Studying Abroad
Exploring mobility, expectations and experiences among mobile students

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Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract
This thesis deals with the experiences and outcomes of temporarily studying abroad, via follow-up studies, aiming to explore international student mobility with a focus on the individual's perspective. The specific research questions, dealing with the individual students’ expectations and experiences, are addressed in three papers. The fourth paper is a framing of these studies, using results from a global study.

The first research question connects to the attractiveness of international study experiences:
Q1. What are the individual's expectations for studying abroad, among inbound and outbound students, and what are the students' reported experiences compared with these expectations?

The second research question connects to the mobility culture of youth:
Q2. Does students' reported life satisfaction change in any way after studying abroad?

A main finding for outbound students was an appreciation of courses offered at the destination higher education institution that were not available at Umeå University. The students also had a desire to change their environment and have new experiences. Conversely, the desire to work abroad in the future was lower after returning home. A major finding for inbound students was that they assigned higher value to personal development than academic development. The experience made the students positive in regard to working abroad. Inbound students reported significantly higher satisfaction at follow-up six months later for the domains somatic health and activities of daily living. For both in- and outbound students, experiencing a new culture was more important than pure academic experiences. When the experience was compared with the expectation, in most cases the outcomes were positively related for both in- and outbound students. The motives for international study were primarily related to personal achievements, indicating a fulfilment of one's potential and curiosity about a sojourn abroad.

Finally, the results from the Umeå studies were compared with a global survey. The Umeå studies shows that the respondents viewed studying abroad as an important experience and as a merit later in life. The global survey results indicate that the transition from education to the world of work is of increasing importance to students, and that it matters more for non-European students. The global study showed that employability, teaching ability, expert lectures, and course organization are important to international students.

Keywords
Student mobility, inbound, outbound, exchange students, Sweden