

From knowledge building to intercultural development of American mobile students in Spain

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Abstract

This paper looks into the intercultural development of a cohort of 26 American students in Spain. Spain constitutes the third preferred world destination of American sojourners. Starting from an analysis of students' knowledge areas about the host culture, this study explores the relationship between intercultural knowledge and other dimensions of intercultural competence through students' journals. Results indicate that sojourners increase their knowledge of 13 areas of the host culture, especially of issues related to food and drink, daily life, house, and institutions and services. Data also reveals that the acquisition of and reflection on culture-specific knowledge instigates intercultural development by honing awareness of intercultural verbal and non-verbal communication and the processes inherent in adjustment to life in the host country, learning from experience, and critical stances.

The paper concludes that informed and critical reflection on sojourners' experiences of otherness during study abroad, facilitated by an intercultural orientation program, favors positive attitudes towards the outgroup and enhances the intercultural attitudes of empathy, curiosity or willingness to adjust, along with the intercultural skills of communicative awareness, cultural awareness, awareness of the self and the other, action-taking, or suspending judgement.

Keywords: American sojourners; communicative awareness; cultural awareness; culture-specific knowledge; intercultural development; Spain; study abroad.

1. Introduction

The mushrooming participation of sojourners in study abroad (SA) provides clear evidence of the internationalisation of higher education. Indeed, one of the main goals of tertiary education institutions, specifically through SA, is to assist individuals acquire global mindedness and become interculturally competent (Doyle, Gendall, Meyer, Hoek, & Tait, 2010; Fantini, Arias-Galicia, & Guay, 2001). Intercultural competence can be defined as the ability to “experience cultural otherness and to use this experience to reflect on matters that are normally taken-for-granted within one’s own culture and environment” (Barrett, 2008: 1), a crucial competence when encountering otherness.

The life-altering effect and benefits of SA have long been documented. External outcomes extensively researched comprise target language skills enhancement, intercultural development (ID), and global mindedness (Clarke, Wright, & McMillen, 2009; Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014), which may be turned into internal changes such as personal growth, self-understanding/awareness, interpersonal communication skills, empathy, tolerance of ambiguity, and appreciation of otherness (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014).

Unless confronted with difference, social practices and perspectives are naturalized, considered commonsense, and separated from their social roots (Kinging, 2008). SA is a powerful experience to spark transformational learning (Mezirow, 1997); through cultural dissonance experienced when encountering dissimilarity, another subjective reality and distinct frames of reference during their temporary re-socialization in the host country (Alred & Byram, 2002), sojourners may re-think their positions, un-learn and relearn what they knew, gather perspective, engage in self-discovery (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014), transcend their worldview (Fantini et al., 2001), and undergo paradigm-shift.

But intercultural experiences may be unsettling and identity-destabilizing (Kinging, 2008). Intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954) propounds that contact among members from different groups reduces prejudice if conditions such as similar status, common goals, and cooperation are met. Consequently, SA may neither spawn knowledge about the host culture or intercultural communication (Bennett, 2010), nor have positive effects unless carefully planned. If students are not adequately prepared, experience disturbing encounters (Doyle et al., 2010), and face unmet or unrealistic expectations, they may reject the host culture, limit contact with host nationals, or return home earlier (Fantini et al., 2001), conceivably with more ingrained negative stereotypes and ethnocentric views (Jackson, 2009). This is why authors question whether SA (equally) strengthens ID (Schartner, 2016).

The characteristics of the study away programme (SAP), the features of the host culture and individual features are determinants of intercultural growth (Kinging, 2008). Although there is a tendency to generalize sojourners’ SA (Talbert & Stewart, 1999), given the heterogeneity of programmes, host cultures, and individual traits, an overall understanding of SA

may not be feasible (Wilkinson, 1998) as the specificities of the sojourn govern professional and personal development.

The Institute of International Education (2015, 2016) remarks that the number of U.S. mobile students proliferates steadily; in 2014/2015 it was over 300,000, an increase of 5.2% over 2012/2013. Europe is American students' top destination (53.3%), Spain constituting, after the UK and Italy, the third preferred destination, with 28,325 (9%) students in 2014/2015, an increase of 5.1% over 2013/2014. This paper focuses on a cohort of American students spending a calendar year in a southern Spanish university.

2. Cultural knowledge as a key to intercultural development (ID)

Culture learning perspectives underscore the relevance of acquiring prominent characteristics of the host environment and culture-specific skills while adapting to the new background (Young & Schartner, 2014). Whereas courses available to mobile students tend to encompass big 'C' or objective culture (history, geography, or art), SA instigates experiential and subjective learning and, thus, forwards both formal and self-discovered cultural knowledge (Engle & Engle, 2003; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Indeed, little 'c' culture, patterns of everyday life, experienced firsthand are more liable to spur intercultural sensitivity (Martinsen, 2011).

The cognitive dimension of intercultural competence (IC) encapsulates knowledge of norms, conventions, values, assumptions, behaviors, symbols, communication, and thought patterns of the host culture, on a par with consciousness of cultural differences and awareness of one's preconceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices (Engle & Engle, 2003; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015; Williams, 2009).

Culture-specific knowledge (CSK) of practices, products, and social groups in one's own and the interlocutor's community, linked to general knowledge of human interaction, represent a component of IC (Byram, 1997), although in alternative conceptualizations of IC, CSK is viewed within an overarching culture-general competence that also draws on sense-making, perspective-taking, suspending judgement, emotion regulation, managing attitude toward difference, and cultural reasoning/explanations skills (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). CSK also relies on communicative awareness of verbal and non-verbal conventions (Barrett et al., 2014) and host communication competence, contingent on friendship networks with host nationals, co-nationals, and other multi-nationals (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011).

Intercultural knowledge—knowledge about other people, knowledge of the values, beliefs, discourses, practices, and products that may be used by them and awareness of the socially constructed nature of knowledge (Barrett et al., 2013)—is an enabler of intercultural communication (Czerwionka, Artamonova, & Barbosa, 2015). CSK stimulates deep cultural knowledge and comprehension of one's own and the other's cultures, and entails recognizing and

valuing cultural differences and similarities, understanding the internal diversity of human groups, the influence of cultural affiliations in individuals' perceptions of otherness and the world, and how culture impacts worldview (Barrett et al., 2014). Hence, cultural knowledge includes knowledge of intercultural communication processes (discovering new information, or coping with misunderstandings), intercultural awareness (the understanding of one's own and other people's standpoints, including assumptions, preconceptions, stereotypes, or prejudices [Barrett et al., 2013]), and the relational knowledge between the host and home culture (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004).

3. Culture-specific knowledge and intercultural growth in SA: a focus on American sojourners

The most substantial development through SA is breadth and depth of understanding and knowledge rather than attitudes and skills (Czerwionka, Artamonova, & Barbosa, 2014). Acknowledged outcomes of SA comprise heightened world-mindedness and knowledge about other cultures (Ryan & Twibell, 2000) and, predominantly, enhanced understanding of the host culture, which frequently correlates with more appreciative views of sojourners' culture and values (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010). By comparing and contrasting the home and host country, American students view their own country differently (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004), conceivably more critically and positively (Carlson & Widaman, 1988). Discernibly expanded knowledge of sojourners' host country not only helps them come to terms with the new environment, but also has positive effects on self-knowledge, awareness, and personal growth.

Awareness of "historical and current information, processes and practices" (Czerwionka et al., 2015: 81), cultural differences, and host members' preferences seems to favourably affect intercultural interactions (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Moreover, greater knowledge of the host country fosters positive attitudes towards the outgroup, aids the management and rejection of stereotypes, and reduces uncertainty and anxiety in intercultural encounters (Hullett & Witte, 2001).

Since most sojourners experience some degree of stress in adapting to life overseas, Ryan and Twibell (2000) advocate addressing culture-general and culture-specific dimensions as constituents of intercultural orientation training programmes. They examine five categories of stressors that require readjustment among American students in Europe. The first stressor, communication, reflects students' concerns about misunderstanding, being misunderstood, or not being capable of expressing themselves. Further stressors are social isolation, environmental stressors (climate, contamination, navigating the host city, and personal space), social customs (variations in food, life pace, and sanitation), and cultural attitudes (i.e., towards women and foreigners). Furthermore, deep reflection on the belief system is required (Ryan & Twibell, 2000) until comprehension of underlying cultural values (Gu et al., 2010) is achieved.

Research attests that American sojourners in Europe intensify their understanding of the host culture, lifestyle, values, and perspectives, and learn to grasp the differences between the host and home cultures (Williams, 2009). Specified areas are food, schedules, transportation, urban life, smaller living places, politics, economy, medicine, art, shorter personal space, or a friend-and-family orientation rather than a materialistic orientation. Apropos Spain, students describe the joy of living in the present time, bullfighting, or the slower pace of life (Williams, 2009). These substantially differ from areas such as bargaining, living arrangements, life expectancy, or dubbing American films, singled out by Elola and Oskoz's (2008) in their study on American sojourners in Seville (Spain).

In their research on American students enrolled in a short SAP in Madrid, Czerwionka et al. (2014) examined significant everyday life topics. Sojourners raised themes like food, size of homes, nightlife, *siestas*, public transportation, personal space, city living, laid-back people, formal cultural norms, politics, controversial topics, cultural dances, town festivals, art, regional cultures, and communication and educational norms. They conclude that the knowledge gained approach a “maximum knowledge set” in short-term SA that evolves from daily life to cultural facts beyond it as sojourners' knowledge of the host culture accentuates. This knowledge seems to impact their understanding of the home and host countries' history, sociopolitical context, everyday life, and norms.

In an expanded investigation, Czerwionka et al. (2015) identified 13 themes: Big C, city life, climate/landscape, daily life, food and drink, house, interactions, people, relationships, schedule, talk, transportation, values and politics. Their study manifests knowledge change throughout SA—with city life and schedule being more salient initially—and knowledge growth in all areas.

In conclusion, the specificity of each SAP influences CSK gain. Cognition constitutes a dimension of IC significantly enhanced through SA that has a consequential effect on intercultural growth, as the acquisition of CSK is closely entwined with the development of intercultural behavior, skills, and attitudes. Only through deep reflection on knowledge gathered through the SA are these dimensions likely to be honed.

4. Goals and research questions

This paper aims to examine sojourners' familiarity with knowledge areas during their SA and ascertain whether this knowledge leads to deeper reflection and intercultural growth. The research questions that guide this study are:

1. Which knowledge areas about the host culture do sojourners address?
2. Is there evidence that, as the literature suggests, culture-specific knowledge enhances other dimensions of intercultural development?

5. Methods

5.1. Participants' profile

A cohort of 29 American students from a large US public university, enrolled in a yearlong SAP in Spain, were invited to participate in this study; 26 gave their written consent, 5 (19.2%) males and 21 (80.8%) females. Their age ranged between 19 and 69: 2 (7.7%) were 19, 23 (88.5%) between 20-25, and 1 (3.8%) was 69. One (3.8%) student's Major and 19 (57.7%) Minors were Spanish. On average, sojourners had taken 2 years of Spanish. Three of them had already visited Spain before, all of them as tourists.

On the basis of the researcher's classroom observation, participants' intercultural competence on arrival at the host country was heterogeneous. On the one hand, not all of them had had the chance to travel abroad and to reflect on how it felt to be "the other" away from home. Furthermore, even though all of them acknowledged that otherness was part of their daily life experience in the United States and felt equipped to deal with otherness in the host community, some sojourners gradually showed instances of ethnocentrism or lack of skills to cope with some intercultural encounters and experiences, as data discloses.

5.2. Programme description

The SAP took place in a public southern Spanish university. The programme was taught in Spanish, except for *Comunicación Intercultural* (Intercultural Communication), a first-semester course conducted in English which the author taught for 8 weeks.

The author and students met for 4 hours weekly and analyzed key intercultural topics such as identity, stereotyping, culture, culture/language fatigue, socialization, group membership/ascription, or intercultural interaction. Against this backdrop, salient aspects of Spanish culture and experiences that students found puzzling and wished/needed to share were also addressed. Individual work and the tutor's consultation was likewise fostered and facilitated throughout the course and during the researcher's office hours, as the host university establishes a minimum of 6 weekly office hours of personalised attention for students.

Further reflection on their (inter)cultural experiences was stimulated through the completion of the Council of Europe's *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (Byram, Barrett, Ipgrave, & Méndez García, 2009) and a field study on the town market. In pairs or small groups students were invited to conduct mini-ethnographic research or fieldwork by interviewing locals at the market with the help of a Spanish tutoring buddy. Students prepared their research tools, gathered and analysed the data obtained, and reported on it. As food and Spanish cuisine constituted a bewildering issue frequently raised in class during the first stages of their stay, students decided to interview locals about the food they were buying and the dishes they intended to prepare. The field research in the town market allowed American students to

experience the psycho-geography of public spaces in the new town. Likewise, it provided them with a unique opportunity to learn about the host culture by engaging their five senses, as students were able to see, smell, touch, and taste local products and also to listen to and interact with host nationals.

5.3. Instrument

The research instrument employed was students' journals. As self-narratives, journals constitute sense-making tools that enable a unique insight into how sojourners comprehend their experience (Kinging, 2008). The initial stages of the sojourn are a crucial period of psychological distress (Schartner, 2016) and keeping journals shows to be a valuable, or even cathartic, coping response.

Although long-term students represent only 2.5% of American sojourners (Institute of International Education, 2016), this study is similarly relevant for short-term (63.1%) and mid-length (34.3%) programmes since it was conducted after eight weeks, the final period of a short-term, or the first and most determining stage in mid-length and long-term programmes. Besides, after a two-month immersion in the culture, sojourners may have developed skills to make sense of and interpret their experience, not by virtue of their initially rushed impressions, but from more reflexive insights (Marx & Moss, 2011).

5.4. Procedure

After the 8 weeks of *Comunicación Intercultural*, students were requested to submit a journal with reflection on at least the five most significant (inter)cultural experiences in Spain and/or consequential aspects of Spanish culture experienced. The rationale behind this approach was to encourage them to pursue topics of their interest or concern in their quest to comprehend the experience abroad.

Since sojourners used English, the language barrier was non-existent, allowing them to concentrate on the message, articulate arguments comfortably, and formulate complex and precise texts (Elola & Oskoz, 2008).

5.5. Data analysis

Data were coded and analyzed thematically to address the research questions.

Coding and thematic analysis. Data were contained in 74 pages (35.328 words) of students' journals. To assure interrater reliability, data were analyzed, labelled, and coded twice, and then categories and subcategories were refined through ATLAS.ti.

Grounded theory, the inductive approach of analyzing data without pre-established categories (Mackey & Gass, 2005), was followed. However, once the main themes and subthemes of

knowledge areas about the host culture (first research question) had been identified, they were compared with the 13 themes propounded by Czerwionka et al. (2015), as they maintain that sojourners acquire a “maximum knowledge set” comprehended in these categories. For this study, 12 of their 13 themes constituted central categories; however, a wider variation was discovered in the subthemes.

Frequency analysis. ATLAS.ti is a powerful tool to analyze qualitative data, including frequency analysis. Evidence of frequency was gathered through sojourners’ mentions of subthemes, which were used as indicators of familiarity with knowledge areas and further ID.

Mentions of a subtheme were generally counted once per student. Exceptionally, when descriptions of two substantially different areas in a subtheme were discovered, mentions were counted twice for the same student.

6. Results

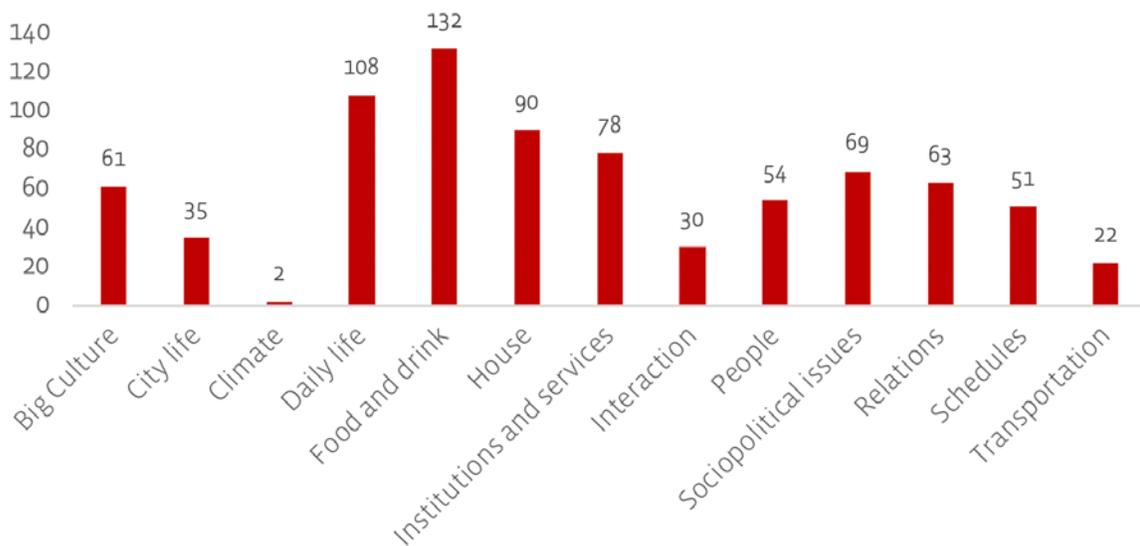
Findings are presented following the research questions: knowledge areas and further ID. The quantitative data that show the number of mentions for subthemes are supported by quotations extracted from journals.

6.1. Knowledge areas

Thirteen central categories (figure 1) and 216 subthemes were identified (appendix A).

FIGURE 1

Host culture knowledge areas: students’ mentions of subthemes by theme



The most commonly addressed field is *Food and drink*, especially food, drinks, and *tapas*. Sub-themes often incorporate meals, courses, and their presentation; practicalities like ordering, table manners, and tipping; food culture, sharing plates, big meals, diet and health, and the culture-specific manifestation of *botellón*¹. This theme is often linked to *Schedules* (student 2/S2) and health (S25, S10):

I starved myself the first week, not purposely. I couldn't get the hang of the timetable. (S2)

I was so impressed by how fresh everything is. (S25)

At first it was strange to eat breakfast but now I am used to it and have noticed an improvement in my energy. (S10)

Daily life centers on people at work/university and, especially, leisure activities like going for a walk, going out for a drink, partying, and socializing. Family-oriented lifestyle, Sundays with the family at home or at church are likewise broached, along with the cost of dental care/healthcare/tuition, clothing, time and punctuality, stress-free life, and slow pace of life. Different shades of *Daily life* raise mixed-feelings (slow pace of life, S19, S20), shock and rejection (S6), or confusion and approval (S11):

I am not accustomed to such a slow pace of life. (S19)

I love the slower pace of life. (S20)

The amount of people that smoke shocks me. (S6)

My host dad amazed me: a successful heart doctor who still lived a whole other life doing other things not related to his job. (S11)

House addresses observations about housing (house/apartment), layout, size, services (machines/appliances, phone, Wi-Fi/internet) and facilities (garden, swimming pool, gated neighborhood). When accommodation is rented the landlord is brought to the fore, although many sojourners live with host families, the most noticeable subtheme. Interestingly, students tend to call their houses/apartments their home.

Outstanding subcategories within *Institutions and services* are shops, supermarkets, malls, the city market, places to eat and drink (bars, restaurants, clubs/pubs/discos, cafés), and lodging (hotels/hostels). A final set of items comprehends hospitals, healthcare centers, the police, and public/government/office buildings.

There is an emphasis on *Sociopolitical issues* like the government, healthcare, drinking age, economy, education, and ethnic minorities, followed by gender-related aspects, the independent movement in Catalonia, tourism, immigration, and the national flag. Smoking, politics, the disenchantment with the future of Spain, patriotism, corruption, poverty, homelessness,

1 Congregation of young people to drink economically in public places at nighttime.

and *turismo sanitario*² are also discussed. Controversial issues—drinking age or lenient drinking policy (S11)—are frequently brought up, whereas factors like healthcare are seemingly appreciated (S18):

The small convenience stores that sell hard alcohol, soda [...] are not supposed to sell alcohol past a certain time, yet it is not strictly followed. (S11)

What I like about the system is that you don't have to have private health insurance. (S18)

Though (town) festivals, monuments, history, architecture, or art are cited, geographical locations—major cities (Barcelona, Madrid, Seville), other cities/towns, and Spanish autonomous communities (Andalusia, Catalonia)—stand out in *Big Culture*.

Four types of *People* are identified. Spaniards are positively appraised as nice, great, friendly, generous, helpful, open, sociable, relaxed, calm, patient, non-rushed, and proud of their country/culture/lifestyle (S25, S8). Second, regional variation appears in the depiction of Catalans, their distinct culture, pride in their country, and strong feelings about independence (S12). Third, the Gypsies/Roma constitutes the only ethnic minority alluded to, and it raises mixed-feelings. They are distinctive because of their darker skin colour and persistence; whereas some may be nice, others may be dangerous, not good, or lazy (S6, S5). Fourth, professors—supportive, patient, and casual—seem to be relevant for sojourners too.

I love how relaxed and calm everyone is. (S25)

People here have been very generous, helpful. (S8)

Interacting with people of Catalonia, I know that they want independence and feel strongly about it. It was cool to see how much pride they have in their country. (S12)

I have this bad idea of who a Gypsy is. (S6)

Before coming to Spain we were warned about the Gypsies. Being here and experiencing it, I don't agree with that. (S5)

The main remarks within *Relations* are about friends and, notably, family time/support/relations. Relations are observed at different levels: Spaniards-sojourners (Spaniards use English, are interested in the USA, help although sometimes get frustrated with foreigners); professors-sojourners, who interact casually; minorities-mainstream population (the latter defined as unintentionally racist at times)—some Gypsies harass people to sell things and curse if asked to go, hence mainstream population tend to avoid and ignore them; and between individuals/groups within the mainstream population (parents have a lax attitude to discipline, or individuals socialize without getting noticeably drunk).

2 Travelling abroad to obtain medical care.

Hours of commercial establishments/operation (S2), eating hours, and *siesta* stand out in *Schedules*, a notably puzzling field, followed by nightlife and the hour at which people go out (S2), the concept of “morning”, significantly longer than in the USA, and the lack of evident activity on Sundays (S20):

The city (shops) closes down for siesta, goes home and eats lunch. (S2)

I'm ready to go dancing at 22:00 and they are barely having their dinner. Once we get to the discoteca it is 1:00 am and I am ready for bed. (S2)

Sundays are a very unusual day. Everyone stays with their families at home. (S20)

City life includes mentions of lively parks, stray animals, city attire, safe streets, and slower walking pace. A distinction is made between big and small cities or towns, small city life—with its little streets, the contrast between modern-classic buildings, cheaper rent/food, and reduced size, which facilitate getting around and account for a pleasant stay—becoming the major subtheme (S20):

The size of the city makes my stay easy and comfortable. (S20)

In *Interaction*, communication between host nationals and sojourners is explored. Except for tourist places, not many locals speak English, which, linked to students' limited command of Spanish, reduces their opportunities to network. However, sojourners notice that it is acceptable to start conversation with a stranger (S25) or to invite him/her home. Locals' communication style is ostensibly straightforward (S26) but, when misunderstandings arise, sense of humor may help oil intercultural differences. Remarks on non-verbal communication allude to staring as non-rude behaviour, men staring (or even making comments towards) female sojourners, young adults' use of apparently “menacing” gestures to informally interact with friends, and non-verbal signs to indicate breach of social rules (S16) or lack of understanding:

This interaction with a Spanish local when I was waiting for the bus was new to me. If it wasn't for it, I wouldn't have made a new friend. (S25)

Spaniards are much more direct. (S26)

My entire family gave me a strange look. I had no idea what had happened. (S16)

Finally, *Transportation* contains two subthemes, public transportation and the preferred means of transportation, walking. As to *Climate*, the warm weather in southern Spain is briefly touched upon.

6.2. From culture-specific knowledge to further intercultural development

Sojourners seem to draw from CSK to contemplate aspects of more general nature. Data contains reflections on communication and additional dimensions of ID. Appendix B displays the results arranged according to the number of mentions in decreasing order.

6.2.1. Intercultural verbal and non-verbal communication

SA seems to boost reflection on intercultural communication. Students learn to value the all-importance of languages (S8), the difficulties in conveying ideas through Spanish, and, especially, the unexpected obstacles encountered when executing simple actions. They perceive that the language barrier curtails their possibilities of networking, experience language anxiety, and feel intimidated and disempowered when unable to understand host nationals (S7):

I often find myself reminiscing on the things I have taken for granted. Never had I thought to appreciate the language I speak and the importance of language. (S8)

My host family spoke all in Spanish. I felt disconnected. I was a deaf man in their conversation. (S7)

Additional matters, like language varieties or the challenges of language switching (S5) are examined as students gain awareness of the complexity of language phenomena. To compensate for lack of language skills, the relevance of non-verbal aspects (body language, miming, gestures) (S5), verbal elements (fast-connected speech, clear pronunciation, the need to access jargon/grammar in diverse fields), and paraverbal factors—like how to fine-tune tone, harder to master but essential as deficient use may yield lack of cooperation or withdrawal from conversation (S21)—emerge as consequential issues of intercultural interaction:

She switches between English and Spanish and gets frustrated because my English is too fast. But that's how I feel when she's speaking Spanish. (S5)

It's hard using gestures and basic vocabulary to get my point across. (S5)

I had to work extremely hard to maintain a respectful, but forceful, tone. I found myself becoming passive as the conversation progressed. (S21)

While sojourners feel relieved when their L1 is spoken and admit the easiness of falling back into it, they are surprised at unexpectedly experiencing mixed-feelings about it (S26), although, irrespective of their command of Spanish, students are impelled to strive to interact with locals in Spanish (S7):

I am so used to challenging myself to speak with Spaniards that talking to people from the States was just too easy. I can't imagine what it will be like to be back. (S26)

I need to be able to communicate, even with a low level of Spanish. (S7)

6.2.2. Intercultural development

SA has the potential to trigger intercultural awareness, attitudes, and skills like determination to adjust, learning from experience, critical stances, and personal growth. Willingness and determination to adjust constitutes a first step in intercultural development in SA, characterised by the need to learn from the myriad of experiences sojourners encounter on a daily basis. It is only through critical awareness and understanding of these experiences that key internal changes such as personal growth will emerge.

Determination to adjust

SA seems to impact numerous facets of students' lives. Noteworthy is the awareness that, however hard adjustment may be, it is necessary to enjoy life abroad. Sojourners may feel anxiety and culture shock, miss things, and experience embarrassing gaffes which, although frustrating, constitute an eye-opener. Only through determination to learn about a different culture, students declare, can these hurdles be surmounted.

Interestingly, American students' multicultural families or environments seem to give some "false" assurance in encountering otherness, hence their bewilderment at experiencing culture shock (S4):

I didn't think I would be too affected by the whole idealism of "culture shock". I did experience it. (S4)

Students are cognizant that adjustment requires understanding the underlying cultural meanings (S11) behind practices. Nonetheless, the difficulty in adjusting to anticipated aspects is overshadowed by the obstacles met in unforeseen simple everyday actions (S8):

The schedule requires adjustment, and under the surface the concept and attitude towards time. (S11)

I anticipated living a completely new life, and experiencing the unfamiliar; however, not once did

I imagine myself having trouble learning the ins and outs of everyday life. (S8)

The challenge, therefore, lies in awareness of what the self is ready to forgo without getting lost in the process:

Although I hope to adopt many customs, I do not expect to sacrifice what makes me comfortable. (S21)

Learning from experience

Immersion in the host country facilitates understanding otherness. Essential sources of learning are travelling to other European countries, other parts of Spain, living with host families, and interacting/observing host nationals, vital to understand them and their culture (S11); especially illuminating is finding a difference of opinion among host nationals (S17):

One Spanish friend who is 26 and his brother live at home still. I am beginning to understand it and not find it so odd. (S11)

Talking to one local about the Gypsies, she told us how bad they are but her daughter disagreed.

It was interesting to hear both views. (S17)

Therefore, successful interactions with locals contribute to both gains in knowledge and feelings of well-being and accomplishment (S21):

I played with my Spaniard friend, then carried a conversation with my Spanish housemate. This has contributed to me feeling secure and adjusted. (S21)

Critical stance

Sojourners express their esteem for some elements of Spanish culture, mainly, family/friend time, *siesta*, *tapas*, food/food culture (meal-time as family-time) (S6), Mediterranean diet, liberal culture towards drinking (S16), small city life (S7), cost of tuition, students' more polite behavior in class, public healthcare, slow pace of life, schedules, and the people (S3):

I like how the act of eating food is a way to spend time with family and friends. (S6)

The more liberal culture towards drinking leads to less violence and alcoholism. (S16)

I had to be in tourist-infested cities to really appreciate why I am here. (S7)

I have come to love the people and the hours they keep. (S3)

Far from over-complimenting the host country, students ponder the elements they disagree with, making a critical appraisal of life in Spain. Some express their discomfort with the slow pace of life, schedules (S19), food, the fact that young adults do not work while they study or some parents' lenient discipline; non-verbal behavior, such as men staring, is specifically challenging for female sojourners (S9). This critical stance also applies to their own culture: sojourners question American work-orientation or the cost of tuition/healthcare. Meanwhile, they learn to value some cultural practices at home (eating on-the-go, snacking, food, or the value of independence).

Siesta time started to become an annoying inconvenience. I am not accustomed to such a slow pace of life. (S19)

Men constantly staring has made me angry. (S9)

Students acknowledge the things they will miss from Spain, such as little streets, *tapas*, and people. Furthermore, they know that embracing life in Spain implies welcoming change, for instance, adopting different habits (walking to their destination or eating different food). Immersion may be so gratifying that students overtly state features of Spanish culture—eating habits, *siesta* as family-time (S10), and, chiefly, the balance between professional and personal life (S18)—they intend to take back with them upon their return to the US:

Siesta is based around eating lunch and spending time together. I love this cultural concept and truly plan on bringing this to my future family. (S10)

Here, half of your time is based on family and friends and the other is work. This balance should be shared in the States. (S18)

Personal development

SA seems to aid sojourners grow personally. By meeting and reflecting upon otherness, they develop a new understanding and appreciation of their culture, family, and language (S1). They experience being outsiders and ponder how they are perceived and treated by host nationals, sometimes with patience and respect and sometimes less tactfully; this, in turn, elicits reflection on how they behave towards others in the US.

This made me think back to when we moved to America and appreciate my parents for the hardships they had to endure when they first began to learn and practice English. (S1)

Consequently, they uphold that visiting a country has a different impact from the uniqueness of studying abroad, which, despite the many challenges faced, is beneficial for the self, a life-altering experience that helps broaden horizons, become more open-minded (S6), develop new awareness (S7), and realize the necessity to suspend judgement (S2):

I have changed a lot. I have become more open-minded. (S6)

I have already faced many challenges culturally, linguistically, socially and personally. I have built awareness. (S7)

Although things can be different, this doesn't mean they are weird or wrong, just different. (S26)

However, at least one of the journals shows that SA may not equally contribute to learners' intercultural reflection and growth. S24 rejects Spanish food, clinging to American food; a more thorny issue, though, is the confirmation of prejudice towards the Roma (S24):

I am thankfully able to cook American dishes. Other than dessert, I don't think Spanish food will ever be good to me. (S24)

In class, we came to the conclusion that Gypsies are normal people suffering from a racist society, but I maintain my opinion that they are to be avoided. (S24)

SA has its vicissitudes but only through facing otherness can individuals learn to consider new ways of living (S17), question taken-for-granted assumptions, and undergo a paradigm-shift (S8):

I'm happy to be widening my views on how others live. (S17)

It does have its rough moments. You'll never fully appreciate, let alone understand, little things until they are completely removed from your life. I now see the world from a whole new perspective. (S8)

7. Discussion

7.1. Cultural learning

This study confirms that SA enhances cultural learning, in particular, host cultural competence. For the sample of American students in Spain, special areas of interest are *Food and drink*, *Daily life*, and *House*. Food, daily life, or living arrangements are fundamental in SA (Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Czerwionka et al., 2014, 2015; Williams, 2009). *Food and drink* related aspects about Spain not foregrounded before are culture-specific *botellón*, the relevance of sharing plates, the tendency to eat big meals vs. snacking, or the relationship between diet and health. Similarly, data discloses new *Daily life* factors, like differences in the concept of time and punctuality; yet results concur with frequently discussed topics—slower pace of life or family/friend-orientation. Besides, the most significant feature of *House* is sojourners' feelings of belonging to the host community through the consistent use of the word “home”.

A new subtheme arises, *Institutions and services*, with references to services and institutions (hospitals/healthcare centers, the police, and official buildings) students need to know. Yet some of the aspects reported within these subthemes (i.e. the difficulty of finding places to buy the food they miss) may become a hurdle in initial stages. Thus, sojourners' four main areas of concern respond to the necessity to fulfill basic needs like food, accommodation, and familiarization with the essence of daily life.

Schedules often incorporates eating hours, commercial establishments, nighttime, and *siesta*, although prior studies do not explore aspects like the concept of "morning" (perceptibly longer) or "lazy Sundays" (spending Sundays with family at home). A significant discovery is that *City life*, often linked to big cities in the literature, contrasts life in the big cities sojourners visit and in the small city of their host university, a comfortable life they welcome. In addition, the least addressed categories are *Climate*, with mentions to the warm weather, and *Transportation*, principally walking, a consequence of small city life. Both major and smaller cities, and the autonomous communities of Catalonia (one of their favorite destinations) and Andalusia (their place of residence) emerge in *Big Culture*. Less attention is paid to other aspects often reported: festivals, monuments, history, architecture, or art.

Sociopolitical issues incorporate elements of economy, medicine, values, and politics. The sample also analyzes topics not often present in the literature like ethnic minorities, independent movements in Catalonia, the symbolic meaning of national flags, or culture-specific *turismo sanitario*.

One of the most notable discoveries is that *People* does not exclusively comprehend general descriptions of Spaniards. Revealing are the discussions about Catalans, a regional group defined by their pride in their country, and the minority group of the Roma, which may stir conflicted emotions and awaken sojourners' mistrust. Within *Relations*, relationships among locals (chiefly family and friends) and between locals and students, are coupled with relations between mainstream population and the Roma. Knowledge of social groups is deemed to be special because of its entanglement with ID (Byram, 1997). Whereas Czerwionka et al. (2015) hypothesized that a few weeks may not be enough for sojourners to comprehend variations in such a complex issue, this study shows that it is possible to reach some understanding of social diversity, at least concerning knowledge of different regions and ethnicity, in the first stages of SA.

To conclude, data reveals that SA boosts the development of a maximum knowledge set departing from aspects of daily life and leading to cultural facts of deeper nature. In spite of constituting basic elements of life abroad, some (sub)themes may become stressors (variations in food, life pace, schedules, and especially "lazy Sundays") and require culture-specific analysis to lower sojourners' anxiety. On the contrary, the study evinces facilitators of adjustment, like small city life.

In conclusion, since knowledge about preferences of members of a culture and cultural differences positively affects intercultural interactions (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015), CSK gain and reflection upon it becomes paramount.

7.2. Communicative awareness

The subtheme of *Interaction* becomes a springboard for reflection on intercultural communication processes. By analyzing interaction with locals, sojourners recognize the partially culture-specific nature of human communication. In Spain, they note, it is acceptable to start a conversation with a stranger, communication style is more straightforward, non-verbal communication follows a different code, including subtleties to convey lack of understanding or breaches of social norms. Therefore, SA yields host communication competence, highly contingent on networking (Hendrickson et al., 2011).

Host communication competence prompts awareness of the culture-general essentials of *Verbal and non-verbal* intercultural interaction. While experiencing the difficulties of conveying messages or executing simple actions through another language, students comprehend the all-important role of language, a complex system that empowers or disempowers. They feel that limited language command reduces the possibilities of much desired networking and access to the host culture. This is why, to compensate for their weak language command, they need to develop alternative non-verbal communication skills (miming or gestures), master paraverbal aspects (tone), and refine verbal elements (vocabulary and structures) to cope with a wide array of communicative situations.

While the target language spurs feelings of frustration and anxiety, the L1 triggers feelings of ease and security. Interpersonal relations and communication, so far taken-for-granted, become stressors related to sojourners' concerns for misunderstanding or being unable to express themselves (Ryan & Twibell, 2000).

Results indicate that the host communicative competence that SA facilitates yields communicative awareness (i.e. coping with misunderstandings through sense of humor). Communicative awareness, a constituent of IC, implies understanding interaction processes, the influence of one's language, awareness that ideas are expressed differently and uniquely in each language, awareness of different verbal/non-verbal conventions (Barrett et al., 2014), and the behavioral skill of sensitivity to ways of communicating (Byram et al., 2009), all present here despite most students being non-language specialists. Communicative awareness needs to lead to the intercultural dimension of action-taking, like seeking opportunities to engage with people with different cultural orientations, and effective and respectful interaction with them (Barrett et al., 2014). SA stimulates the development of communicative awareness and skills that bring about communicative action-taking, as sojourners' determination to further interaction with host nationals demonstrates.

7.3. Cultural awareness

Incorporating new experiences into learners' schemata requires cultural reasoning, the intercultural competence of developing explanations for observed facts and behavior (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015) which interweaves with the enabling skills of cross-cultural (Clarke et al., 2009), intercultural (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004), and/or critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). Critical cultural awareness, the critical assessment and appreciation of the other and one's own cultural perspectives, practices, and products, stems from factual and relational knowledge about both cultures through the analysis of similarities and differences, and how members of a community perceive each other (Elola & Oskoz, 2008).

The sample compares life in Spain and the US as a fulcrum for reflections on sojourners' experiences abroad and the development of enhanced critical skills (Talburtt & Stewart, 1999; Williams, 2009). Aspects of Spanish culture welcomed (family/friend time, *siesta*, food, *tapas*, cost of tuition/healthcare, slow pace of life, and people) are contrasted with elements from which sojourners dissent. There is a parallel critical appraisal of cultural elements of the US that students question (materialistic orientation or the cost of tuition/healthcare) paired with the appreciation of some practices at home (eating on-the-go, snacking, food, or independence as a value).

Furthermore, networking is consequential for cultural reasoning since the most significant source of understanding and developing positive attitudes towards the outgroup are successful interactions with locals, especially host-families. Yet their views need to be critically assessed; i.e. locals' differences of opinions about the Roma spawn sojourners' reflection on their perceptions of them, an act of critical cultural awareness in understanding other people's and one's stereotypes, prejudices, and assumptions (Barrett et al., 2014).

7.4. Readjustment and personal growth

Adaptation to the new surrounding demands myriads of readjustments in communication, environment, customs, attitudes, and beliefs (Ryan & Twibell, 2000). However, adjustment differs from the cultural knowledge of products, practices, norms, historical and sociopolitical issues in having a deeper intercultural nature (Czerwionka et al., 2015).

Results disclose considerations on diverse facets of adjustment to the host culture, which proves sojourners' development of the skill of adaptability (Clarke et al., 2009). Students broach the hardships in constant readjustments, from language, food, and schedules to the underlying meaning or assumptions behind social practices. Even though disorientation, stress, or culture shock may occur, students are not deterred from participating in the host community, many verbalising their determination to immerse themselves in it.

The “constructive disequilibrium” of SA (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014) makes the discomfort experienced when individuals are “removed from their social support system” (Hunley, 2010: 387) a source of learning and personal growth. This is perceptible in sojourners’ interpretation of misunderstandings as frustrating but also as wake-up calls that need the intercultural dimension of action-taking, since students concur that they will only thrive in the host community through proactive adjustment.

In awareness of the other necessary to make readjustments, self-awareness is enhanced. Findings show that SA heightens intracultural aspects (knowledge about the host culture) and intrapersonal aspects (Fantini et al., 2001) such as introspection, self-analysis, self-awareness, and reflection on how sojourners see their culture in a new light, appreciate it differently, and question assumed aspects. Besides, empathy seemed to be developed; being outsiders allows students to experience how it feels to be a foreigner, and the influence of cultural affiliations in individuals’ view of the other and the world. This seems to spark change in personal values, beget cultural humility, and boost the skill of suspending judgement when difference begins to be perceived as neither weird nor wrong, but just different.

Studying abroad constitutes a unique experience beyond compare. Challenges are faced, but in the process new choices are adopted, some of which will be taken back home. These may relate to food choices or go even deeper, affecting sojourners’ life philosophy (the aspiration to build a family-oriented life). Consequently, sojourners exhibit a challenge instead of a threat appraisal attitude (Ryan & Twibell, 2000) and overtly contemplate SA as an unparalleled life-altering experience, a journey of personal growth (Gu et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, not all sojourners are equally able to cope with the pressure of sustained readjustments, as S24’s apparent refusal to participate in practices like eating Spanish food or revisit her views of the Roma evinces. Unless individuals drink “in all input from the senses” and engage in the emotional, intellectual, and multisensory aspects of the host community (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014: 84), SA may forward partial involvement if not rejection of otherness. Thus, the disequilibrium of SA may not always be constructive, but produce multicultural indifference to living in and learning about other communities (Doyle et al., 2010).

For this reason, culture-general considerations on identity and perceptions of otherness become indispensable and should probably precede culture-specific analysis (Bennett, 2010). It is possible that the intercultural training received during their SA, with constant co-nationals’ support and joint sense-making, aided sojourners to critically reflect on culture-specific and culture-general matters, as assumptions and values behind complex/bewildering aspects of the host culture were addressed against the backdrop of issues like identity, stereotyping, culture, socialization, group ascription, or intercultural interaction.

8. Limitations and opportunities of application of research findings

This research employed reflective journals. One possible limitation is that the content of reflective journals written to be submitted and read by another person may differ significantly from self-narratives written to be kept private.

In addition, because qualitative research entails interpretations, this study could be supplemented with focus groups or individual interviews with sojourners to double-check the researcher's interpretations.

As intercultural development is malleable over time, this study would likewise benefit from a comparison between the data obtained and an analysis of students' journals at the end of their stay and/or after their return to the US. However, since the study was conducted after eight weeks, the final stage of short term programs, its results are significant for American sojourners embarking on short, mid, and long-term programs in Spain as this period seems to be sufficient to sharpen the skill of interpreting the experience from an informed and critical perspective (Marx & Moss, 2011).

9. Conclusion

As intercultural interaction is context-dependent, students of a specific language may interpret their experience differently from students of other languages in other placements (Kinging, 2008). Hence, investigations into particular sojourner groups in specific academic environments are indispensable.

Sojourners' advances in CSK of the host country cannot be underestimated. Indeed, research attests to greater ID through intensive immersion in a culture rather than sampling of different cultures (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). This study supports Czerwionka et al.'s hypothesis (2014) that sojourners approximate a "maximum knowledge set" of products, norms, practices, and historical/sociopolitical issues that impacts their perception and deeper understanding of the host and home countries. Some of these topics may constitute stressors (variations in food, schedules, and life pace), therefore hindering adaptation, whereas subthemes like small city life seem to facilitate adaptation. Since ID may be heightened through contextual anticipatory schemata, a scrutiny of (sub)themes in the appendices may prove beneficial for intercultural training. Accordingly, this study may be especially although not exclusively enlightening for trainers and American sojourners preparing their stay or already living in Spain.

The social conditions of SA, with the feelings of lack of belonging and powerlessness they raise, challenge sojourners. Meeting these challenges stirs a sense of personal achievement, especially in broadened experiences and enhanced interpersonal and communication skills (Gu et al., 2010). In particular, positive attitudes towards the outgroup are favored, the inter-

cultural attitudes of empathy, curiosity, and willingness to adjust are honed, along with the intercultural skills of communicative awareness, (critical) cultural awareness, awareness of the self and the other, action-taking, or suspending judgement. Likewise, this investigation discloses that critical reflection on one's own and the assumptions of the others, cultural differences, and the challenge of immersion that SA, coupled with intercultural training, may trigger help gather perspective (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014), embrace changes (Mezirow, 1997), undergo paradigm-shift, and adopt a broader worldview.

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11. Appendixes

Appendix A. Knowledge areas of the host culture: students' mentions of themes and subthemes

BIG CULTURE (61)		
Architecture (1)	Art (1)	Festivals / town festivals (5)
Historical events (2)	History (3)	Major cities (20)
Mediterranean sea (1)	Monuments (6)	Other cities and towns (17)
Spanish autonomous communities (5)		
CITY LIFE (35)		
City attire (2)	Lively parks (3)	Safe streets / lack of crime (2)
Slower walking pace (2)	Stray animals (3)	Village (1)
Big / major city (BC) (4)	(BC) Full of life / filled with people (1)	Small city / town (SC) (11)
(SC) Cheaper rent and food (1)	(SC) Contrast between classic town and modern shopping centres (1)	(SC) Easy and comfortable stay (1)
(SC) Little streets (1)	(SC) Many people share the affiliation to the university (1)	(SC) Size makes easy to get anywhere without a car (1)
CLIMATE (2)		
Warm weather (2)		
DAILY LIFE (108)		
Beach (1)	Birthdays (2)	Church on Sundays (1)
Clothing / clothes (4)	Concept of time and punctuality (2)	Cost of healthcare / dental care (3)
Cost of tuition (4)	Emphasis on family (6)	Going for a walk / to the park (6)
Health insurance (1)	Hobbies / free time (4)	Lifestyle (young adults) (7)
Partying / clubbing / drinking / going out for a drink (12)	People at work / attitudes towards career and job (12)	Pets (4)
School / class / university (11)	Slow pace of life (4)	Smoking (4)
Socializing (6)	Songs (1)	Spending Sundays with the family at home (1)
Sports (4)	Stress-free life (1)	Taking / waiting for the bus (5)
Walking the dog (2)		
FOOD AND DRINK (132)		
Appetizer (1)	Botellón (2)	Breakfast (5)
Dessert (3)	Dinner (16)	Dishes from another culture (2)
Drinks (14)	Entrée / courses (2)	Food / diet and health (3)
Food / type of food (30)	Food culture (8)	Food presentation (1)
Fresh (cheap) food (3)	Having coffee (1)	Lunch (9)

Meals / main meals (3)	Menu of the day (1)	Ordering (6)
Shared plates (1)	Snacks / snacking vs big meals or having breakfast (4)	Table manners (3)
<i>Tapas</i> (13)	Tipping etiquette (1)	
HOUSE (90)		
Apartment (9)	Garden (2)	Gated neighborhood (1)
Home (10)	Host family (34)	House (4)
Housing (for sojourners) (1)	Landlord (3)	Layout (3)
Machines and appliances (2)	Makeshift shelters (1)	Modern technology (1)
Phone (3)	Rent (2)	Roommate / housemate (6)
Size (2)	Swimming pool (2)	Wifi / internet (4)
INSTITUTIONS AND SERVICES (78)		
Bank (1)	Bar (10)	Café (4)
Club or pub (5)	Disco (4)	Emergency services (2)
Hospital / healthcare center (5)	Hostel (1)	Hotel (5)
Market (10)	Office buildings (1)	Police (3)
Public / government buildings (2)	Restaurant (9)	Shop / supermarket / mall (15)
Shops that sell alcohol (1)		
INTERACTION (30)		
Acceptable to approach / start a casual conversation with a stranger (4)	Acceptable to invite a stranger home (1)	
Customers have to physically get waiters' attention (2)	Deficient command of Spanish prevents networking with locals (1)	
English is not spoken by many people (6)	English / multiple languages are spoken in tourist places (2)	
Men make comments towards / stare at female sojourners (2)	Menacing gestures used to informally communicate among friends (1)	
Non-verbal signs to indicate lack of understanding (1)	Non-verbal signs to indicate that social rules / etiquette have been broken (3)	
Sense of humour oils intercultural differences (2)	Shopping for food favours interaction with locals (1)	
Staring is not rude (4)	Straightforward / direct communication style (2)	
PEOPLE (54)¹		
Calm (3)	Can really party (1)	Crazy (1)
Curious (1)	Dress up (1)	Fashionable (1)
Friendly (2)	Generous (2)	Great (2)
Helpful (1)	Keep calm / enjoy their youth (young adults) (2)	More happy (1)
Nice (3)	Not impatient (1)	Not rushed (1)
Open (1)	Patient (1)	Proud of their country, nationality, culture & lifestyle (3)
Relaxed / more relaxed (3)	Seem more reserved at first (1)	Shocked (1)
Sociable (1)	Understanding (1)	Willing to help (1)
(CAT) Have a different culture (1)	(CAT) Proud of their country (1)	(CAT) Want independence / feel strongly about it (1)
(GYP) Bad (1)	(GYP) Darker skin color (1)	(GYP) Do not try to work (1)
(GYP) Lazy (1)	(GYP) Not good people (1)	(GYP) Persistent (2)
(GYP) Some are/may be nice (2)	(GYP) Some can be dangerous (2)	(GYP) To be avoided (1)
(PROF) Casual (2)	(PROF) Supportive and patient (1)	
SOCIOPOLITICAL ISSUES (69)		
Corruption (1)	Dental care (1)	Disenchantment with the future of Spain (2)
Drinking age (5)	Economy (5)	Education (5)
	Gender roles /	Government (7)

¹ CAT stands for "Catalans", GYP for "Gypsies" and PROF for "professors".

Ethnic minorities (5)	differences / issues (4)		
Healthcare (6)	Identity card (1)	Immigration (3)	
Independent movement in Catalonia (4)	Life expectancy (1)	Media (1)	
National flag (3)	Patriotism (1)	Politics (2)	
Poverty (1)	Religion (1)	Smoking (laws) (2)	
The homeless (1)	Tourism (4)	<i>Turismo sanitario</i> (2)	
Women's rights (1)			
RELATIONS (63)			
Actual talk (vs. use of phone) at the tables in restaurants (1)	Casual interaction with lecturers/professors (3)		
Do not care enough to help stray animals (1)	Eager to use English with sojourners (3)		
Family relations (16)	Family support (less homeless and insane) (2)		
Family time (12)	Friends time (8)		
Gender roles (2)	Get frustrated with foreigners (1)		
Gypsies go out of the city and do not bother anyone (1)	Gypsies harass people to sell things and curse if one insists they go (1)		
Host nationals are interested in the US (1)	Mainstream population shy away and ignore Gypsies (1)		
May not look friendly/ may seem less approachable but are more nice (2)	Meetings with professors at the university are not strongly recommended (1)		
Not noticeably / excessively drunk (2)	Parents' lax attitude to discipline (children throw a fit) (1)		
Straightforward when communicating (1)	Unintentionally racist at times (1)		
Waiters are treated as equals (1)	Willing to help sojourners (1)		
SCHEDULES (51)			
Eating hours / meal times (11)	Hour at which people go out (5)	Morning (1)	
Nightlife (6)	Shops (hours of operation) (12)	<i>Siesta</i> (11)	Sundays (5)
TRANSPORTATION (22)			
Public transportation (7)	Walking (15)		

Appendix B. Intercultural communication, intercultural reflection and development (arranged according to the number of mentions in decreasing order)

INTERCULTURAL VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Language barrier (15)
- Difficulty of learning a language / expressing oneself in a different language (8)
- Difficulty of ordering / asking for things / getting things done (5)
- Interaction with locals / Spanish housemates as a source of language learning (5)
- Language anxiety (4)
- Language varieties (4)
- Feeling of comfort with L1, easy to fall back into it (3)
- Need to communicate even with broken / a low level of Spanish (3)
- Usefulness of miming and gestures (3)
- Importance of language / speaking or learning languages (2)
- Body language favours comprehension (1)
- Different scenarios (class vs. casual conversations) help improve language command (1)
- Difficulty of communicating through basic vocabulary (1)
- Difficulty of fast connected speech (1)
- Difficulty of maintaining a respectful but forceful tone (1)
- Importance of clear pronunciation (1)
- Interaction with locals helps remember words (1)
- Jargon and grammar pertaining to different fields is necessary (1)
- Language exposure (1)
- Language switching (1)
- Need to ask people to slow down (1)
- Not being able to understand what people say is intimidating (1)
- Usefulness of locals' description of unfamiliar words (1)

INTERCULTURAL REFLECTION AND DEVELOPMENT

- Things to be learnt from Spain / aspects sojourners appreciate or admire (33)
- Adjustment necessary to enjoy life abroad (17)
- Feeling anxiety / experiencing culture shock (13)
- Living with a host family as a source of learning (13)
- Feeling of helplessness when experiencing unexpected difficulty in executing simple actions (may lead to refusal to act) (12)
- Visiting a country has a different impact from the unique experience of living and studying abroad (10)
- Experiencing the feeling of being outsiders: host nationals' views about and attitude toward sojourners (willingness/unwillingness to help outsiders) (9)
- Critical appraisal of life abroad: things sojourners do not like, approve of or agree with in Spain (8)
- Adjustment as a hard process (7)
- Interacting or getting to know /seeing locals act/react helps understand them and complex cultural issues (6)
- Misunderstandings or critical incidents are frustrating but also an eye-opener (6)
- Travelling to other parts of Spain (or visiting other European countries) as a source of learning (6)
- Feeling excited / determined to learn about a different culture / language (5)
- Appreciation of one's culture / language / family (4)
- Appreciation of SA as beneficial for the self and for broadening horizons (4)
- Different / healthier (eating) habits or choices some students adopt (4)
- Sojourners' ideas about the Gypsies may be influenced by locals' assumptions about them (4)
- Things sojourners miss from home (4)
- Feeling relief and accomplishment / overcome language anxiety when participating in successful interactions with host nationals (4)
- SA as a changing experience with many challenges faced: things need to be questioned and cannot be taken-for-granted (3)
- Things students will take back home with them (3)