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Between temporary mobility and local anchoring: a portrait of Swiss youth

Analysis of stays in other linguistic regions in Switzerland and abroad

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English Summary

Temporary mobility among young people takes various forms: training exchanges, language stays, backpacking trips, internship or volunteer work experiences, etc. This type of mobility seems to be more and more widespread, and there are several advantages associated with it: language learning, proof of flexibility, better intercultural understanding, increased employability, etc. This applies particularly to Switzerland, a small country located in the heart of Europe, composed of four linguistic regions and with a largely globalised economy.

However, very little is known about temporary mobility. The 2016/2017 edition of the Federal Youth Surveys ("ch-x surveys") fills this gap. More than 40,000 young Swiss men were questioned as part of the army recruitment process, as well as an additional sample of 2,000 women.

This study focuses on educational, professional or cultural stays in another linguistic region in Switzerland or abroad. It distinguishes between short (1 to 3 weeks) and long (more than 3 weeks) stays, whether done or planned. The survey also deals to a smaller extent with other forms of mobility (migration, residential mobility, etc.).

Three questions served as the common thread in the research:

- What are the experiences and intentions of young people in terms of mobility?
- What factors explain young people's propensity to be mobile?
- What are the motivations and obstacles of temporary mobility?

Most of the results presented below concern the young men. Some comparisons are nevertheless made with the sample of 2,000 young women.

What are young people's experiences and intentions in terms of mobility?

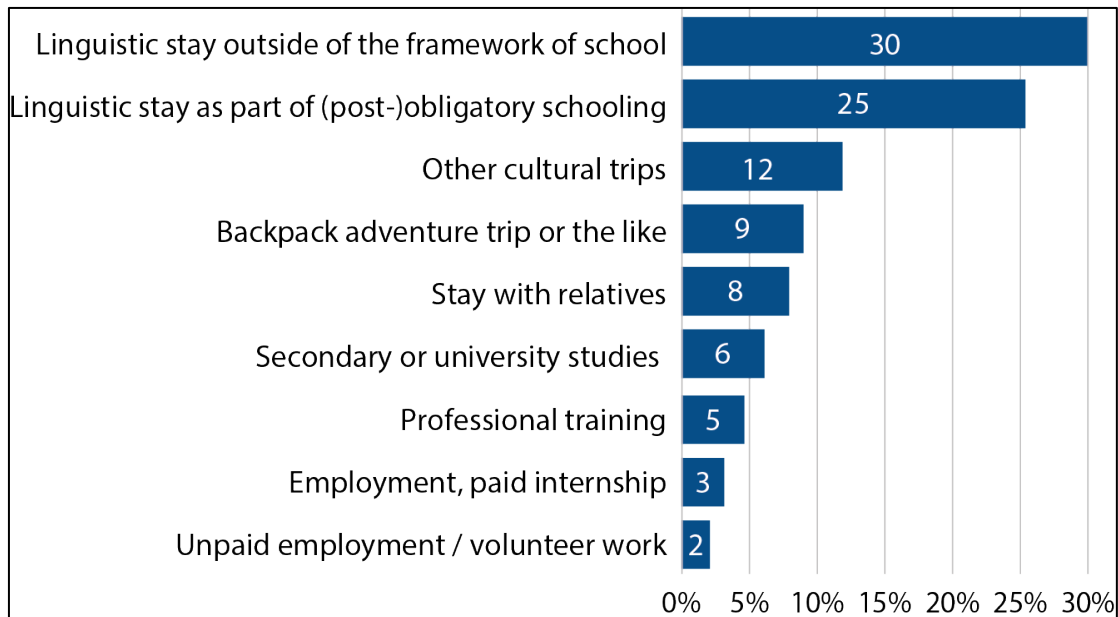
This first question is intended to give an overview of the importance of mobility among young Swiss people. It first addresses residential mobility on different scales, as well as temporary mobility, which is the main focus of our study.

Moves relate to varying distances, from the local to the international scale. A significant portion of young Swiss people have a recent family migration history: 18% have both parents born abroad and another 20% have one parent who was born abroad. Furthermore, two-thirds have experienced at least one move. Given their age, these moves are mainly due to their parents, and the distances involved are usually short (within a commune or within a canton).

The vast majority of young people feel that a move abroad, and even more so to another linguistic region of the country, is unlikely to happen. This is particularly the case for French- and German-speakers, while almost half of Italian-speakers plan to live in another linguistic region.

Excluding holidays in the strict sense, 25% of respondents undertook a temporary stay of one to three weeks in another linguistic region or abroad, and another 14% undertook one of more than three weeks. A majority of the past stays were for linguistic purposes (Figure 1), a trend also found for intended stays. Indeed, some 30% plan to undertake a long stay within three years. Asked about their opinions on mobility, more than half of the young people consider language proficiency and mobility experiences to be an asset in the labour market, and almost three-quarters consider it important to offer the opportunity to undertake a stay as part of education.

Figure 1: Reasons for past stays longer than 3 weeks (N=5030)



Young people thus value both temporary mobility and local residential anchorage, given the low interest to migrate, domestically or internationally, for professional reasons. They are, however, somewhat more likely to be willing to migrate to be with a loved one.

In terms of the destinations of the temporary stays, the attraction of foreign countries (primarily English-speaking or neighbouring countries) is much stronger than that of other linguistic regions within Switzerland. Several explanations can be put forward: the role of English as a lingua franca, the cultural importance and media impact of these countries, the desire to discover more distant destinations, etc. The same trend can be found for past and future residential moves. Although the odds are low, more young people are considering living abroad (with a preference for English-speaking countries) than in another linguistic region. The lack of national focus - both for residential moves and short stays - raises questions of cohesion and inter-knowledge of the different language communities in Switzerland.

What factors explain young people's propensity to be mobile?

Temporary mobility is a selective phenomenon. The greatest disparities concern experiences of more than three weeks, followed by intended stays, but less so for short stays. Several factors explain the varying propensities to engage in temporary mobility.

The first factor is socio-economic background. A good financial situation during childhood and parents who have a tertiary level of education or who have themselves studied or worked abroad favour mobility. Based on the assumption that it is an asset to be valued on the labour market, these differences reveal a tendency to reproduce social inequalities.

The most mobile young people are those who opt for a baccalaureate or tertiary education, while those who go through an apprenticeship are the least mobile. This gap refers to differences in terms of available time, opportunities offered through programmes, and the degree to which mobility is valued for training and career opportunities.

The analysis also points to a trend towards the reproduction of mobility. A first stay is likely to open the way for other projects. Short stays can be a first step before undertaking longer-term mobility. Socialisation to mobility is influenced by the experiences of one's entourage, and the fact of having changed residency seems to facilitate the first experiences of leaving a familiar environment.

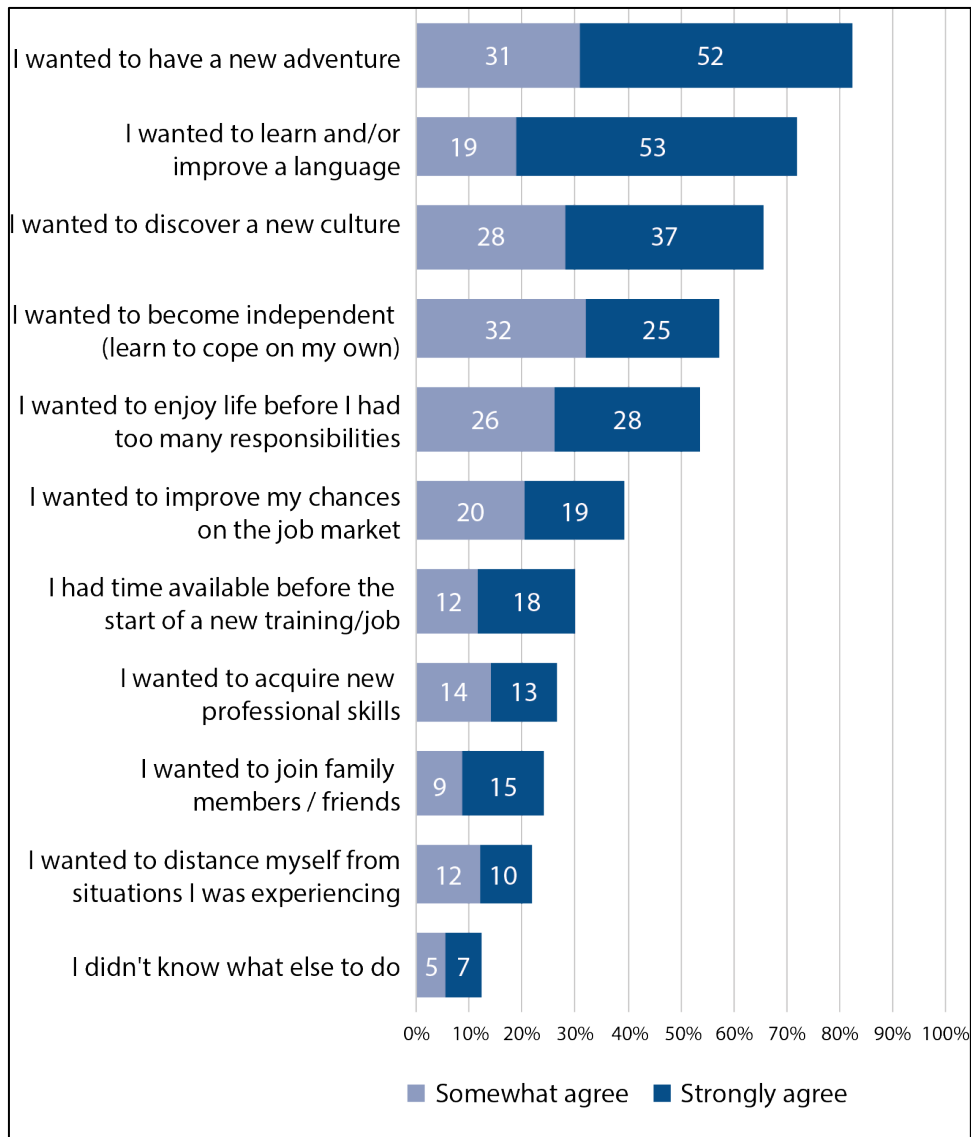
Taking into account psychological dimensions provides additional insights. This is the case with the level of flexibility shown by some young people, which may favor less structured stays requiring greater autonomy.

Other variables have a significant influence, all other things being equal. Being in a relationship reduces the intention to undertake a stay. French speakers were mobile more often than the others, while Italian speakers had more intentions for mobility. Finally, temporary mobility is more frequent among young women.

What are the motivations and barriers for temporary mobility?

The motivations for long stays refer to three logics: hedonistic (e.g., living an adventure, enjoying life), utilitarian (e.g., learning a language) and opportunistic (e.g., seizing an opportunity) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Motivations for stays longer than 3 weeks (Nmin = 5480; Nmax = 5571)



Compared to past experiences, intended projects of mobility give more emphasis to utilitarian reasons and employability but also to the desire to enjoy the freedom associated with youth (hedonistic reasons). Women are more likely than men to mention issues of independence but less so to express the desire to join family members or friends.

Depending on how the motivations are combined, young men fall into three categories. The *interested* (39%) are more strongly motivated by utilitarian reasons. They hope to increase their employability through, for example, the acquisition of language skills. The *curious* (34%) tend to be motivated by hedonistic values (discovering a culture,

experiencing adventure, enjoying life). The *pragmatists* (27%) are more likely to use the time available before starting a training or employment, to visit or leave with acquaintances, or to step back from their current life.

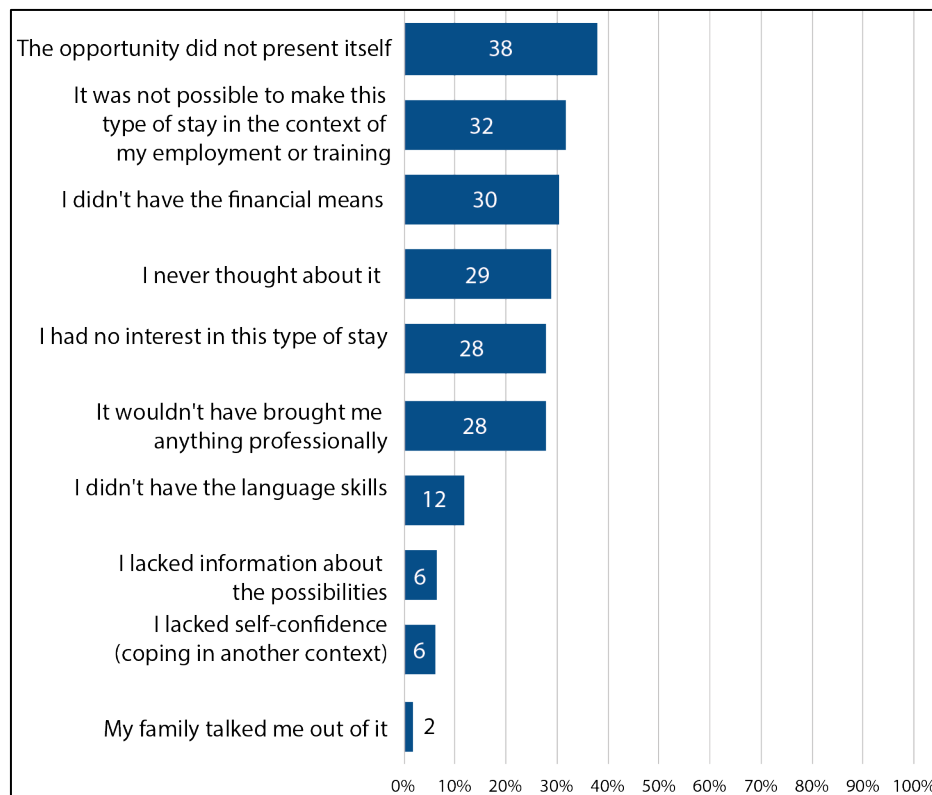
The vast majority of young people are satisfied with their stays and report having benefited from them in terms of language and personal skills. In addition, many respondents indicated that the experience had changed the way they look at their lives and are willing to repeat the experience.

The reasons given for not considering a stay refer to local anchoring (partner, family, friends), lack of interest (personal and professional), as well as lack of resources (financial means, self-confidence). Men are more likely to indicate a lack of interest than women.

Young men with no intention of mobility belong to four groups. The *resource-challenged* (32%) are characterised by a much more pronounced lack of resources (financial situation, language skills, self-confidence). The *anchored* (26%) are characterised by a high degree of local attachment but also by a lack of interest in long stays. The *indifferent* (22%) share this disinterest but express it more strongly. The *established* (21%) seem not to be considering temporary mobility, either because they have already had such an experience or because they have other life projects.

Non-mobility is a multifaceted phenomenon. It results both from constraints (financial resources, available time, opportunity, etc.), competing projects, and a lack of interest (Figure 3). The reasons for a lack of interest may be structural (as shown by the influence of the socio-economic environment) or refer to subjective or unconscious constraints. Non-mobility is not, however, simply a passive condition. Youth is indeed characterised by the search for a balance between professional, educational, financial, and social objectives and pressures.

Figure 3: Barriers relating to the absence of a mobility experience (N = 24603)



Towards a policy of accessibility to temporary mobility

Raising the question in political terms implies asking oneself what meanings a society attributes to temporary mobility. Why should young people be mobile? Political discourses often express two concerns. At the national level, temporary mobility is seen as an instrument that can favor cohesion and understanding between regions. At the individual level, it is seen as a way of acquiring skills and developing autonomy. However, these objectives face the selective nature - both socially and spatially - of temporary mobility.

Not all young Swiss people have the same ability to undertake stays outside their home region. These differences relate to resources (financial means, available time, opportunities, access to information), skills (mobility experiences, flexibility, language) and values (motivations and barriers, value given to mobility). Each of these components is unevenly distributed among young Swiss people.

It would thus be interesting to reflect on a policy of accessibility to temporary mobility that would both apply to individuals (social equity) and the country's regions (national cohesion). The aim would be to offer the opportunity to young people to undertake a first

temporary mobility stay. Measures could consist in generalising a short-term experience within Switzerland in upper secondary education (apprenticeships, vocational schools, high schools, etc.). Such an approach would enable reaching out to a large majority of young people, irrespective of their gender, national origin, and socio-economic background.