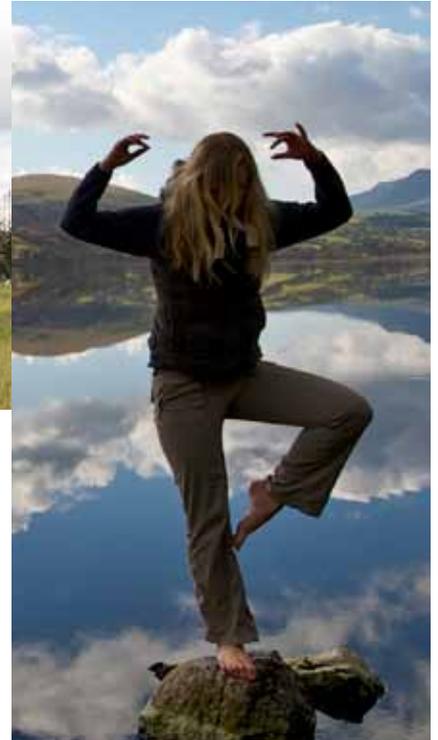


NUMBER  
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# Facts

**EXPRESS**

## DO MOBILITY PERIODS CHANGE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES?



➤ **Global Mindedness**  
maps how students engage  
with difference

### Background

**THOUSANDS OF FINNISH** higher education students head abroad annually as exchange students and trainees. These mobility periods improve their language skills and promote their personal growth, but do they also have a real impact on attitudes?

CIMO's Global Mindedness survey is a pioneering study, measuring how international experiences impact on students' attitudes and engagement with difference. Commissioned by CIMO, the survey is the product of a research team led

by **Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti**, Professor of Global Education, University of Oulu.

Global Mindedness is useful not only for research purposes but also as a guidance tool and in coaching students before and after a mobility period. Taking the survey and reflecting on the responses helps students identify ways of engaging with difference.

This Facts Express publication presents the first findings of the survey and suggests different ways of reading the results.

We also hope that this publication will encourage CIMO and both practitioners and researchers of internationalisation to join forces to work on the survey, to assess the impacts of international experiences and to develop ways of mapping these impacts further.

#### **MORE INFORMATION**

about the Global Mindedness survey and the findings on CIMO's website [www.cimo.fi](http://www.cimo.fi) | Services | Studies, analyses and evaluations.

# GlobalMindedness



Each disposition can be useful depending on the context. Changes in the dispositions do not signify development for the better or for worse.

## Tourism, Empathy and Visiting: three dispositions toward engaging with difference

**THE GLOBAL MINDEDNESS** survey highlights three different dispositions toward engaging with cultural otherness and difference<sup>1</sup>. These are referred to as *Tourism*, *Empathy* and *Visiting*.

**Tourism** – based on objectivism: the world can be understood and described in only one way. “Tourists” already know what they will find abroad. Other cultures and different views appear as other. The disposition of tourism overrides difference.

**Empathy** – based on relativism: we all have different perspectives on the world. Seeking to understand how others view the world, which helps to bridge the difference between self and other. The disposition of empathy aims at a fusion of perspectives.

**Visiting** – based on pluralism: acceptance that people can live and function in different worlds. Opening to and encountering others’ perspectives outside a ready-made framework. Being with and in the presence of other. The disposition of visiting aims at a meeting of different worlds.

The dispositions are seen not as developmental stages but as different ways of engaging with difference. One is not better than the other. Each disposition can be useful depending on the context.

### What does the Global Mindedness survey do?

The survey targets higher education students and recent graduates in Finland heading abroad as exchange students or trainees. The survey has been available since May 2013.

Students respond to the survey twice, before and after their mobility periods.

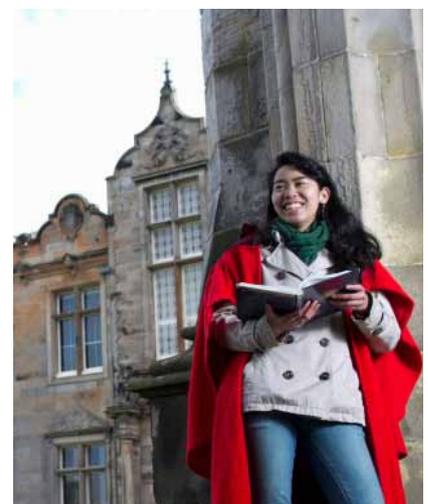
The survey contains 21 statements, which the students can agree or disagree with. These statements measure three different ways of engaging with difference.

On responding to the survey before the mobility period, the students are also asked to answer a set of background questions. After the mobility period, they are asked to revisit the statements and to answer self-assessment questions on the impacts of the mobility period.

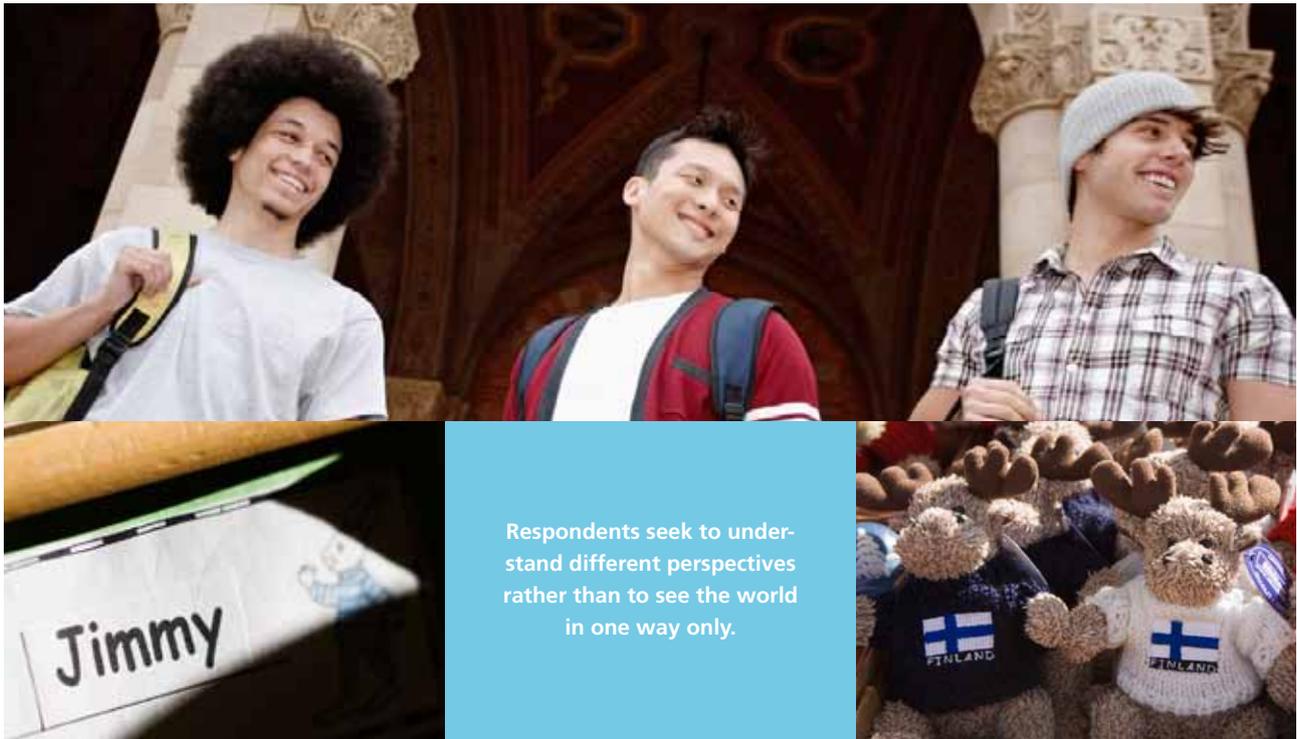
### RESPONDENT PROFILE

The data includes all responses submitted by August 2014.

- 632 respondents from 37 institutions of higher education
- 71% women, 29% men
- 55% university students, 45% from universities of applied sciences
- 59% under the age of 24
- 38% abroad for the first time for study or work
- 74% spent less than six months abroad
- 64% in a country within the EU/European Economic Area.



<sup>1</sup>De Oliveira Andreotti, Vanessa & Biesta, Gert & Ahenakew, Cash (2012): Global Mindedness Dispositions Instrument. Final Report. April 2012.



Respondents seek to understand different perspectives rather than to see the world in one way only.

## Mean values show little change in dispositions

**THE STUDENTS** who responded to the survey tended to agree more with statements in the categories of Empathy and Visiting than with those in the disposition of Tourism. The constellation did not change during the mobility period. This is evident from the mean values of the extent to which the respondents agreed or disagreed with the statements measuring the different dispositions.

Rather than opting for one single interpretation of the world (Tourism),

the respondents aim to understand different perspectives (Empathy) and to challenge their own views (Visiting). This may in many contexts prove to be a more constructive approach.

Mobile students seem to be more open to engaging with difference before heading abroad already. They are therefore a predisposed group, more ready to meet new people and perspectives.

Dispositional changes are on average minor after the mobility period. On average, Tourism grows slightly weaker after students' return, while Empathy remains at a similar level. The disposition of Visiting grows somewhat stronger.

## Disposition influenced by previous international experience, gender and field of education

The disposition of Tourism stands out among those respondents who were about to study or work abroad for the first time. The gap grew smaller once the students had returned to Finland.

The respondents' gender and educational field also had an impact on the disposition. Tourism was more prevalent among men than among women both before and after the mobility period. Women were more predisposed to Visiting. It also appears that women find it easier to engage with internationality and related phenomena: for example, women are more likely to study abroad than are men.

Students of Natural Sciences and Engineering number more advocates of Tourism and fewer advocates of Visiting than do students of other fields. This may be because Natural Sciences and Engineering are dominated by male students, but it may also be down to the exact nature of these fields.

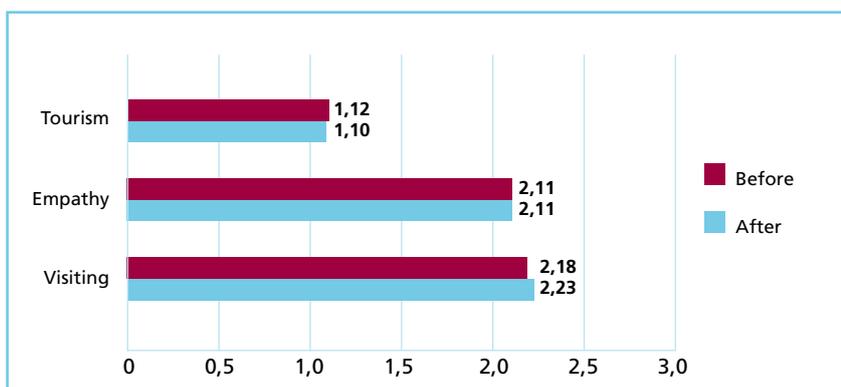
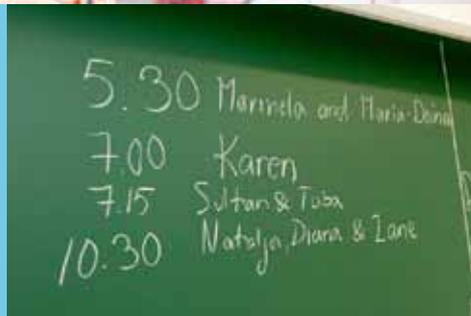


Figure 1: Different dispositions before and after mobility period, average (0=strongly disagree – 3=strongly agree)



Most change occurred in the disposition of Tourism, which became the dominant disposition among 11% of respondents, and turned to a non-dominant disposition among 9% of respondents.



### Change becomes visible in configurations of dispositions

**RESPONDENTS** may use more dispositions depending on the context. Figure 2 shows a cross table of various configurations of dispositions before and after the mobility period.

A disposition is deemed to be dominant, if a respondent agrees with at least four statements measuring this disposition. A dominating disposition is indicated with a capital letter.

The respondents typically had several dominant dispositions at any one time. The most common configuration was one dominated by Empathy and Visiting, and not dominated by Tourism (tEV). This configuration was shared by almost 500 respondents before the exchange and by 485 respondents after the exchange. The configuration of 414 respondents did not change during the mobility period.

Another fairly typical configuration was one dominated by all three dispositions (TEV), applied by 105 and 117 respondents, respectively, before and after the mobility period.

Configurations of dominant dispositions before and after mobility make the impacts of international experience more visible than do mean values alone. In the disposition of Tourism, change was evident in about 10% of the respondents: it became a dominant disposition among 67 respondents (tEV ► TEV) and a non-dominant disposition among 56 students (TEV ► tEV).

Tourism turned into a non-dominant disposition especially among the first-time exchange students and trainees. For them, Tourism was the dominant

disposition before the mobility period more often than among the more experienced students.

Tourism turned on average into a dominant disposition more often among those students who spent less than 3 months abroad.

All in all, the respondents whose Tourism disposition changed one way or another were more likely to be men, students of universities of applied sciences and students of Natural Sciences, Technology, and Social Services and Health.

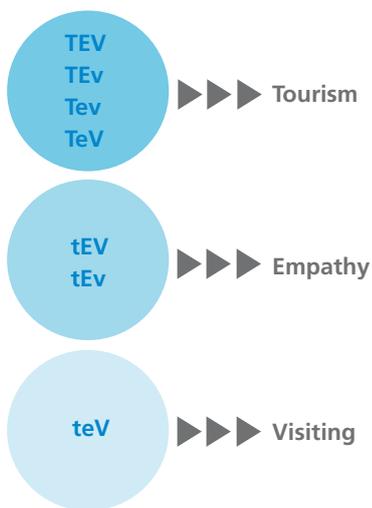
		After mobility period							Total	
		tev	tEv	teV	tEV	TEV	TeV	TEv		
Before mobility period	tev	0	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
	tEv	0	3	1	7	3	0	1	1	15
	teV	0	1	0	7	0	0	1	0	9
	tEV	1	4	7	414	67	1	0	0	494
	TEV	0	2	1	56	44	0	1	1	105
	TEv	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	TeV	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	3
	Total	2	13	9	485	117	1	4	1	632

Figure 2: Configurations of dispositions before and after mobility period, number of respondents (CAPITAL letters = dominant disposition)

## Research team: respondents pay attention to social expectations

**THE RESEARCH TEAM** behind the survey argues that the three dispositions are qualitatively different. Their concurrent use is not without problems. The Visiting disposition requires that we distance ourselves from statements of Empathy and Tourism. Similarly, Empathy requires a certain distance from statements common in Tourism.

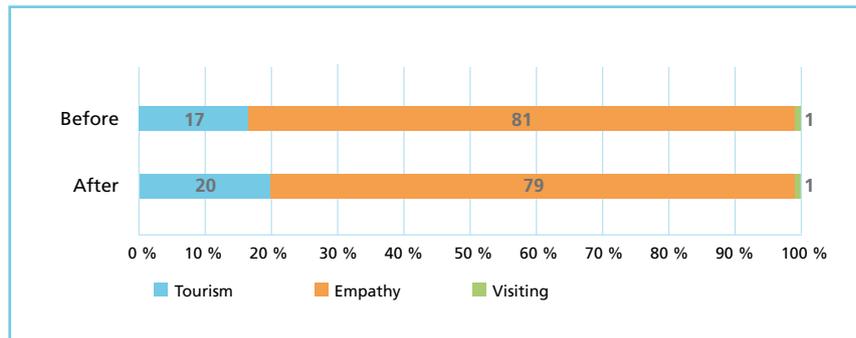
The researchers claim that Tourism is more powerful than the other dispositions. As a dominant disposition it overrides the other dominant dispositions within a configuration. The second most powerful disposition is Empathy, which overtakes a dominant Visiting disposition. The various configurations can thus be reduced to a single disposition.



This, the researchers say, is because students respond to statements of Empathy and Visiting at least partially based on what they know to be socially accepted or what they perceive is the desirable scenario.

Seen in this light, Empathy is by far the most common disposition, used by over 80% of the respondents before the mobility period (figure 3). Their share grew slightly smaller after the exchange. Under 20% of the respondents were Tourism-minded. Their share increased somewhat during the mobility period.

The Visiting disposition, which rests on the ability to question one's own



**Figure 3: Prevalent disposition before and after mobility period when different configurations are reduced to one dominant disposition, % of respondents.**

perspectives, was found in only a few cases. This is understandable, say the researchers, as the inherent reflexivity of Visiting is not easy. And while we are encouraged to understand other people's perspectives, education does not promote a Visiting disposition.

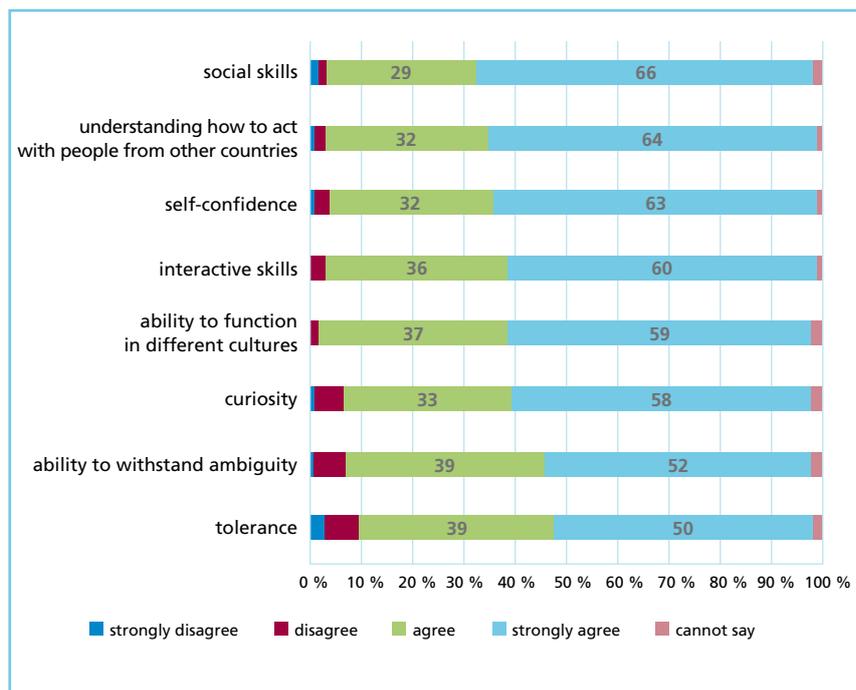
## Students' self-assessment: mobility periods have clear impact on a range of issues

**THE IMPACTS** of mobility periods were most tangible when the students themselves were given a chance of self-assessment after the exchange. A clear majority of the respondents felt that the mobility period had improved their

social skills, interactive skills, ability to function in other cultures, understanding of how to act with people from different cultures, and curiosity (figure 4).

Most respondents also feel that the mobility period has had an impact on how they perceive themselves or their home and target countries. There were few dissenting voices on this.

Researchers find that Tourism dominates in configurations of dispositions, while Empathy is stronger than Visiting.



**Figure 4: The mobility period helped me to improve my... (%)**

The self-assessment section of the survey showed that the students felt the mobility period had impacted on several items, while the changes appeared on average minor on the basis of the students' responses to statements of Tourism, Empathy and Visiting.



## What do the findings tell us about the impact of mobility periods?

**THE GLOBAL MINDEDNESS** survey is a first attempt to build a measuring tool to map the impact of mobility periods among Finnish students. The survey has not been used previously, nor is there a fixed template to read the results.

The survey examined the impact in two ways: by studying the dispositions of Tourism, Empathy and Visiting and by asking the students to assess the impact themselves. The different methods and interpretations gave different results.

Students back from their mobility period felt that the exchange had affected them in many ways, but their responses may have been coloured by enthusiasm over the recent experience.

As to statements related to Tourism, Empathy and Visiting, the students are placed differently according to how strongly they agree or disagree with the said statements. Measured in this way, the impacts on engaging with difference are less pronounced and the changes after the mobility period are similarly smaller. It may also matter that the mobile students are a predisposed group from the outset.

At the same time, there is change in two directions: some grow more rigid in their reliance on one truth, while others turn to seeking to understand other perspectives.

Engaging with difference belongs to the realm of deep-seated attitudes, which are slow to change. It is not perhaps realistic to expect that a mobility period of six months or a year would change such attitudes to a great extent. Heading abroad does not automatically lead to intercultural learning. This may rather require that we also reflect on the matter.

We should also continue to analyse how adequately isolated statements describe and fit the three underlying dispositions. It is on the whole challenging to study attitudes with a quantitative survey, as a multidimensional phenomenon needs to be simplified and the choices need to be limited.

### Ongoing development

CIMO continues to work on Global Mindedness. The survey will be tested in initial vocational education and training in 2015. The decision should also be made whether to introduce a non-mobile control group alongside the mobile students. Do students who stay in Finland engage differently with difference?

## The effect of mobility on students' abilities has also been studied elsewhere.

A study published by the European Commission<sup>2</sup> examined the impact of student mobility on six traits or competences deemed as especially relevant for students' employability: *confidence, curiosity, decisiveness, serenity, tolerance for ambiguity and vigour*.

The study was carried out by CHE Consult, a German consulting company, whose Memo survey (*Monitoring exchange mobility outcomes*) served as the basis of the measuring tool. Here, too, the competences were mapped before and after a mobility period. The mapping is grounded not (only) in the students' self-perceptions but in a psychometric analysis.

The mobile students were found to have slightly higher values on all studied factors to begin with than the non-mobile control group. The largest difference was found on curiosity. The mobile students are thus a select group from the outset.

The studied competences and personality traits were somewhat enhanced during the mobility period. The largest effect size was found on confidence. The study also found that the students themselves felt that they had learnt and developed more than was shown by changes in competences and personality traits.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2014): The Erasmus Impact Study. Effects of the mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalization of the higher education institutions.