to the problems of interaction between different actors. Although the study is focused on grass-roots level and people-to-people relations, it is crucial to bear in mind the whole system of relations.

What can be drawn from the discussion is that international exchange is a multi-faceted phenomenon that can be scrutinized from different angles. In order to be prolific one should confine the object of studies into a particular framework; otherwise the study would be about everything and nothing at the same time. In the present case, social psychology and peace studies are the lenses of the research and this should be kept in mind when evaluating the role of international student exchanges between Norway and Russia.

Contact theory supports the idea of individual's role in building or strengthening cross-cultural understanding by means of proximate and frequent contacts, the multi-track diplomacy also highlights the need of ordinary people to be involved in the process of positive peace-building. The presumption is that people-to-people initiatives and international academic exchanges in particular can be the foundation, or a part of the foundation for positive peace and cross-cultural understanding.

Chapter 3. Background

International educational exchange between Russia and other countries is now becoming more commonplace. The geographical framework of the study is Norway and Northern Russia and this section attempts to provide the context of relations between these two nations taking a historical perspective.

Furthermore, some considerations concerning Russian policy of education are presented.

The chapter is concluded with up-to-date information concerning international educational programs and projects between Russia and Norway.

Before moving on to data analysis and evaluation of the effects of Norway-Russia international exchange programs, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the context of the relations between the two states. As one notices the peculiarities, one will draw more precise conclusions of the results of the contact occurring in the course of the sojourn.

3.1 History of relations: Russia – Norway

To characterize the contemporary relations between the two states and estimate the potential for positive attitude change after participation in international academic exchanges it's necessary to look back in history and underline the main features of the relations. Throughout the long history of relations Norway and Russia have never been at war, what the reasons are for such peaceful coexistence and how history can contribute to positive results of student exchanges.

3.1.1 Russia and Norway before the Revolution.

The history of modern Norway-Russia relations has its roots in the 17th century when the Pomor⁹ Trade began. Russian Pomors sold grain and wood in return for Norwegians' fish; fishing was the main economic activity in Northern Norway. Pomors sold fish as well, but the primary commodity when trading with Norway was grain.

Due to the fact that Saami were crossing borders moving their herds, it was natural in the 18th for Pomor fishermen to go to Finnmark when the fishing was unsuccessful on the Murman coast, and vice versa – Norwegian fishermen often went to Murman coast when catches were bad at home (Nielsen 1994).

Another trade, quite popular in Northern Norway was seal hunting. In the 18th century the Russian population on Spitsbergen was absolute, but as time passed Russians left the places of hunting, and seal trade was taken by the Norwegians in 1860s. At the same time the Russian

⁹ Pomors – ethnographic group of Russian population who live by the White Sea. In the 17th century Pomors were merchants who traveled all the way to the Northern Norway for trade.

fishery was in decay in comparison with Norwegian. It was caused by the favorable geographical position of Norway that is surrounded by ice-free seas. It gave the fishermen an opportunity to reach the fishing locations earlier (Nielsen 1994). Having noticed, the uselessness of rivalry with Norwegians, Pomor people decided to sell goods which Norwegians were interested in and in return gained fish.

The Russian government was not concerned about the Norwegian presence in its waters, moreover, taxes were abolished in this area; it was made for the purpose of development of northern territories, as trade attracted more people to live in the North. More active Russian policy in the region was not implemented until other countries such as Britain, Germany and Sweden showed their interest in the Arctic region. Thus, in 1826 the permanent boundary between Russia and Norway was established. Since that very year the economic development gap became more and more noticeable. For this reason Russia opened up the boundaries for local Norwegian population “to set a good example to Russians” (Nielsen 1994:97), on the other hand Norwegian expansion posed a threat to Russian sovereignty in the North. People were afraid of Northern Russia to become a part of Norway. However, Russian authorities didn’t interfere with peaceful life of Norwegians on the Russian territory. It was not until the Russian Revolution when they were forced to go back to Norway.

Why were the relations between Norway and Russia kept so friendly during all the pre-revolutionary years? One answer to this question is “the lack of symmetry in the perception of each country had of the threat by the other” (ibid. 97), meaning that Norway was making up a threat which didn’t exist and Russia was not worried about the threat that was real. This misperception of threats made it possible to keep up good relations through the Pomor trade times.

Another fact that contributed to the strengthening of relations was Russia’s recognition of Norway as an independent state in 1905. It was a big move forward in the relations not only for Norway that was treated as equal in the legal sense, but also for Russia that was no longer concerned about ‘a third power that can occupy the Norwegians ports on the Arctic ocean’ (ibid. 98).

Common interest was the reason for constant and flourishing Pomor trade; Norwegians were almost dependent on Russian grain and timber, while Russians spared economic resources buying cheap Norwegian fish. Another contributing factor was the low extent of interference of governments with the interaction of Russians and Norwegians as long as Pomor trade gained profit and developed both Northern Russia and Northern Norway.

3.1.2 The Russian Revolution and the Cold War.

The Russian Revolution led to a shift in Norway-Russia relations. Norwegians who lived in Northern Russia were forced to leave after the change of political regime, some of them were deported and some didn't manage to return. Norway also changed its international policy after the proclamation of its independence in 1905. Riste (2001) pinpoints three periods in the Norwegian external policy from 1905 to 1949.

The first stage was characterized by the policy of neutralism, "combined with an active policy in defense of the country's foreign trade and shipping interests" (ibid. 206). The second period (1918-1940) is a period of "moralistic advocacy of international law as the civilized way of settling international disputes"; such position was caused by the scourges of World War I, and as a consequence entering into membership in the League of Nations.

The third period is called an active internationalism; the impulse for the shift was an outside intervention, the German invasion, on the 9th of April in 1940. The Norwegian king decided to link the destiny of the people with a great power ally, and develop active cooperation within the framework of the Grand Alliance¹⁰ (ibid.).

Taking into account the isolationist policy of Norway during the period of 1905 to 1914, there were hardly any relations between the two states. The inter-war period was not active either, as the newly established state of the Soviet Union tried to resolve the internal problems.

The period from 1928 to 1939 in Russian foreign policy can be called internationalization, the Soviet Union was trying to keep friendly relations with Germany and participated in the creation of a collective security system; the USSR was admitted to the League of Nations (1934). Norway as a country on the Northern border with Russia was not of serious interest to Soviet authorities at that time. The focus was placed on Western Europe, especially Germany, where national-socialists gained power in 1933.

During the period of the 2nd World War Norway-the USSR relations were terminated; Norway was invaded by Germany and the USSR entered the war against Nazis. On the 25th of October in 1944 Soviet troops freed Norwegian city of Kirkenes and on the 5th of November the military operation in the polar region was completed.

Cold War

In the year 1949 Norway allied the North Atlantic Treaty organization. This decision was taken to provide security:

¹⁰ Grand Alliance – alliance formed to defeat Nazi Germany, often called "the Big Three", consisted of the USSR, the USA and the UK.

“For all the European signatories the North Atlantic Treaty served as purpose by giving them the necessary confidence to go on re-building their economies and strengthening their political stability without fear of being undermined or overwhelmed by the threat of communism” (ibid. 207).

Owing to the fact that Norway was one of the two bordering countries with the USSR, being at the same time a member of NATO, it was to a high extent used as a center for data collection. “Among the results from the Norwegian Intelligent Service’ intelligence collection and analysis was a clear indication that the northern regions of Russia were taking on an increasing importance for the Soviet military” (Riste 2001:221).

The function of intelligence collector of Norway let the country implement the policy of balancing between two great powers – the USSR and the USA. First of all, intelligent service is not a visible activity that would inevitably lead to open conflict with Soviet military. Secondly, the policy of balancing let Norway remain a reliable ally of NATO organizations, contributing a lot with collecting secret data about Soviet military, sticking at the same to “self-imposed restraints” policy. It was one of the main reasons for no conflicts between the two countries during the Cold war (ibid.).

Being a member of NATO, Norway became a potential target for the USSR. Threat was also caused by the intelligence service collecting data around the borders of the USSR, by reconnaissance flights by NATO members and Soviet flights across the Norwegian border.

The Cold war presupposed impossibility of international educational exchanges between Norway and Russia. However, people-to-people contacts existed but to a very limited extent.

Speaking about ordinary people the perception of threat differed depending on people’s background and the place where they lived. According to Fagertun (2003:82), Norwegians, North Norwegians in particular, had a fairly phlegmatic and relaxed attitude to the Cold war, “the North Norwegians never built their own nuclear proof shelters, and neither did they make a fuss when military installations were constructed in their neighborhood”. It seems that such a relaxed attitude derives from the long history of relations, particularly trade relations of Russians with Northern Norway, the history without any conflict-alike situations.

Only in the 1980s were there several events that soured the relations between the two countries. The first one is Soviet invasion to Afghanistan that renewed the anxiety of NATO member states, and the arrest of Arne Treholt, sentenced to 20 years for espionage for the Soviet Union (Riste 2001).

From the viewpoint of NATO, Norway was out of risk to be influenced by Soviet expansion and was characterized as a vulnerable area due to the common border with the USSR. Fagertun (2003:78) believes that the northern region was for a long time considered as “important but it was also considered to be dispensable...the region was not seen as so important that it could not be sacrificed in a crucial situation”. So the Western countries considered that the only threat that

the USSR could pose may be provoked by the geographical position of Norway, while ideological threat was excluded.

What can be drawn from the discussion presented above is that historically built relations between the two countries contributed to the preservation of peace for centuries and the establishment of new relations after the Cold War was implemented in this particular framework.

3.1.3 Contemporary relations

After the Cold War it was very difficult for all of those countries who took part in confrontation to overcome the prejudices of the bloc system; former adversaries did not see each other as partners. However, based on the discussion presented above one can draw a conclusion that Norway and Russia have a very specific historically dictated type of relations; Norwegian citizens, especially those in the North mostly had positive attitudes towards Russians, despite the incidents of the Cold war.

Nowadays “Cod War” can be seen as the basis for conflict but at the same time it creates partnership as both countries are interested in preventing harvesting fishery resource by other foreign vessels, moreover environmental threat posed by nuclear submarine reactors in the fjords of Murmansk “transforms the traditional Cold War logic of conflict into a common interest” (Tunander 1994:34).

To overcome the differences that the Cold War brought to the Norwegian and Russian societies, T. Stoltenberg¹¹ initiated a new policy of Barents region, they started with the shift of perception as opponents to counterparts based on the history of Pomor trade. Tunander (ibid.) believes that “the romanticizing of old trade routes-the Pomor trade – the Barents Region- are used as instruments to overcome Cold War divisions”. The role of history in this case played a role of vehicle and was specially addressed to in order to show the logical development of relations between countries.

The initiative of Barents Region establishment was taken by Norwegians, both Sweden and Finland supported it. Russia was also interested in such cooperation as it would improve its economic situation at least in the North. Most of the Northern regions are subsidized by the center, Barents region membership gives Russia an access to the EU- markets. Norway is also seeking for advantages from such cooperation: “the more strongly Norwegian-Russian ties develop, the more important the Norwegian EU membership becomes” (ibid. 40).

For many years the two states exchanged notes of protest connected with the fishery on disputable territories in Barents Sea, the situation worsened when Soviet geologists discovered

¹¹ T. Stoltenberg – Norwegian Foreign minister in 1990-1993.

deposits of oil and gas in the sea; none of the countries wanted to cede the valuable resources; but in April 2010 during President Medvedev's (2008-2012) visit to Norway it was announced that the two countries intended to close the question by signing the maritime border agreement¹² on the 15th of September, thus taking a major step towards the consolidation of partnership relations not only between Norway and Russia, but also between Arctic states. The Prime-Minister of Norway Jens Stoltenberg (2005-2013) stated that by signing this agreement the two countries opened the new era in the relations between two countries: "It (Treaty) sends an important signal to the rest of the world – the Arctic is a peaceful region where any issues that arise are resolved in accordance with international law. It reflects the parties' active role and responsibility as coastal states for securing stability and strengthening cooperation in the Arctic Ocean" (Press-conference 15, September 2010)¹³. The agreement was partially signed due to the fact that Russia was interested in Norwegian experience in development of its deposits, which in turn let Norway end up the tensions on border issue.

Another display of positive attitude towards each other is that in May 2012 Russia and Norway abolished visa procedure for citizens who live in 30 km distance from the border. They have a right to cross the border having a special permission; they will be given special passports, permitting them to repeatedly enter the foreign state for the period of 15 days¹⁴. This practice makes movement across borders more frequent which positively influences the relations between peoples in the transboundary region, and such initiatives may in the future lead to an extensive abolishment of visas.

Various bilateral and multilateral projects are implemented by the Norwegian Barents Secretariat. For instance an agency introduced Barentskult program, aimed at promoting transboundary cultural cooperation on people-to-people level of interaction. Barents sports program is responsible for strengthening cooperation in sports. This program involves bilateral and multilateral initiatives, promotion of sports among the youth.

Health Fund established for cooperation in medical sphere and health-related issues, finances small-sized regional projects.

All of the mentioned above projects contribute to the general aim of developing partnership relations in the Barents Region. What is important, all of these initiatives presuppose participation of ordinary people on the grassroots level of multi-track diplomacy.

¹² Treaty between the Kingdom of Norway and the Russian Federation concerning Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean (signed 15 September 2010, Murmansk)

http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/SMK/Vedlegg/2010/avtale_engelsk.pdf

¹³ Press conference after the signing of maritime border agreement (15.09.2010):

<http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/smk/press-center/Press-releases/2010/treaty.html?id=614254>.

¹⁴ Information taken from the official site of Visa Center in Moscow (<http://www.visacenter.ru/cat/news/986/>)

3.1.4 Summary

The discussion gives us the picture of relations between Norway and Russia. Looking from the historical perspective, one may emphasize low-conflict nature of relations, especially in the area of Northern Norway and Northern Russia. The reasons for this peaceful coexistence may be summarized as follows:

1. *Common economic interest*

Throughout the years Russia and Norway were tightly connected in terms of economics. Pomor trade made both countries literally dependent on each other. Mutual interest that provided constant exchange of goods created an image of both Russians and Norwegians as reliable partners.

2. *Lesser attention to the North*

Russian government especially in Tsar's Russia did not pay much attention to its northern neighbors, rather to Southern ones. Russia was very concerned with gaining access towards the Black Sea, several Crimean wars required a lot of military and economic resources from the Russian government. Norwegian government was not worried about flourishing trade in the North as well, because the problem with food supply (especially grain) was solved; moreover, the Northern region was developing and populated.

3. *Norwegian policy of isolationism and Soviet internal problems*

Norway was implementing isolationist policy right after gaining the independence from the Swedish Kingdom, so there were hardly any interactions with the USSR, especially if we take into account all the internal problems the USSR was trying to resolve as a newly established state.

4. *Self-imposed restraints policy of Norway*

During the period of the Cold War, Norway was pursuing the balancing policy, on the one hand it was trying not to irritate the Soviet Union, on the other hand it was trying to prove its loyalty to North Atlantic alliance. Norway was one of the intelligence collectors for NATO on the border with Russia. That's why such invisible activities barely led to any international scandals. Self-imposed restraints policy implied "no bases policy" and nuclear-free territory policy, so there were no objects that would provoke the USSR.

5. *No-threat perception of ordinary people*

Due to the long history of non-conflict relations in the Northern Norway most Norwegians and Russians kept a relaxed attitude towards each other.

Having provided the historical context of Norway-Russia relations, I will make a short description of Russian educational policy both before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union,

especially in the sphere of international academic exchanges. It will be done in order to show how this policy changed and how Russia and Norway came to the present stage of cooperation in education.

3.2 Russian policy of international exchanges.

3.2.1 Soviet times.

Norway due to its historical alliance with the western bloc has been a part of international cooperation both in Europe and in the USA. If one looks at the history of educational exchanges, especially at the active phase of this policy, when Fulbright program was introduced one may find dozens of researches on its effects and very often the participating group of the research are Norwegians for instance Lysgaard 1954,1955, Sewell et al. 1954, Eide 1970. There is every reason to assert that international student exchanges have long been a commonplace for Norway. What role did the Soviet Union play in international academic cooperation? This section attempts to shed some light on Soviet policy of international exchanges and answer the aforementioned question.

During the Cold War period along with the arms race the USA and the USSR participated in an ideological race. Both the USSR and the USA tried to implement the policy of “cultural imperialism”¹⁵. The concept of “soft power” developed by Nye (2004) is intertwined with the idea of cultural imperialism as it implies a number of tools aimed at demonstration of positive sides of American lifestyle and propaganda of western political ideas. It is sometimes called “cultural cold war” or simply “Americanization” (Zvetkova 2007a). Both superpowers understood an important role of student educational exchanges in the formation of positive image of itself.

The figure below shows the amount of students on exchange during the “cold war” and those of them who achieved high positions in governmental institutions according to Russian sources.

Table 1. USSR – USA comparative table of student exchange policy results¹⁶.

	USSR	USA
Number of exchange students	250 000	600 000

¹⁵ The concept of “cultural imperialism” implies a system of measures taken for the purpose of dissemination of particular cultural values and principles in other foreign societies in order to achieve particular external political goals (Kuklick 2002). Number of scientists (Fominikh 2008, Zvetkova 2007b, Liping Bu 1999) stated that the USA and Soviet Union deliberately held such a policy to achieve its economic interests in the Third world.

¹⁶ 200 years of Russian- American relations: science and education: <http://www.novreal.ru/articles/nauchnie-stat-i/otsenka-effektivnosti-mez>

Heads of state, government representatives, secretaries of state	63	800
Main countries	Vietnam, Mongolia, Guinea, Congo, Egypt	South Korea, Argentina, Chile, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Japan

Many factors affected Soviet policy of international education. The Soviet system of education was obviously aimed at the development of a new communist working class, ideological education included such subjects as Marxism-Leninism, dialectical materialism, scientific communism, all of them were obligatory for every Soviet student. For this reason a high number of foreign countries announced termination of participation in educational exchanges with the Soviet Union, namely, Cambodia, Alger, Togo, Ceylon, Marocco, Zambia, Mali etc.

Moreover, Eastern European students complained about the ideological propaganda, the Soviet Union subject them to, through lectures, seminars, film viewings and literature. Many Soviet professors noticed the apathy and hostility of students towards the ideas of communism. By the end of the 1970s the US managed to agree on student educational exchanges with all of the East-European countries (Zvetkova 2007b). Compared to the USSR, American higher education institutions taught social sciences, law, political science and American studies. All of these disciplines formed the desired perception of American policy on the international arena that fostered the development of favorable image of Americans (ibid.).

However, the USA was not fully successful in their attempts to extend influence on the Muslim world. The Arab-Israeli war (1967) hit American academic exchange programs in the region, what is more Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Egypt severed diplomatic relations with the US in this period.

All in all, Soviet policy of academic exchanges was less fruitful than American ones, although the programs of both nations supported the ideological orientation of states. But contrary methods of selection of sojourners influenced the effectiveness of policy.

Having looked through the literature concerning the Soviet period of international academic mobility, one can barely notice any two-way traffic. It leads to an idea that most of the exchanges were one-way. Students from the socialist bloc (mostly from Africa) came to the USSR to get education but students from the USSR did not travel that much. The “iron curtain” and the policy of isolationism from the capitalist bloc did not give Soviet students many opportunities to study abroad. Student were allowed to travel to socialist bloc countries, namely

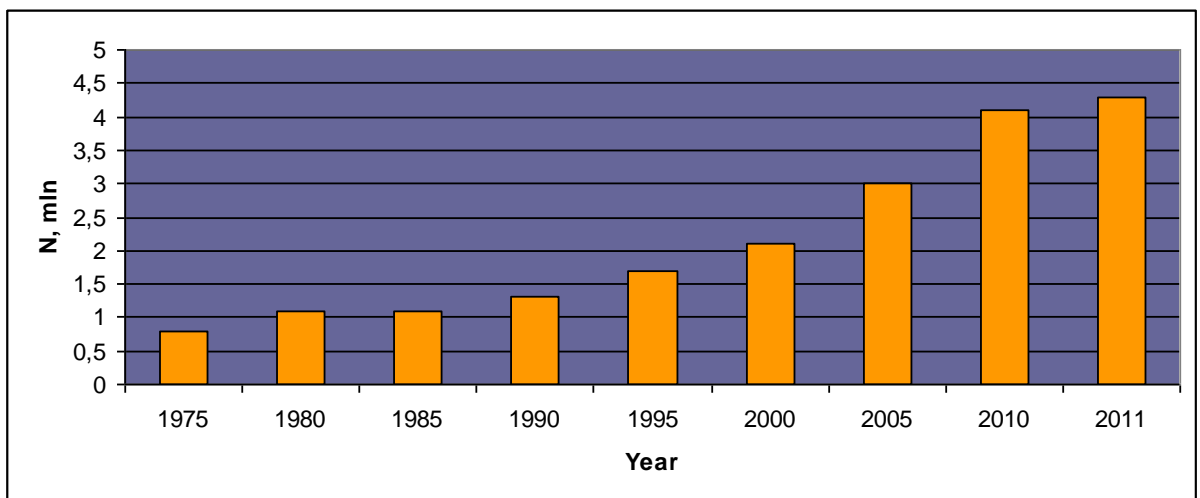
to Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, China¹⁷. In 1970s when the tension was reduced, there were some student language exchanges. Those who traveled abroad were mainly linguists, prospective interpreters in need of language practice.

Some things have changed since that time. How the contemporary Russian educational exchange policy looks like is discussed in the following section.

3.2.2 Contemporary Russia.

I believe that the need in young specialists able to communicate in different languages and obtaining some knowledge of other countries and business methods is closely connected with the processes of globalization and growing interconnectedness of cultures and economies, that is accompanied by the establishment of transnational corporations and international organizations. As the labor market needs more and more international employees, the number of international students increases worldwide. The figure below shows the increase in the number of international students from the year 1975 up to the present day.

Figure 2. Growth in internationalization of tertiary education in 1975-2011¹⁸



As one can see from the diagram, the number of foreign students in 2011 is almost five times bigger than in 1975 and has risen from 0,8 to 4,3 million people. Such an uprise can be explained by the collapse of the Soviet Union and as a consequence the collapse of the bloc system of relations, the removal of frontiers and free flow of information, capital and people, that in turn resulted in strengthening of cooperation in transboundary regions.

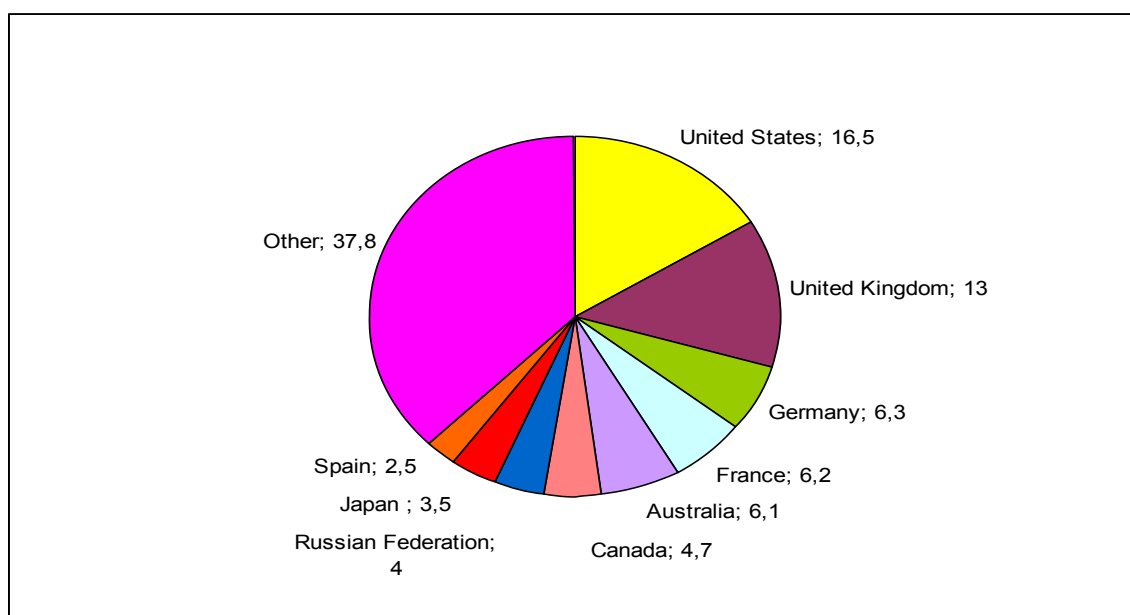
¹⁷ Borzyakov, S. "To leave in order to return", Vzglyad (20 January 2014) <http://vz.ru/society/2014/1/20/668745.html>

¹⁸ OECD (2013), Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en>

Another reason is the policy of intensification of European Union integration in 1990-2000s that promotes educational student exchanges among the EU-citizens with the aim of further consolidation of political union.

Furthermore, Russian policy of international academic exchanges is very complex and relational. On the one hand, one can say that it is more extensive nowadays in comparison to what it was like 20 years ago, on the other hand if we take a look at the comparative statistics (Figure 4) of the US and Russia's rates of student mobility, one can see that Russia is far behind the US. The below presented diagram demonstrates the world's share of tertiary education market by the country of destination.

Figure 3. International educational market share by country of destination (2011), %¹⁹



According to the diagram the USA is the most attractive country for international students. Russia is 7th in the list with 90 000 students. Obviously, if we compare Soviet and Russian policy of international exchanges, we will notice a dramatic change in anticipated direction. However, this change is mostly based on the legacy of the Soviet Union. Great portion of these 4% accounts for the citizens of former Soviet Republics ($\approx 1,5\%$) and countries that once belonged to the socialist camp. What are the reasons for falling behind?

First, the USA has a long history of student exchanges, their universities have already gained a very high reputation, attracting students from all over the world.

Moreover, Russia is a non-English speaking country. All of those countries that stand ahead can offer English as the language of instruction. More likely, students searching for an opportunity to study abroad learn English as a global language, teaching in English simplifies the process of education as no other language is needed. Furthermore, many students regard a

¹⁹ OECD (2013), Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en>

sojourn as an opportunity to improve language skills that again brings them to English-speaking countries. Russia can barely offer any English-taught programs along with Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile etc.²⁰

High degree of bureaucracy hinders the development of international educational policy. Many students do not want to be engaged in the time- and energy-consuming process of preparing the documentation (Fominikh 2008).

One possible reason can also be Russia's small interest in second and third track diplomacy tools. "Soft power" techniques are rarely used in its foreign policy, while the USA show impressive results in this field. If Russia lays a claim to the leadership positions in Euro-Asian region it should be more attentive and serious about international academic exchanges' role in the development of favorable image of particular country - this thesis was many times proved by the US (Fominikh 2008).

3.2.3 Russian students' mobility

There is no precise information on the flow of Russian students abroad. The number of students differs depending on the source. However, according to the National Human development Report²¹ the number of Russian students studying in OECD- countries accounted for 26500 people. In fact, in accordance with OECD's statistics²² 31400 of Russians studied in OECD countries in 2004, and 34740 – in 2006. The main countries of destination are Finland (11,3% of all international students in Finland are Russians), making it the number one destination, Estonia (10%), Czech Republic (6,8%), Norway (6,%) and Germany (5%). These statistics are explained by low or non-existent tuition fees that attract students, many universities can offer free education or\and scholarships. Furthermore, Finland, Norway and Estonia are neighboring countries that presupposes strong cultural, economical and political ties between peoples.

To sum up, it seems that Russia should pay closer attention to the potential of international student exchanges; if we look at Russian legislation in the sphere of education, we notice that there is no mention of international educational cooperation. Information on Russia's participation in international integration processes, joining Bologna process and creation of European higher education area is out of internal legislation (Kozyrin 2007).

²⁰ OECD (2013), Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en> - Box C4.2.

²¹ National Human Development Report, Russian Federation (2008) Russia facing demographic challenges.
http://www.undp.ru/documents/NHDR_2008_Eng.pdf

²² The Global Competition for Talent: Mobility of the Highly Skilled. OECD 2008, p. 86., Education at a Glance. OECD 2008

I believe that Russia does not make the full use of its resources when it comes to internationalization of higher education. What is needed is competent educational policy aimed at both the improvement of educational standards within the country to enhance the attractiveness of Russian higher education and focus on promotion of global cooperation partially by means of international academic exchanges to increase the two-way flow of academics. To attract more students the application procedure should be made easier, more English-language courses should be offered, and more attention should be paid to the image and reputation of the universities.

3.3 Educational cooperation: Russia – Norway.

Norway pays considerable attention to the problem of internationalization of higher education. Several public and non-governmental organizations stimulate this process in Norway. The central actors are the Ministry of Education, Norwegian Council of Universities and the Norwegian Center for cooperation in higher education (SIU).

According to SIU Norwegian educational cooperation in Arctic region²³ is implemented through the Norwegian Government's Strategy for the High North²⁴. The strategy implies strengthening of cooperation with Russia, including cooperation in education and research. This cooperation comprises implementation of various bilateral, regional and multilateral programs. The list of joint educational programs and projects of Norway and Russia is presented below. The information is taken from the SIU's official web-site.

a) Quota Scheme

This program is supervised by the Norwegian government, the target group of this scheme is developing countries in the South and countries in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and in Central Asia. The participants are given financial support from the government; the central goal of the program is to help students to develop the capacities that will benefit the home countries and to strengthen the cooperation between Norway and participating countries.

b) Fellowship program for studies in the High North

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs curates this program and provides funding to the students from Canada, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the US. These students can only apply for the scholarship to the universities of Northern Norway. As well as the Quota Scheme program the

²³ Arctic region includes the following countries: Canada, Russia, the United States, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland.

²⁴ Norwegian Government's Strategy for the High North (December 2006)

<http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/Documents/Reports-programmes-of-action-and-plans/Action-plans-and-programmes/2006/strategy-for-the-high-north.html?id=448697>

Fellowship program aims to promote educational cooperation and academic mobility in the region.

c) Cooperation program with Russia: 2011-2016

This is a new program, supervised by the Norwegian Center for cooperation in higher education with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The goal is to contribute to international educational cooperation between the institutes of higher education in Norway and Russia. The program encompasses following academic areas: Humanities, Social sciences, Business development, Petroleum, Maritime studies, Climate and energy, Environmental sciences and sustainable use of resources and Health.

d) Nordic-Russian cooperation program

This program includes several educational and research projects between Russia and Nordic countries. The objective of the program coincides with the objectives of the aforementioned programs but the program has a multilateral dimension, including all of the Nordic countries. Cooperation is implemented through mobility of faculty, staff, students, joint activities such as conferences, seminars, workshops etc. The legislative basis for cooperation is provided by the Memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of education and science of Russia and the Nordic council of ministers²⁵.

e) Nordplus

Nordic Council of Ministers' program divided into three sections: Nordplus Junior, NordPlus Higher Education (relevant for this research) and NordPlus Adult. This project is aimed at promoting life-long learning and spread on the Nordic and Baltic countries. Financial support is granted by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

f) Barentsplus

Bilateral Russian-Norwegian project aimed at improvement of understanding and solidarity between the peoples, development of Barentsregional dimension. The program implies student and teacher exchanges, Norwegian and Russian language courses, project activity.

g) North2North

North2North is a student exchange program that allows studies in one of the Universities of Arctic. Partner universities are located in Canada, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the US. The program is also aimed to bring benefits to the home country of the participants and increase student mobility in the Arctic region.

²⁵ Memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of education and science of Russia and the Nordic council of ministers (29 January, 2011, Saint-Petersburg).- <http://www.siu.no/eng/Front-Page/Programme-information/BRICS-Eurasia-and-the-High-North/Nordic-Russian-cooperation>

h) Barents Secretariat's project finance scheme

The program is supervised by the Secretariat, financially supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway. It encompasses various projects from Health to Culture and aimed at strengthening the relations between Russians and Norwegians in the North.

i) Russia and the High North Program (NORRUS)

The aim of the program is to broaden and renew the research activities between Norway and Russia on the issues that are related to Russia and the High North. The program is being implemented by the research council in 2011- 2016 with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Table 2. The table of current Norway-Russia educational projects is presented below.

Bilateral	Regional	Multilateral
- Cooperation program with Russia: 2011-2016.	- Fellowship program for studies in the High North.	- Quota scheme
- Barentsplus.	- Nordic-Russian cooperation program	
- Barents Secretariat's project finance scheme.	- Nordplus	
- Russia and the High North Program (NORRUS)	- North2North	

Examining the table one may say that the educational cooperation between Norway and Russia has a very solid basis for further development. The two countries have four separate bilateral projects in the sphere of education and research it draws to a conclusion that they see each other as strategic partners and are open for wider cooperation. In spite of four separate projects, Russia and Norway strengthen relations in the framework of Nordic countries' organizations; furthermore, Norway includes Russia in larger programs such as Quota Scheme programs. This variety of educational platforms allows more Russian and Norwegian students studies abroad.

According to UNESCO's statistics²⁶, 6% of all international students in Norway are Russians; it places Norway in top-10 list of countries of destination for Russian students. The number of Norwegians, however, is negligible. Such a mismatch is mostly explained by the very

²⁶ OECD (2013), Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en> - Table C4.3

small amount of English-taught programs in Russia, while for Norway, on the contrary, internationalization of higher education becomes Anglicization (Ljosland 2005).

3.4 Summary

This chapter has given a broad picture of relations between Norway and Russia since Pomor trade till present days; it provides the prerequisites for success in cooperation between the two nations on every level of multi-track diplomacy nowadays. Non-conflict history of the High North disposes to activation of interaction in the region. Awareness of historical links between cultures creates a platform for joint projects and programs.

Russia's change of its external policy after the Cold War opened up new horizons for cooperation in the Arctic region and led to the renewal of neighboring relations with Norway.

However, the degree of internationalization of higher education is not high enough to attract Nordic partners, the reasons for that were stated above.

While Russia is low-attractive as a country of sojourn, Norway is very alluring for Russian students. Statistics say that Norway is one of the top countries of destination for Russians. High standards of education, English instruction and educational grants attract students from all over the world.

Despite Russian underdeveloped potential when it comes to educational export, the two nations have considerable number of joint projects both in education and research. This might be explained by the historical links and initiatives implemented within Barents Region. These projects are aimed not only at the enlightenment of the participants but also at the improvement of the relations and strengthening cultural ties.

All of the presented contexts, including history of relations, educational policy of the USSR\Russia and current joint projects of educational exchange create a general framework for evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs, chosen by the Russian participants.

Chapter 4. Methodology

This chapter is devoted to the methodology of the research on international student exchanges between Norway and Russia. This section comprises the description of the study area, explains the choice of particular data collection techniques and discusses some obstacles that I had while doing my fieldwork.

4.1 Geographical framework of study

The study area is confined by Barents region, to be more precise by eight regions in two countries – members of Barents Euro-Arctic region – Russia and Norway. The research encompasses three regions in Norway: Nordland, Troms, Finnmark and five regions in Russia: Murmansk Oblast, Arkhangelsk Oblast, Komi Republic, Republic of Karelia, Nenets Autonomous Okrug²⁷.

Figure 4. Map of Barents Euro-Arctic region²⁸



I have focused on two countries in my research. Being Russian means using the language of interview as your mother tongue which gives the researcher an advantage when interpreting the words of interviewees. Moreover, the aforementioned study area is the most active territory when it comes to Norway-Russia relations.

²⁷ Barents Euro-Arctic Council <http://www.beac.st/in-English/Barents-Euro-Arctic-Council/Introduction/Member-regions>

²⁸ Map of Barents Euro-Arctic region. Source: indigee.org – Indigenous Entrepreneurship

4.2 Methods

This section discusses the methods commonly used while conducting the research in international academic exchanges. Furthermore, I explain the reasons for choosing semi-structured interview as my primary method of collecting information and thematic analysis as data analysis technique. I will also identify some obstacles that occurred in the course of fieldwork and make some considerations on the methods' limitations.

4.2.1 Choice of methods

All research starts with an idea; then the researcher develops a strategy on how to analyze this idea. The researcher starts to think on how the problem can be explored and explained.

Berg (1995:15-16) mentions two ways of conducting research. The first one is theory-before-research model, which suggests that theory should be the point of departure for the analyst and this offers some hypotheses that should be discussed by means of empirical research.

Another model is research-before-theory, correspondingly: "empirical research goes far beyond the passive role of verifying and testing theory... Research plays an active role: it performs at least four functions which help shape the development of theory. It initiates, it reformulates, it deflects and it clarifies theory" (Merton 1968:103).

Being an international student myself led me to an idea that contact with local population leads to attitude change both towards the recipient and sending societies. So I may say that in the current research the second model is used, I experienced the phenomenon of educational exchange and wanted to study the similarity or difference of student sojourns, then I collected data and conducted analysis.

My research began with the literature review. I was searching for theories that support an idea that contact occurring between students of different cultures may provide an attitude change. I found a lot of research on the effects of academic exchanges. Many of these studies were conducted using various techniques (both quantitative and qualitative). Here is a brief overview of the main methods of data collection in the researched field (Byram and Feng 2006).

Quantitative methods:

Questionnaire

This quantitative method is very common for social science researchers. "In many social sciences, quantitative orientations are often given more respect. This may reflect the tendency of the general public to regard science as related to numbers and implying precision (Berg 1995). As the study of effects of cross-cultural contact requires deep analysis the quantitative method of questionnaires does not usually bring the anticipated results: "informants seemed particularly

hesitant whenever they were asked to put down their ideas in black and white...Being bombarded by various surveys in their daily life in the institution the local students seemed especially impatient when responding to questionnaire in general” (Lam in Byram and Feng 2006:101-102). Then there is an assumption that interviewees will be reluctant to give detailed answers, while my research requires extensive texts for thematic analysis.

Jackson (2006) supports the idea that quantitative methods do not enhance the understanding of social processes during the sojourn. Studying of people’s experiences, feelings and thoughts seems to be better conducted if the qualitative research is used.

Qualitative methods

Qualitative research has a long history in social sciences. “Chicago school” in 1920s “established the importance of qualitative research for the study of human group life” (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 1). However, very often qualitative methods are regarded as non-scientific and invalid in comparison to quantitative techniques, as it cannot be analyzed with the help of computer program. “These critics have lost sight of the probability factor inherent in quantitative practices and have replaced it with an assumption of certainty....Qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things” (Berg 1995:2-3). The notions of “meaning”, “description” are central to thematic analysis that is used, it seems that qualitative research may give a more profound knowledge on the phenomenon of international exchange.

It is with the help of qualitative research we can study the behavioral patterns, changes in attitudes and prejudices of people, their feelings and experiences. When both the researcher and the researched are found in the same context some new insights may be discovered which gives the floor for further in-depth research. Some issues that would never come up in quantitative research may give a different angle for discussion of this or that phenomenon. Finally the findings may be used as recommendations for resolving problems the research aimed to disclose in particular setting. Researches using qualitative techniques examine how people learn about and make sense of themselves and others (ibid. 7).

Analyzing journals

Diaries are an ethnographic tool of eliciting data and a good alternative to questionnaires.

After conducting the research on the dynamic of cross-cultural adjustment of Irish students in Japan, Pearson Evans (2006:55) noted that “qualitative research emphasizes studying events in their natural settings from the perspective of those being studied...its concern is to produce a holistic account of reality”. This makes the research much more valuable as the researched write about whatever they want and are not guided by the instructions, that’s why other aspects of the studied issue that were not seen before may occur.

“As a stimulus to encourage reflection and learning from experience, “learner diaries” are regularly employed to help engage students’ interest and increase their sense of involvement in their own learning process” (Byram and Feng 2006:56). The form of diary writing can be absolutely different, it may be constructed by the list of questions made by the researcher or may have a free-form. However, this method is connected with number of difficulties both for the researcher and the participants. If the diaries should be kept for a long period of time there is a high probability that they won’t be complete when the study is over, as students face many problems of adjustment while studying abroad and diary writing is not their primary concern. This obliteration may distort the general picture. In present case, given a time constraint diaries are not the best option.

Analyzing reports

Analyzing reports is intertwined with journal writing practices. This method is a useful technique but it is once again connected with paper work, that sojourners tend to avoid so I will not use it in the present research.

Interviews

Interviews as well as questionnaires are very often used and I’ve chosen this type of quantitative method for several reasons.

But before moving on to the discussion of my fieldwork and interviewing, there is one important point to be mentioned. Very often researchers are not limited by only one method; on the contrary, they use a set of methodological tools. This multi-method approaches are referred to as triangulation, that leads to broader and better results in validating general hypothesis (Fontana and Frey 1998). I didn’t use triangulation in this research. However, I have personal experience that helped me to structure my interview, prepare appropriate questions that, in my view, helped to properly discuss the phenomenon of student international exchange.

4.2.2 Semi-structured interview

Before making the decision on what method I would use in my work, I asked myself which of two (quantitative or qualitative) can better answer my primary research question - how do the international student exchanges influence cross-cultural understanding by the example of Norway and Russia? - and can help me to achieve the objective of my study. Both of them have advantages and disadvantages. My particular choice was between questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. I came to a conclusion that making a questionnaire and distributing it among the former participants will not fully answer my question, although standardized questionnaires lead to “representative” results (Flick et al. 2004:5). As was mentioned above when one analyses personal experiences and issues that are tightly connected with feelings and emotions, interview is the best data technique as it gives not only verbal but also non-verbal

information for interpretation. Being a student myself, I realized that students are tired of various surveys conducted at the universities. They fill in the gaps or answer the question without proper understanding or thinking of them. I knew that they would rather communicate verbally than write something on paper. Indeed, those respondents that preferred to write the answers on the paper were less detailed than those who communicated with me verbally. When conducting an interview you can ask some additional questions or clarify some things that may be unclear for the interviewed and therefore get more information.

My study is interpretative. I seek to understand the impact the sojourn had on the interviewees. As was mentioned above, only qualitative methods could reflect the feelings and experiences of people.

Moreover, qualitative methods take into account the context of the study, which makes it unique and realistic and helps to understand the feeling and thoughts of the interviewees compare to superficial yet generalisable –easy to structure and analyze- quantitative methods (Coolican 1990).

My choice of semi-structured interview as a data collection technique can also be explained by the fact that it presents a much more detailed view on the problem. Thanks to this method a researcher can trace the changes in students' attitudes before, in the course of and after the exchange program. Furthermore semi-structured interview may enclose unexpected aspects or help to formulate new insights in the course of the interview (Ehrenreich 2006:200). This type of interview must have a guide but it still allows for narratives to shape the process of the interview: "the interviewers are permitted to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardized questions" (Berg 1995: 33). By giving freedom to the interviewees the research may find interesting and valuable themes for further elaboration that can give a more concrete picture of the student sojourn. The goal is to explore things like similarities and differences of answers across interviewees. This will help the researcher to indicate trends and regularities, to discover new issues within the field.

Semi-structured interview is a very efficient way of getting data that is not so easily revealed and observed (feelings, experiences, attitudes). As long as the field of my research is changes in attitudes after cross-cultural contact while studying abroad, I decided to use semi-structured interview.

The ethnographic approach that I use gives an understanding behind the statistics; it helps the researcher to capture emotions of the studied group. Furthermore, while conducting an ethnographic interview one may capture differences between what people say and how people behave when saying this. While studying abroad I made several observations that in turn helped me to prepare the questions for semi-structured interview. This combination of personal

experience (observations), background (being Russian) and information from the interviews helped me to contextualize the research and grasp the interviewees' points of view. So I may say that my personal experience positively influenced data collection and analysis.

4.2.3 Data analysis technique

I decided to combine two methodological approaches to data analysis: ethnographic approach and interpretive phenomenological approach. This provides the researcher with an opportunity to understand and interpret the phenomenon of international educational exchange, and at the same time take into consideration cultural background and personal experience of the informants. Ethnographic approach helps to develop “a deeper understanding of the meanings that behavioral practices and beliefs hold for a particular group of people at a particular time” (Jackson 2006:135). As well as other analyses interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) has an interpretative element when the participant's text is explored. However, “in contrast to some other methods it assumes an epistemological stance whereby, through careful and explicit interpretative methodology, it becomes possible to access an individual's cognitive inner world...IPA explores how people ascribe *meaning* to their experiences in their interactions with the environment” (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008:5).

In my case I would like to explore how Russian students (particular group) think of the sojourn in Norway (particular place), to be more precise if their experiences talk about a positive role of international student mobility in contributing to cross-cultural understanding. What meaning do they ascribe to the exchange?

These two approaches let me describe and explore the researched phenomenon. My aim to understand the role of international academic exchanges in attitude change suggested the need for thematic analysis. “The term thematic analysis refers to the process of analyzing data according to commonalities, relationships and differences across a data set” (Gibson and Brown 2009:127). This type of analysis aims at searching for common “themes” across the informants' narratives. Thematic analysis is very often criticized by its generalization function, leaving personal experiences out of the brackets. However, this does not mean that thematic analysis is ineffective, rather as van Manen (1998:90) puts it “themes are knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun”. In this case themes can help to find similarities and differences between individuals' views and experiences. In my case the following themes should be highlighted: sojourners' expectations and their compliance with the reality, anxieties and problems during the sojourn, the character of interactions with the local population and gains of the sojourn.

Thematic analysis should be used carefully and the researcher must consider the potential pitfalls of this analytical tool. For instance, personal experience is central to the present research and should first of all be taken into consideration, that's why the IPA analysis has been chosen.

The central tool of the thematic analysis is coding, meaning the creation of categories "of data that represent a thematic concern" (Gibson and Brown 2009:133). According to thematic analysis there are two types of codes: a priori codes generated before data collection and empirical codes that emerge in the process of gathering data. Some codes are based on the existing theory; however, some codes can be developed from the material as well.

Thus, thematic analysis helps the researcher to define the framework of data collection and provide new insights that require further exploration.

To create codes one should be clear with the research questions that ought to be related to theory, data and research interests. Thus, the following sub-questions to be answered:

- 1) What were the participant's expectations (objectives) before undergoing the program?
- 2) What knowledge about and attitude to Norway, its people, culture and foreign cultures on the whole did he/she have?
- 3) What experience and knowledge did they gain in the course of the program: how often and under what conditions did they communicate with locals?
- 4) What advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad can they name?
- 5) Did the knowledge and experience they gained influence their attitudes towards Norwegian culture and society (primarily students), Russian culture and society, themselves? If yes, in what direction?
- 6) What factors encouraged or blocked cross-cultural understanding?

Thematic analysis gave me the direction for further analysis of the data, these questions were partly posed after discovering the benefits of thematic analysis. The detailed results of analysis are presented in the data analysis chapter.

4.3 Fieldwork

"The question of how to gain access to the field under study is more crucial in qualitative research than in quantitative" (Flick 1995:53) as the researcher needs more intense and closer contact with the informants. The word "field" for my research means a group of Russian students, who participated in international educational exchanges at universities in Norway. That's why one cannot say that it was an ethnographic fieldwork in a full sense. However, my personal observations made while studying in Norway and personal experience of being an international student contributed a lot to my ability to interpret the words and find the meaning of this or that issues the interviewees talked about.

Gaining access

The success of gaining access to the field depends among other things on the communicative skills of the researcher. “With regard to access to persons the researcher above all faces the problem of how to find the informants and the problem of willingness” (Flick 1995:57). Indeed, to find the informants was not an easy task. To reach my informants I tried to get in contact with the institutions of higher education in five regions in Russia that collaborate with Norwegian universities in the framework of Barents region. None of them helped, as providing contact information about students is not allowed. Thus, I was forced to use my personal social networks to gain access to the student. I used the techniques of snowball sequence²⁹ and managed to find more than twenty former participants of Norway-Russia exchange programs implemented at the moment (2013).

Unwillingness to participate

Another problem I faced was the unwillingness of students to participate in my study. There were several reasons for that; the first one is connected with time-consuming process of interview, not all of the contact persons wanted to spare their time participating in the research. Another reason they gave me is their coyness and fear of “saying something wrong” without knowing the subject of conversation. Some of them did not want me to record their words, and I was trying to convince potential informants that these recordings are made only for the purpose of convenient flow of conversation. I tried to provide anonymity for all my informants so I didn’t use any names in my research.

After multiple attempts I managed to talk to eight people, and one person agreed to answer the questions of the interview in a written form. To save some time interviews were conducted both in person and via Skype, as some of the participants live in remote places.

All of the participants were guaranteed to be anonymous.

Underrepresentation

I was not planning to conduct gendered research and find out how attitudes change depending on gender of the participant, as I knew that it is almost impossible to control the selection of informants, although, it would be an advantage to the research. But in reality only two of the participants are males due to snowballing technique and small number of respondents.

²⁹ Snowball sequence – is a respondent-driven technique. I have an acquaintance that knew one individual participated in Norwegian - Russian exchange program who knew another potential respondent and so on. Of course, there is a bias problem; however, when the access to data bases is restricted it seems to be a good alternative.

Insider vs. outsider

The issue of the degree of detachment or involvement of the researcher is relevant to every social science research. Being both an outsider and insider has its advantages and disadvantages.

The role of outsider saves the time for acceptance, facilitates researcher's self-identity, and lowers the risk of "going native". On the other hand being in this position does not allow the researcher to know insider's experience and misinterpretation is most likely (Neuman 2006: 282).

In contrast being an insider facilitates the process of empathy and trust, while the lack of distance may lead to biased reports.

In my case I'm playing both the role of insider and outsider. On the one hand I'm Russian, on the other hand I'm not an exchange student. I'm taking a full two-year program in comparison to short-term exchange programs and my observations may vary from those who studied in Norway for six months. However, there are still many similarities, as I could well understand their feelings when they have just come to Norway, when they first encountered with local population, and when they started their classes. I experienced the same issues while adapting to a new environment, and all that they were talking about, for instance, language barrier, different educational system, altering patterns of behavior – all of these was familiar to me.

Language

The role of language matching of the researcher and the study group is crucial for the research. Language influences the nature of the data collected. Some say that it influences the research in a positive way, "enabling the respondent to ensure that their view have been fully communicated and understood". While others assume that language is not always an advantage to the researcher. However, the shared vocabulary that language matching gives is paramount for the research (Grewal and Ritchie 2006:65). To collect data for the present research speaking the Russian language is an advantage. As Russian is my mother tongue I had no problems with interpreting the words of Russian students as I could understand what they think not only by their words but also by their intonations and verbal communication.

All interviews resembled a friendly conversation, and all of those who agreed to participate were quite communicative and open people. Furthermore, they were very interested in my life at the university and the way the research is carried out, as for Russian students "going in the field" is not common and seemed very interesting to them. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. My fieldwork took approximately five months including the process of finding the informants.

4.4 The actual data collection

My fieldwork took place mostly in Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia during the summer, however, the last interviews were made in late September in Norway. The search for participants was being performed simultaneously with the interviewing. To find the informants I used the snowball sequence method, which supplied me with nine people from Archaenglesk, Petrozavodsk and Murmansk. Some of the interviewed were currently living in Norway (2013). All of them are former participants of various bilateral, regional and multilateral exchange programs mentioned in the background chapter.

All in all nine people were participating in the research. I interviewed three participants of the High North program, three participants of the Barentsplus program, one participant of the North to North program, one participant of the Erasmus Mundus program and one participant of the Norwegian-Russian Barents ecological conference. One agreed to answer the questions in a written form.

Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes.

All of the participants were getting their first tertiary education, most of them were 4th year students when participating in the exchange. All of the participants are Russians (7 females and 3 males) with an average age of 21,8 years on entry to the exchange program. The language of instruction during the sojourn was English, so all nine interviewees possess advanced level of English. Some of the interviewed had made shorter visits to Finland, Sweden, Czech Republic and some former Soviet Republics, and only one of nine have been to Norway before participation. Most of the participants had very limited experiences of communicating with people of different cultures before undergoing the program.

Table 3. Table of participants' background, relevant to the research

No	Sex	Age	Field of study	Year of participation	Previous visits abroad (esp. Norway)
Interviewee №1	F	22	Ecology and Biology	2009-2010	Never visited foreign country
Interviewee №2	F	24	Biology	2013	Limited experience of foreign cultures, never visited Norway
Interviewee №3	F	21	Linguistics	2013	Limited experience of foreign cultures, never visited Norway
Interviewee №4	F	22	Linguistics	2012	Many visits abroad, never visited Norway

Interviewee №5	F	20	Northern European Studies, the Norwegian language	2013	Limited experience of foreign cultures, never visited Norway
Interviewee №6	F	23	Finance and Management	2012	Many visits abroad, including Norway
Interviewee №7	M	21	International relations and Linguistics	2012	Never visited a foreign country
Interviewee №8	F	23	Biology	2010	Never visited a foreign country
Interviewee №9	M	21	Linguistics	2012	Never visited a foreign country

This table provides the background information that seems significant for further analysis.

Most of the participants spent one term at one of the Northern Norway universities. Some of them were interviewed right after their return and that could also influence their answers.

All of the interviewees were friendly and open to talk; if there were some questions they did not wish to answer I didn't push them to answer, however, that was a rarity.

The fact that the participants talked not only about positive experiences but also some negative aspects of the sojourns I may indicate that they were quite honest and not constrained by the fact that I'm an international student as well. On the contrary they were willing to share their experience and asked me to express my opinion. I think that shared experience was the key to success during my fieldwork, furthermore, the informal nature of conversation played a role as well, as informal talk makes people relaxed and more communicative.

Findings are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Data presentation and analysis

The purpose of this case-study is to show how educational exchange programs may contribute to cross-cultural understanding between Norwegians and Russian students who spent one semester or more at a Norwegian university.

There is a general assumption that study abroad brings positive change in the attitudes of the participants and “enhances levels of international understanding and concern” (Carlson and Widaman 1988:2). As was previously mentioned, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations adopted a resolution directed to UNESCO stating that “contacts between peoples and knowledge of each other’s ways of life and thinking are a prerequisite for peace and improvement of international cooperation”³⁰. However, this assumption should be shown empirically. According to contact theory, personal contacts, occurring between members of different cultures are related to positive attitude changes (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998).

The task of this analysis is to show under which conditions such positive outcome is likely to be realized, and to indicate factors that influence the shift in the attitudes of Russian students towards Norwegians while studying abroad. Thus, the following general question should be answered **“how do international student exchanges influence cross-cultural understanding?”**

As Brewster Smith (1955:18) emphasizes, taking an international education perspective, cross-cultural (international) understanding is more than knowledge, it is “the ability to take the other person’s point of view across cultural and national boundaries and to see why his reactions seem reasonable to him”. Thus both cognitive and affective perspectives will be taken into consideration.

When it comes to international educational exchange, one may find it difficult to define this term. Exchange implies the acts of giving and receiving something in return. When it comes to student exchange, the term should not be used only in its quantitative interpretation, evaluating the results of exchange only by the number of the participants. Different actors (institution, students, professors) of the exchange are linked with each other. For instance, students may gain some knowledge and experience of cross-cultural interactions, while higher education institution may enhance academic cooperation through potential academics (present students), furthermore, “the institutions that award international credentials have an opportunity to profit from the embodied cultural capital that students bring with them from the country of origin” (Raghuram

³⁰ U.N. Economic and Social Council. 30th session. International relations and exchanges in the field of education, science and culture. 1132d plenary meeting (E/3422/1960/803)

2012:143) and so on. Educational exchange is a broad notion and not only students can benefit from it.

Interviewees

Educational exchange is above all a highly personal experience (Allaway 1994:69). As was mentioned in the introductory chapter, there is no such thing as a “foreign student”; we are individuals, that is why our experiences may vary considerably. When we enter a foreign country we already have a set of preconceptions about the host country and society (Selltiz and Cook 1968). These preconceptions to some degree predetermine the results of the sojourn. Some background information about the participants that were interviewed is presented in the methodology chapter (see p. 44).

Using a semi-structured interview as a primary data collection technique, the interview attempts to provide retrospective views before and after the sojourn. Thus, the quality of the study depends among other things on the informants’ capacity to recall the experiences before, in the course of and after the sojourn and on the researcher’s competence to conduct semi-structured interviews.

5.1 Analysis

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate potential shifts in attitudes and cross-cultural understanding of Russian students that resulted from a long-term sojourn at one of the Northern Norwegian universities. The effects of study abroad are problematic to assess. Klineberg (1981) refers to various scholars suggesting different ways of assessing the sojourn. One of these tactics is to put an emphasis on the changes these programs are designed to produce in the individual student, in the universities, in the country and in the international relations (ibid. 115). As long as my hypothesis is defined in terms of *personal* contacts and *attitude* changes, my analysis is focused on an individual level. I then discuss the effects of the sojourn on the student themselves, meaning first of all, the implications for his development, career, changes in attitudes and values and degree of satisfaction with the experience abroad.

Students’ experiences are analyzed by comparing “here” and “there”. “Comparisons are never neutral; they hierarchy places along particular axes” (Raghuram 2012:144), some of which are presented in this analysis. Firstly I tried to find out what knowledge about Norway and Norwegians Russian students had before the trip. In the other part of the interview, I asked them about current views on not only Norwegians but also Russia and Russian society. The analytical comparison depended mostly on participants’ ability to reminisce before and after the sojourn feelings and attitudes.

The interview was divided into four sections. My thematic analysis is designed according to these sections of the interview. In the first part of the interview, students were asked to provide general information about their age, field of study, year of participation in exchange program and the length of the program. Background information was captured in the table above (Table 3). The reason for asking for indicating gender and age was an assumption that females and males of different ages may have different outlooks towards foreigners and foreign countries.

Being an international student in Norway may influence my analysis. On the one hand my personal experience may help me to understand the attitudes and feelings of my interviewees and I could find profound motivations or reasons for their responses, on the other hand it may be a pitfall for me, as the narratives of the participants are imposed on my experience, and may not fully reflect what the interviewees thought, but rather my own thoughts. There is an assumption that personal experience may help to explore the phenomenon deeper and provide new angles for discussion. Further considerations on this subject are provided in the Methodology chapter.

5.1.1 Before the sojourn

Pre-sojourn goals

Before moving to the exchange program experience the interviewees were asked about the personal goals they aspired to attain during the sojourn. Neoclassical theorists see individual migration as a result of push-pull analysis, by weighing up the costs and benefits of staying and moving. This comparison is the driving factor of migration, including student international migration (Raghuram 2012). Following answers were typical:

“First of all, I wanted to improve my English. Personal networking was also important. Here at the faculty (in Norway) we have very interesting people” (interviewee N21).

“I wanted to improve my English, to communicate with native speakers (there were a lot of American participants), and also learn about Norwegian culture, and to get acquainted with interesting people” (Interviewee N22).

“I wanted to improve my knowledge of English and Norwegian, first of all. I also wanted to know about the life in Norway, how educational system works, how people study and work there. And to get some professional practice” (Interviewee N28)

“The most interesting thing was to see how foreigners live. I have heard so much about Norway, its economics and people. I have a lot of friends who have been there before, so the primary objective was to get to know who the foreigner is and how he/she differs from us” (Interviewee N29)

A major finding from the interviews was that most of the participants wanted to improve their language skills, especially in the English language. One possible reason for these kinds of statements is an idea of English as of an international language that gives you an opportunity to build your career in an international job market: “language facilitates economic integration

which influences the desire for skills amongst migrants” (Raghuram 2012:140). One more reason is that some of the interviewees had an aim of moving to Norway to further their education or find a job:

“I want to stay in Norway after graduating the university in Russia and I want to get a job there as well” (Interviewee №3).

“I wanted to work here, you have more opportunities here, you know, how much ecologists earn back in Russia, that’s why it is easier here” (Interviewee №1)

Their primary goal was to get some knowledge about the potential place of living. It’s noteworthy that the sojourners were convinced about the advantages of living in Norway before they moved there for an exchange. Living conditions that one interviewee mentioned are the driving factor for most of migrants nowadays.

Furthermore, some of the participants are linguists and improvement in the English or Norwegian language was an aim in itself.

Many of them named learning about Norway and getting acquainted with Norwegians as their primary goals. “Fun, excitement and escape from the familiar are important reasons for student mobility” (Waters et al. 2011 in Raghuram 2012:143). It was interesting to know that few also indicated academic improvement as an objective, since the major goal of educational exchange programs is sharing academic knowledge and educational cooperation, which in some cases seems to be inconsistent with students’ aims.

All in all one may say that acquiring knowledge (any sort of knowledge) is a driving factor of international student exchange, skilling becomes an integral part of migration. This statement contributes to the general hypothesis that contact brings knowledge and experience. In my case exchange students were sure that the sojourn will give them the experience they need to reach the goals they set. Whether this knowledge brings attitude change is discussed further.

Anxieties and worries

It is interesting to note some of the anxieties students experienced before undergoing the program as it may demonstrate the level of readiness that in turn may influence the sojourn considerably. The comments of the participants were various and this can be explained by the different experiences they had. As a rule, those who had never been abroad before were scared and stressed:

“I was excited, but I felt a little bit scared of what is lying ahead... I have never been to either Norway, or abroad on the whole” (Interviewee №7).

“I was scared that I would go there alone. It was the first time I went abroad for a half a year. I was also very nervous about where I would live and with whom” (Interviewee №6)

Such anxiety seems to be connected with the poor knowledge and experience of other cultures, their ways of living and behavior.

Another cause for anxiety is uncertainty about language skills:

“I was very nervous, mostly about the English language, as I knew that everything would be in English”
(Interviewee № 2).

“I didn’t have this language basis, so I was really scared; language barrier played a great role here”
(Interviewee №1).

On the contrary, those who had “exchange” experience felt more enthusiastic rather than scared, and admitted that previous participation played a positive role:

“I previously participated in an exchange program with Finland, and back then I was really scared and nervous, it was my first year abroad. But in case of Norway it was interesting, new country for me” (Interviewee №8).

Some noted that their enthusiasm was partly explained by the shared experience of those who participated before. Mediated knowledge about people, patterns of behavior and educational systems gave them tranquility and confidence for a pleasant stay in Norway:

“I wasn’t afraid. There’s a lot of people who go there, they go to Norway every year and they told me about their experience...I was waiting for getting new experience” (Interviewee №9).

Initially, all of the interviewed have been enthusiastic about their stay in Norway, however, some of them were scared, as they had never been abroad before and had limited experience of communicating with foreigners. First of all those with traveling experience needed less time to adapt to new living conditions in Norway and did not feel homesick as keenly as those without experience.

The concept of “habitus” firstly introduced by Bordieu (1980) explains the above presented answers of the sojourners by stating that past experiences influence people’s actions within current ones (Huot 2010). Habitus as a social structure that organizes individual’s practices has an impact on the reaction to future experiences. All the knowledge and experience that we acquired serves as a prism that we look through when we are found in an unfamiliar situation. Exchange students that had never experienced trips abroad didn’t feel comfortable before and in the beginning of the sojourn, these anxieties and worries seems to be dictated by “habitus”.

What is interesting though, despite the lack of personal experience, many of them had heard of Norway as a country worth visiting from their colleagues. “Extended contact effect” that implies that experience one gets is passed on to his\her inexperienced friends (Pettigrew 1998) positively influenced the initial attitude (Amir 1969). Initial attitude plays a very important role in the effect of the contact, if an exchange student has a positive attitude towards Norwegians before meeting them, there is an assumption that he\she will more willingly initiate the contact. Shorter and less stressed period of adaptation of sojourners is the direct result of sharing knowledge by former participants. Thus one may say that knowledge acquired before the sojourn

may influence the contact as well as the contact can bring the knowledge and experience as was stated in the hypothesis. Friendship networks offered important systems through which arrivals found their way in a new place (Conradson and Latham 2010) that's why "extended contact effect" should not be underestimated when it comes to adaptation.

Speaking about people, they knew little about Norwegians, some of them didn't know anything about foreigners on the whole, which can be an advantage too. Exchange students in this case may be "tabula rasa", experiencing secondary socialization. If they have no pre-existing knowledge about Norwegian culture, there is a suggestion that it would be easier for them to accept and adapt to it.

Despite the fact that some of the participants felt scared and nervous before the sojourn they did it anyways. Perhaps the advantages that the sojourn would give outweighed possible shortcomings. As one of the interviewees mentioned:

"It (participation in an exchange program) is a plus to your CV, that will help you to get a job, it is kind of advantage over my competitors". (Interviewee №6)

Many interviewees were interested in learning about foreign country and people; they mentioned it throughout the conversation. Gaining knowledge is the primary goal of those who participate in international exchanges and those who organize them. International student exchange presupposes interaction with different people within different social settings, and this contact gives new information and experience.

5.1.2 Sojourn experience

Cultural adaptation and first encounter with the locals

All of the participants noticed a difference between Russians and Norwegians, but whether they experienced a culture shock or not depended among other things on their personal experience:

"In Norway I didn't experience cultural shock, when I went to Finland (first time abroad) I did, everything amazed me. But when I came to Norway, I already knew what to expect, I was calm, no shock" (Interviewee №8)

"I didn't feel cultural shock when I came, because I knew something about Norway and Scandinavian countries, I've been abroad before. Moreover I study this region at the university" (Interviewee №5).

Participants with no previous experience of traveling abroad commented on some psychological issues they faced:

"There was a cultural shock; there is no doubt about it. Both negative and positive moments. You know in Russia it is forbidden to put your legs on the table in the café or sit on the floor in the library. When I came to these places and saw this, I thought what ill-mannered people they are, but in a couple of days I found myself sitting with my legs on the table. You adapt very quickly it wasn't a shock that I couldn't cope with, it was just strange to me..."

I was positively shocked that everyone in Norway speaks fluent English, that made an impression!”
(Interviewee №9).

The negative reaction of the interviewee when talking about particular situations stems from the fact that we possess a certain “national” culture, which exercises strong influence on our behavior and world view. National culture shapes individual’s cognitive development at an early age (primary socialization) that’s how ethnocentric mentality is formed (Hofstede 1991).

Good knowledge of the English language by Norwegians was emphasized several times and marked as a positive surprise by Russian students:

“It was a bit of a surprise that all Norwegians could speak and understand English perfectly” (Interviewee №3)

In general Russians are not very good at English. Whenever a foreigner in Russia needs help in translating something it is very difficult to find someone who can speak English. An English speaker in Russia is still a rarity. What was more surprising for exchange students is that even old people in Norway can interact very well in English..

Some interviewees underlined the restrained character of Norwegians; this, of course, influenced their psychological condition in the course of sojourn:

“I’ve noticed that people here are self-contained. I live in a student housing back home, and I never noticed such a restraint. Even if we went somewhere together, the doors were always open, you were always welcome. We were constantly communicating. It was difficult here, as it is normal for Norwegians to spend time in front of the computer, it is more interesting for him\her to communicate via facebook than face-to-face...I felt like I’m foreign there” (Interviewee №1).

Deriving from the passage, one may notice that different backgrounds and experience had a great impact on the sojourn experience of the participant. Those who lived in an open outgoing society found it very difficult to adapt, explaining it by the “unsociable” Norwegians. At the same time what Russians see as the “unsociability” of Norwegians may just be another way of socializing for others. However, some ascribe politeness and willingness to help as major qualities of Norwegians, that in turn helped sojourners to adapt.

Some participants experienced a culture shock but managed to overcome the difficulties connected with it in a short period of time. The concept of culture shock implies that a person that found himself in an unfamiliar environment has new physical, psychological, and behavioral reactions to this new surroundings. (La Brack 2010). Differences between Russians and Norwegians helped the participants to cope with culture shock. Some of them said:

“I didn’t experience cultural shock when I first came to Norway, because all people were polite and ready to help so I didn’t feel discomfort” (Interviewee №3).

Several studies have been made arguing that the effect of the contact depends mostly on the personal characteristics of the participants (Mussen 1950; Church 1982; Williams 1964). Several studies showed how personality characteristics relate to cross-cultural adjustment (Church 1982; Mendenhall and Oddou 1985; Black 1990). “Cross-culturally adjusted sojourners represent a

more integrative approach to a new culture, they are open to the host culture, but integrate new behavior, norms and roles into the foundation provided by their home cultures” (Church 1982:543). Such students do not reject the new culture, rather they modify it according to their “habitus”, they create a “comfort zone” and enjoy the advantages of the sojourn.

The present study showed similar results. Those interviewees who previously had international communication experience adapted quicker to a new environment. Those who had little or no experience felt homesick and lonely, especially at the beginning of the sojourn.

The experience of former participants formed a particular (so-called initial) attitude of Russian students towards Norwegians. Initial attitude predetermines the effect of contact. Initially, a person may have a positive or negative attitude and changes it. Usually people tend to stick to the pre-existing attitude (Guttman and Foa, 1951). As Butcher (2009) argues, negative initial interaction with locals leads to the reinforcement of “home” identity, while a positive initial encounter may lead to “association” with the recipient’s culture. When students found themselves in a new environment they felt lost and had a sense of dislocation. The transnational mobility forces the sojourner to choose between local and home culture.

Many said that they had heard about Norwegians as reserved people. That’s why Russian students had a particular initial attitude that was formed by the experiences of others. This attitude predetermined their behavior and led to the deliberate avoidance of contact with local population.

Experiencing differences

Although some differences have already been mentioned I would like to develop a little bit more on this aspect of sojourn.

Almost all participants noted that “people” and their patterns of behavior were positively different from Russians. The most common descriptions were: Norwegians are “calm”, “not that stressed as in Russia”, “polite”, “ready to help”, “smiling all the time”, “happy”.

Russians, on the contrary, were described as “tired”, “consumed by their problems”, “shouting at each other”.

Participants could name the reasons for such patterns of behavior. As one of them said:

“In Russia people don’t know what to expect tomorrow, there is always not enough money... We are constantly stressed; there is no balance in our life. Instability in Russia and calmness in Norway” (Interviewee №8).

This connection of attitude towards political structure and social problems is very common. Russians are used to showing the dependency of their psychological condition on socio-political situations within the country. The sojourn and knowledge about other people’s lives and socio-economic situation made the difference even more striking. That’s how people shape new attitudes towards their country of residence, their ‘home’ society or themselves.

Norwegian attitudes towards Russians:

Some Russian students noted that Norwegians think about them through the lens of stereotypes and Russians were made to explain that things are different from what Norwegians suppose, and that was annoying for them:

“Well, there are a lot of stereotypes. They have common opinions on Russia: vodka. Putin, bears. Everyone asks about it. Some of them think that Russians are very rude and that Russians prefer to stay on their own, and it’s very difficult to get in touch with them. I don’t know if it’s true but a lot of people really think so” (Interviewee №9).

It is interesting that, according to this interviewee, Norwegians say that Russians are unsociable, as Russian students mentioned the same trait of character when describing Norwegians. This statement makes you look at Russian national character (general traits that are typical for the representatives of ethnic groups) from a different angle. It seems that Russians also need quite a long period of time to get to know someone, especially if we talk about the person of another culture and who speaks a different language. Finding yourself in a new environment international students don’t tend to initiate contact, especially having heard of “not very sociable” Norwegians from others. Initial attitude formed by the shared knowledge of others, cultural differences dictated by ‘national’ culture - these factors affect understanding between Russians and Norwegians.

Not one the interviewees faced any personal mistreatment from the Norwegian side, however two of them mentioned negative experience of their acquaintances.

The typical answer was that all people are different, and there are different Norwegians, you can not generalize them. As one puts it:

“Well I think it depends on the region. They are all different from South, North, East, West. They have lots of dialects. They are different in treatment too. People are different; I can not say something average. But those I communicated with were very nice” (Interviewee №1).

“I wouldn’t say the attitude was negative, no, but it wasn’t positive either. They will not let you come into their circle, although they are all smiles” (Interviewee №2).

What these statements indicate that international educational exchange gives you knowledge of other cultures and that, in turn, may break one’s ethnocentric worldview. At the same time having discovered differences between cultures may be a reason for further estrangement

Some participants admitted that they spent too little time in Norway to make friends there, furthermore, they did not communicate a lot with the locals. That certainly influenced their answers. To assess the level of interaction with Norwegians, the interviewees were asked to specify the amount of time they communicated with Norwegians and communicated in Norwegian (in case they learnt this language). The results are presented in a table (Figure 8)

below. However, I would like to note that these evaluations are very personal and therefore not necessarily precise.

Table 4. Time Russians spent with Norwegians, and speaking different languages.

№ Participant	Time spent with Norwegians, %	Time spent speaking Norwegian,%	Time spent speaking English,%	Time spent speaking Russian,%
1	20%	-	70%	30%
2	5-10%	-	65%	35%
3	10%	20%	40%	40%
4	-	-	30%	70%
5	20%	20%	40%	40%
6	7-10%		40%	60%
7	3%	15%	70%	15%
8	10%	-	70%	30%
9	65-70%	10%	60%	30%

Most of the interviewed spent less than 20% of their sojourn communicating with Norwegians. Some of them explained it as having little opportunity to interact, as most of the programs, they participated in, excluded Norwegians. A lot of sojourners emphasized that they spent most of their time in an international setting that is why even those who learnt Norwegian, were forced to speak English. The role of internationals in educational exchanges should not be underestimated. Thanks to the high extent of communication with other foreigners Russian students widened their world view. Having gained the knowledge and experience of cross-cultural communication they noted differences and similarities between members of different cultures. This knowledge contributed to the formation of international understanding.

When it comes to non-university life, many sojourners lived with other internationals as well. Many got acquainted with other Russian students, that is why the percentage speaking Russian is so high.

These results show that there was very little opportunity to learn something about Norwegians, their patterns of behavior, ways of communication and language.

Despite the fact that the interviewed had some Norwegian neighbors they highlighted the unwillingness of locals to communicate with them:

“There was one Norwegian, which I met only when he made sandwiches and disappeared into his room. I have to say that if you have a Norwegian neighbor, he\she doesn’t tend to communicate with you” (Interviewee №1).

“We got on well with each other. We talked in the kitchen, Some of them ate in their rooms.Out of politeness we talked, discussed common subjects” (Interviewee №6)

“I lived in a student housing, where I spent most of my time. I lived in a house, where four people share one kitchen and there was one Norwegian among us, and some couldn’t get on well with him” (Interviewee №2).

However, this pattern of behavior that Russian students called “unwillingness” may be interpreted as the Norwegian way of showing respect and desire to not disturb those who surround them. This statement once again shows the difference of mentality which is expressed in a difference of perception. As one interviewee says:

“They (Norwegians) don’t eat in the kitchen, only in their rooms, they are trying to spend as little time in the kitchen as possible”.

Was that a reason for the interviewee to call her neighbour self-contained? From a Russian point of view, it might be the reason. Knowing that in Russia it’s common to eat in the kitchen and talk; student house communities in Russia differ from those in Norway. That explains why, based in their own culture in particular, student housing culture Russians regarded such actions as unwillingness.

Another possible reason for such interpretation of Norwegian behavior is a strong willingness of Russian students to communicate in Norwegian or with Norwegians. There might have been very high expectations of constant communication with locals, which Norwegians could not live up to. Or, on the contrary, there was no explicit interest both from the Norwegian or the Russian side, as initiation of contact is very important in any kind of interaction.

In spite of the fact that students were sharing space with Norwegians, “they were clearly linguistically and culturally marginalized” like in Vande Berg’s study (Vande Berg 2009: 16). As the answers of the participants showed, they spent less than 20% of their time with the locals, despite the fact that some of them came to Norway to study the Norwegian language. A possible reason for this may be that students are often “left to their own devices” (Vande Berg 2009:16). As the analysis showed, most of them had very little contact with Norwegians and the platforms they met on did not give them a chance to elaborate their relationships with Norwegians. Few of the interviewed had Norwegian neighbors but even if they did they didn’t communicate with them, describing Norwegians as ‘unsociable’. All excursions that were organized by the university excluded Norwegians, and once again students did not have chance to interact. So the contact was not frequent and consequently not proximate, and that diminished the contact effect.

However some say, that if the students were marginalized they have only themselves to blame. At the same time, some propose to enroll students in the same courses taught in a foreign language alongside local students. That would cause serious problems with academic performance, as students are unable to study as well as in their mother tongue.

Later on the interviewees were asked to name the five closest people to them while undergoing the program. All of the participants named at least one Russian friend, however, most of the time the number of Russians exceeded two people. There are a lot of Russians who

travel to Norway, especially to Northern Norway. Those interviewed tended to communicate more with other Russians, to speak Russian, as all of them said that they felt lonely at the beginning. Moreover, some of them already knew each other and came from the same university.

The “need to belong” (Butcher 2009) is a driving factor of sojourners to create personal relationships that would reinforce their “home” identity. Having faced the cultural difference, individuals tend to place themselves in a “comfort zone” (=habitus) where they don’t have to think about how to be a part of it. These relationship networks reflect expected cultural norms and the sense of dislocation disappears. That is how the high number of Russians counted amongst their closest friends can be explained.

“Others” were named almost as frequently as Russians. The data has shown that foreign students tend to form closer relationships with other internationals, out of solidarity and the shared “status” of foreigner. The same findings were presented by Papatsiba (Byram and Feng 2006:120). Interviewees named French, Spaniards, Italians and Americans among their closest friends during the sojourn. They described them as more open and communicative than Norwegians, who “*will not let you come into their circle*” (Interviewee №2). This opinion on Norwegians might have been formed in the course of living at student houses. Looking through the prism of you ‘national’ culture you may feel like one culture is closer to him/her than the other.

Only three of the interviewed named Norwegians as their close friends during the sojourn. The most common reason is that students didn’t have enough platforms for communication. The programs designed for them by the university rarely presuppose the participation of Norwegians.

Furthermore they were usually accommodated in a student house with lots of internationals and few Norwegians. Some of them said that they only managed to meet Norwegians in student bars, student organizations or sport clubs, but they could not say that they are friends, just good acquaintances.

Thus, in order to increase the number of contacts and make it more proximate both Russians and Norwegians have to have as many common social settings as possible. The student house community should be heterogeneous, increasing the number of Norwegians in an international-oriented residence and study groups should include more Norwegians. The shuffling of student houses and stronger engagement of internationals in the university life should be assigned to the universities and student organizations. These changes will inevitably lead to further cross-cultural understanding.

Making Norwegian friends

When the interviewees were asked about possible conditions for friendship with Norwegians, they mentioned how hard it is to be close with them.

The most common epithets describing Norwegians were reserved, self-contained and unsociable. That's why all participants said that it takes a really long time to make Norwegian friends. Some even said you have to know each other since childhood. Stemming from this fact, sojourners believed that half a year of exchange program is not enough to establish solid friendship relationships with Norwegians.

However, the impossibility of being close with Norwegians may also be explained by Russian national character. As previously mentioned, Russians are not sociable at the initial stage of acquaintanceship either. Furthermore, all of the interviewees noted the language problem at the very beginning of the sojourn, therefore the language barrier (impossibility to express yourself fully) played a great role in scarce interaction with the locals. All of these challenges are tightly connected with the very time-constrained exchange program, which would possibly bring other results if extended.

All of these factors affected the level of interaction between Russians and Norwegians.

The intergroup contact theory presupposes four conditions for positive contact: equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation and support of authorities, law or custom. It is assumed in theory that international educational exchanges fulfill all four of these conditions, thereby it is a perfect platform for discussing contact hypothesis. Then, is it true for this particular study? This is not to say that inter-group contact is unimportant or unnecessary. However, in attempting to theorize its influence and effects, it is clear that contact can not be fully understood without a proper appreciation of the broader social contexts within which participants are located and the various factors that help to construct and sustain racial and ethnic divisions. These factors may be the history of relations between groups (including stereotypization), personal characteristics of the sojourner, the proximity and frequency of contact and the number of platforms for communication.

The majority of interviewees noted a scarce amount of Norwegians in their study groups and low level of interaction outside the classroom. That's why it would be wrong to state that Norwegian-Russian student exchange programs presented in this study meet the condition of close and intensive intergroup cooperation.

In the present case the contact had little for development, the only context the members of different cultures communicated in was educational institution, in other social settings they interacted to a very small extent. Deriving from the interviews the proximity of contact between representatives of different cultures was low. The frequency of contact directly depends on the proximity that in most cases leads to a positive attitude change. As long as the contact was not frequent it was not proximate either. Proximate contact may appear only if the participants interact on a regular basis and found themselves in the same social setting. For instance, if the

students spend most of their time in the same study group it is more likely that they will be closer to each other, than those who live in the same residence hall.

So the fact that Norwegian and Russian students very seldom interacted with each other outside the classroom initially diminishes chances of effective contact. The high extent of communication with other internationals supports the idea of the importance of frequent and proximate contact on different social platforms whether it is the classroom, student house or sport club.

Unfamiliar routines, problems in the course of sojourn

This section shows some of the daily practices that were unfamiliar to Russian students, which they found strange but not necessarily negative.

Quite often interviewees expressed their surprise at having discovered that shops in Norway are closed on Sunday. As one interviewee puts it:

“It is strange for me that life stops on Sunday. You can not buy anything to eat or drink. If you don’t buy food for the weekend, then you starve. In Russia there are a lot of shops that work 24 hours a day” (Interviewee №9)

“I really like libraries in Norway, all the equipment, all sources are available to you. Everything you need for your studies, you get it...I really liked the fact that all of the films are in English. and television too...”

I know that there is a big problem of alcoholism in Russia, but I was shocked that Norwegians get an access to the night clubs even if they are totally drunk. It’s not like that in Russia” (Interviewee №1).

The language proficiency of Norwegians was mentioned several times during the interviews, some of the extracts are presented above.

Speaking about the problems, the interviewees were reluctant to name any; however, I suppose that the reason for that was that they did not have any serious problems or the advantages of studying abroad outweighed the problems they faced. Having found yourself in a new environment, surrounded by internationals you open up new opportunities for yourself and you behave differently, than at home. For instance, student life in Russia is not full of parties that are offered to you when you participate in the exchange program, and that is what many interviews mentioned. You become more open and sociable. It happens due to the fact that social norms that are imposed on students in Russia or social networks don’t let you communicate in several circles at the same time. However, when you are an exchange student you are a part of an international community where you’re welcome at any time. I suppose this is partly connected with the reforming of your personality according to the place where you reside. According to the translocal subjectivity concept a new environment influences one’s subjectivity. Having found yourself free of the social norms of your country, one starts to behave differently.

Going back to the problems, the regular answer was “it is my personal problem and there was nothing insoluble”. Almost all of them mentioned is the language barrier, which they managed to overcome after a while:

“I was not used to speak English. Besides it is very stressful at first. But then I improved my language, because I was talking in English every day” (Interviewee №2).

“When I came I started to practice my language and in awhile I had no problems at all” (Interviewee №6).

5.1.3. After the sojourn

Repatriation

Some of the interviewed admitted that they experienced reverse culture shock when they returned. Of course, many of them mentioned how they longed to see their relatives and friends, but on the other hand there were negative moments connected with coming home. This is what Butcher calls a “sense of dislocation”. They said it was mostly about people. As was mentioned above, Russian students tend to describe Norwegians as smiley, polite and willing to help others. When they came back to Russia they saw *“gloomy faces of the airport officers. When I came back to my hometown I really wanted to cry, I saw new houses, and thought to myself why don’t you renovate old buildings, these bad roads. When I saw old people in Russia, I felt really sorry for them. I feel like Russian people are just surviving when they retire, while in Norway they relax and live their full lives” (Interviewee №1).*

“People here (in Russia) are so tense, now I’m working and I have to talk to people most of the time and I feel stressed most of the time” (Interviewee №2)

Many interviewees shared their general impression of going to the offices in Norway, not necessarily at the university. Previous passage may be once again explained by a striking difference in the way people treat others when they render services in Norway and in Russia. Russian citizens do not always get what they want from this or that bureau, they start arguing and the employee who sometimes does not answer in a polite way feel stressed. These little conflicts in Russian society are not a rarity. While in Norway you would get the service from a well-mannered person, that is what the interviewee meant.

Some of them felt lost which is also connected with the way Russians communicate in public: *“I didn’t know what’s going on. I couldn’t understand a thing there (in a bank in Russia), why everyone was screaming and what they wanted from me” (Interviewee №9).*

Some emphasized that the previous experience of going abroad, especially for a long period of time helped them and they knew what to expect, that’s why they did not experience any culture shock both on the way abroad and on the way back.

On the whole it took much less time to adapt to the home country conditions than in Norway, when you return to the place he was grown up and socialized in. It takes time to recall the adopted norms of behavior, but it seems natural to recall. Some interviewees got a new outlook on their home country, which is discussed further.

Gains of the sojourn

Some of the personal achievements during the sojourn were discussed under the interview. The students shared their reflections on the effects of the exchange.

The changes occurred in many different spheres. The most common change was the improvement of the English language skills. If one goes back and looks at the pre-sojourn goals, one may say that many of the interviewees managed to achieve the most desirable aim.

Another popular answer was that they had learnt about other people and cultures, not only Norwegians.

"I became more tolerant, I guess" (Interviewee №7).

"I got acquainted with Norway and Norwegians, so I was already morally ready to go there for further education" (№8).

"I broadened my worldview. I got to know about Norwegian culture and people" (Interviewee №6).

However, these statements may not be absolutely honest if we look at the above presented discussion, what can be true is that they became more tolerant, as they were surrounded by internationals and communicated a lot with them. Yet, the sentence about Norwegians to certain degree is not trustworthy. Of course, they have learnt something about Norway and they got some connections both professional and personal, but whether it is enough to say that you know culture and people is hard to say.

Some participants also mentioned some achievements in terms of personal development. The processes of self-valorisation and individualization are a part of overseas experience and central to international migration (Conradson and Latham 2010):

"Before I felt restrained, but there you feel like you're open-minded. And I felt more independent and self-standing there" (Interviewee №5).

"You become more independent. Here in Norway nobody will force you to study if you don't want to. Diligence and purposefulness are elaborated inside you" (Interviewee №1).

The concept of translocal subjectivity that was discussed above implies the direct dependency of one's personality on the place he\she is at the moment. As Conradson (2007:167) argues who we are derives from the multiple connections we have "to other people, events and things, whether these are geographically close or distant, located in the present or past". I suppose that personal development the interviewee talked about is the direct result of being in Norway for quite a long period of time.

Less people mentioned some achievements in terms of academia. Not many people mentioned professional development as an objective before the sojourn. Those who did commented on some academic gains as well. As one puts it:

"I can say that I learnt more about economics while studying in Norway (only half a year) than in Russia. I've studied subjects, I've never heard of before. They (Norwegians) instruct in a very interesting way" (Interviewee №6).

These observations let the interviewee look at the Russian educational system differently, note some advantages of participating in international exchange and share this knowledge with others.

When the students were asked about changes in the perception of their own society, almost all answers had the same leitmotif. Students tend to say that “we” and “they” are different, “there is no point to compare”, no changes occurred.

“I think every country has its own history, culture, people. We are different” (Interviewee №6).

“They have their own life, we have ours” (Interviewee №5)

“I know that there is no point in comparing different countries. We have our own history, they have their own” (Interviewee №8).

These statements support theses on educational role of student exchanges. Having spent several months in a foreign country student got acquainted with Norwegians and noticed some differences, which may be the reason for breaking an ethnocentric worldview (if they ever had it). Having recognized the difference one may reform his/her attitude towards the whole nation or particular group (youth in Norway). These statements point as well at the ability of Russian students to look at themselves and understand how they differ from Norwegians, understand Russian national features (or personal ones) and critically look at Russian society and at themselves.

However, one should remember that sojourn can bring to light some of the differences between cultures which may be the reason for further aversion (Reich and Purbhoo 1975), but it is only the case for those groups who are found in a conflict. In case of Russia-Norway these statements have a positive nature, as Russia and Norway have never been in the state of direct conflict.

However, two of the interviewees marked some changes in attitudes towards their own society, towards the national character.

The concept of national character was first introduced by Linton in 1945. He highlighted the role of culture in shaping personality. Linton talked about “modal personality” that possesses the totality of features, typical of people who were brought up in the same culture. Later on his research was enlarged by Inkeles and Levinson (1969), stating that national character is expressed in several multimodal personalities, showing the differences of personalities in various social and ethnic groups.

As one interview emphasized:

“I marked some disadvantages of our national character. You have a small circle of acquaintances and friends and you don’t want to extend it. I’ve noticed that Russians are also very reserved. In Norway everyone is always glad to see you” (Interviewee №9).

As one may conclude from the previous discussion place plays a major role in shaping identity and thus movement along different settings influences our subjectivity. Here we face the term *translocal subjectivity* meaning a form of self that is being shaped in the process of transnational movement. What is particularly relevant to this research emotional and affective states are key dimensions for translocal subjectivities. “The happiness, sadness, frustration, excitement and ambivalence that accompany emplacement and mobility are central to social life, shaping our experiences of the world and relations with others.” (Conradson and McKay 2007:169)

One may say that the main gain of the sojourn is the creation of “mobile subjectivity” – ability to operate effectively in different cultural contexts that the students gained if we look at their feedback about the sojourn. When sojourners were trying to elaborate relationships in a new cultural setting they re-evaluated their identity and national character which helped them to manage the cultural difference and “re-find points of comfort” while abroad (Butcher 2009: 1353).

Evaluation and sharing the experience of studying abroad

At the end of the interview I asked students to reflect on their overall impression after undergoing the program and desire to participate again. Almost everyone said that they had a positive experience, and would participate again. Although some of them would change the place of study. However, it is not connected with negative aspects of the sojourn at any particular place; rather it would be interesting to explore new places.

Answering the question of any negative aspects of the sojourn and sharing it with their colleagues and friends, participants highlighted that they could barely name any negative moments connected with sojourn. All of them shared their experience with classmates and friends and recommended Norway for educational exchange:

“I found out recently that the girl I talked to about my stay in Norway got accepted to one of the universities in Norway. And I think that my narrative played a partial role in her choice” (Interviewee №8).

This statement supports Flack’s idea (1976:114) that the returnee will advise others in his society “to seek to engage in study, do research or visit in his former host society or some of its institutions, and the likelihood that he will help in their efforts to be admitted to such study or sojourns”, which unambiguously is a benefit both for the host institution and for the participant; even if the experience of the sojourn is negative, it is valuable.

“They (classmates) are jealous of me, they told me “oh what a pity we didn’t apply, we would love to go on such a sojourn” (Interviewee №2).

On the whole all interviewees were satisfied with the sojourn, moreover they felt absolutely positive after undergoing the program, and shared only positive aspects of stay, as they managed

to fulfill the objective they set before the sojourn and gained invaluable experience. However, some of them felt homesick, I suppose it is connected with their personal characteristics, that perhaps hindered their effective sojourns.

It seems like the difference they noticed between Norwegians and Russians, between Russian culture and Norwegian culture didn't lead to any aversion. On the contrary, an exchange gave them an opportunity to learn about different cultures and people. Deriving from the interviews one may say that Norway offered them favorable conditions for their academic and personal development.

5.2. Summary

The aim of this chapter is to show what knowledge and experience students gained in the course of the sojourn, what change the program brought to their lives and how exchange program influenced cross-cultural understanding. So the analysis of the semi-structured interview was conducted on an individuals' level. Participants' experiences, their goals, anxieties, problems, gains under the sojourn were discussed.

Special attention was paid to their contact with Norwegians, to be more precise on their observations regarding behavioral patterns of Norwegians, their ways of socialization and general attitude towards the local society.

Taking participants' perspective the effectiveness of the educational exchange may be shown by the compliance of goals they set before the sojourn with the gains after the sojourn.

They managed to improve their language skills (English) while studying abroad. They learnt something about Norwegians, their culture, and language. They acquired some academic knowledge and made new friends.

Their sojourn may have been soured due to anxieties connected with the feeling of dislocation which can be explained by their "habitus" (Bordieu) or "national culture" (Hofstede 1991). Looking at the new culture and its people through the prism of your own cultural norms may be frustrating, and one should either reject it and create a comfort zone or modify it and accept.

However, what is more interesting for this research is program's effectiveness in terms of attitude change towards Norwegians.

Some theses of contact theory indeed explained participants' behavior and experiences in the course of the sojourn.

"Extended contact effect" (Pettigrew 1998) played an important role in the beginning of the sojourn. The reason for its significance is that it forms initial attitude (Amir 1969) and as a consequence influences the contact. Particular initial attitude hindered or encouraged

participants' communication with Norwegians and other internationals as was shown in the analysis. So the contact hypothesis in this case may be modified and may look like this:

Figure 5. Modified contact hypothesis



The analysis led me to some considerations on personal characteristics (Amir 1969) and their influence on the effect of contact. Mostly I talk about such characteristic as cross-cultural adjustment. The present analysis showed that those who had communication experience with internationals are more open towards different cultures. They are more adaptable and are able to modify the new culture in accordance with their own cultural norms.

Some interviewees stated that they see clear differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’. These observations (knowledge) they gained, as theory says, break the ethnocentric worldview that is shaped in the course of primary socialization. These observations relate not only to Norwegians (that are in the focus of the study) but also to other internationals the participants met under the sojourn.

“Other internationals” made up almost a half of sojourners’ network. This can be explained by the high amount of social setting they met in: student houses, university, student organizations, sport clubs, parties.

At the same time Norwegians are not so engaged in activities with internationals and this is one of the reasons for low contact. It is not as frequent as required for effective interaction and as a consequence not proximate either.

Another reason for low interaction is students’ “need to belong” (Butcher 2009). Russian student as any person abroad seeks for compatriots to create a ‘comfort zone” (Bordieu 1980) and strengthen his\her home identity. So it seems like those who surrounded my interviewees were either Russians or other international students with whom they could share the status of foreigner (Byram and Feng 2006).

So the number of factors affected the level of communication between Russian and Norwegian students.

The frequency and proximity of contact as one of additional conditions for effective contact turned out to be one of the most important in the present case, as the high level of interactions with other internationals may be explained by the diversity of social platforms they met on.

All of these observations support and supplement some of the theoretical theses. But the most important thing is that whatever the attitude towards Norwegians is the long-term trip abroad (educational exchange) did bring some changes in the participants’ lives, namely this sojourn

shaped their mobile subjectivity. On the whole one can say that international educational exchange between Norway and Russia brings ambiguous results when it comes to international understanding. However, it does not mean that exchanges are ineffective, some reflections on that are presented in the conclusion.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

The research paper aimed to show the importance of people-to-people initiatives, namely international educational exchanges in promoting intercultural understanding and peace.

The main advantage of international exchanges is the ability to learn about another culture by experiencing it through communication with its representatives.

The current study is based on a contact theory hypothesis that personal contact between the representatives of different cultures will lead to higher knowledge about culture that in turn will lead to positive attitude change.

Educational exchange is very often considered as the best example to show how this theory works as it fulfills four conditions for effective contact³¹. But is it true for this research?

Indeed both Russian and Norwegian students share common status of “student”, they do have common goal – gaining knowledge, and they are supported by the universities in this aspirations. But what data analysis has shown is that there is a lack of intergroup cooperation.

Low interaction between Russians and Norwegians are explained by: initial attitude of Russians towards Norwegians based on the narratives of others, lack of social settings to meet in, and Russian students’ need to belong and reinforce ‘home’ identity through communication with compatriots.

Intergroup contact theorists also talk about the generalization of contact – the ability of contact to be extended from one person to the whole group, from one situation to another. However the study showed that generalizations do not always happen, but the extended contact effect played a role in educational exchange. Those who shared their positive experience of participation mentioned positive reaction of their groupmates and their desire to participate as well.

Theory of attitude change says that both positive and negative contact results are possible and this thesis led me to an idea that other conditions presuppose the effect of the contact. First of all in order to foresee the effect of the contact one should take into account the broad social contexts within which participants are located and the various factors that either encourage or hinder communication. These factors may be the history of relations between groups (including stereotypization).

Contemporary relations between Norway and Russian encourage people-to-people initiatives by implementation of various bilateral, regional and multilateral educational programs.

³¹ Allport’s four conditions for effective contact are equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation and support of authorities, law or custom (1956)

The contact depends also on personal characteristics of the sojourner. As was discussed before cross-culturally adjusted participants with previous experience of international communication adapted faster and managed to create bigger social network with the representatives of different cultures.

One should remember about the proximity and frequency of contact which was one of the main reasons for low interaction between Russians and Norwegians. This problem is the direct consequence of the lack of platforms for communication.

Despite ambiguous results of data analysis, one may say that international educational exchanges still have a positive affect on attitude change, it only depends on attitude to *what* it influences.

Answering the major research question one may say that cross-cultural understanding is only partially achieved when it comes to Norway-Russia educational exchanges.

However, if one speaks about the change of attitudes towards their own society and themselves, one may notice serious changes happened to the interviewees. Many of them noted poor living conditions in Russia in comparison to Norway, and understood the need for change even stronger. As one of them mentioned:

“When I saw old people in Russia I felt really sorry for them. I feel like in Russia people survive when they retire, while in Norway they relax, they live full lives. Tramps, devastation is all around, and the way we treat each other is awful” (Interviewee №1).

This rethinking of their own society and willingness to change it can be regarded as one of the pluses of the sojourn. The personal development and attitude change towards themselves, many interviewees mentioned that they became more independent, open-minded and tolerant towards other nations. Finding yourself in an international milieu, gives you an opportunity to learn more and understand better.

Despite the fact that present study did not provide evidence for attitude change towards the host country, its people, it did contribute to a positive role of educational student exchanges in cross-cultural understanding, as the translocal subjectivity is being shaped. According to this concept our selfhood is formed by the events and connections we have, but these events and connections are attached to certain places. That’s why place plays a great role in building our identity. Found in an unfamiliar environment the sojourner gets to know about other patterns of behavior, he\she starts to think critically about himself and his ‘home’ culture and society.

The phenomenon of academic student exchange as one of the people-to-people diplomacy techniques is an integral part of peace-building processes. However, one should understand that it is only a *part*, a “piece of a multi-level, multi-faceted peace-building process, and people-to-people initiatives rely on vertical capacity (coordination between the various levels) in order to have political value and effect” (Gawerc 2006:448). People should not have overoptimistic

opinion on the role of student exchanges in building positive peace. John McDonald points out that “civil society has a small capacity to influence the first two tracks” (Gawerc 2006: 449). More than just a superficial contact is needed to change attitudes, and it is likely that not all foreign students have the degree of contact with people of the host country that is likely to produce attitude change, as was the case for the interviewees’ sojourns.

What is needed is a complex approach towards peace-building, which would include both vertical and horizontal interaction of different levels and actors. Goals and means of different actors should be common, funding should be allocated evenly, there has to be strong link between governments and non-governmental organizations, so that people-to-people initiatives could turn into political decisions.

However, the role of student educational exchanges should not be underestimated either. What many researchers and political figures highlighted is that the most important advantage of exchange programs is that it gives an opportunity to experience new culture (Vande Berg 2010: 25). It may seem that all of possible levels (individual, society, country, international relations) of analysis are separate; however, individual experience inevitably influences home institutions and home country, and international relations as well. The student can advise to engage in particular institution and participate in an exchange program, as was the case for my interviewees, and this inevitably influences the institutions. The repay to home institution can also be made in the form of arrangements for university libraries “to receive publications, documents, journals, and other materials from the ex-foreign students’ home countries, with a view to improving their resources for learning and research” (Flack 1976:114).

Findings made by various scholars (Buchanan and Cantril 1953) support the idea that “feeling of friendliness or unfriendliness toward the people of another country correspond closely to international political alignments” (Selltiz and Cook 1962:13). The character of diplomatic relations between countries puts an impact on the relations between individuals from these countries. That’s why it is important to bare in mind the specificity of Norwegian-Russian relations, discussed in the background chapter. Long non-conflict history of relations undoubtedly influences the formation of (if not friendship then) partnership attitude towards each other. Thus, the change in the attitude on the highest level leads to the shift in perception on the individual level. If the reverse process is possible remains unanswered and serves as a topic for a separate research.

Hopefully, the research analysis showed some aspects that play a great role in attitude formation and transformation, blocking or encouraging cross-cultural understanding: initial attitude, frequent and proximate contact, personal characteristics, need to belong and historical background.

One more aspect I would like to dwell on a bit, is that the results of the research can not be straightforwardly generalized to all students participating in international academic exchanges, let alone to overall population of Norway and Russia.

What this research aimed to show is that exchange does lead to changes if not in attitudes towards the host country, then to home country, or individuals themselves, which is also very important in terms of constructing conscientious and tolerant society. Thus, student educational exchanges can be regarded as subsidiary instrument for keeping and building peace and international (cross-cultural) understanding if certain conditions drawn from the analysis are fulfilled.

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