

IMPACTS OF LONG-TERM INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING ON VOLUNTEERS'
INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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<p>Intercultural competence has become an extremely important skill for one to have in today's globally-connected world. As intercultural competence is something that must be developed over time, it is therefore crucial to understand how one develops intercultural competence, and the impact that such developments have on an individual. Immersion experiences in particular have been proven to have the ability to help aid in intercultural competence development, and one specific context that has not been studied much in intercultural competence research is long-term international volunteering, which research has shown has the unique elements needed to foster intercultural competence development.</p> <p>Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to look at how past, long-term international volunteers perceive that their volunteer experience affected their intercultural competence and what effect that has had on volunteers since. Through the analysis of open-ended questionnaires and follow-up interviews completed by 30 past, long-term international volunteers from Maailmanvaihto ry, the Finnish branch of ICYE, who completed their volunteer experience 3 to 10 years ago, it was found that long-term international volunteering, as an immersion experience, does have the ability to foster intercultural competence in volunteers. In addition, it was found that volunteers perceived that learning and development continued to take place after they returned back home as they processed, and reflected on, their experience. It was also found that the impacts of the volunteer experience were still felt, years after the volunteer experience, particularly in participants' working lives.</p> <p>These findings are useful to Maailmanvaihto ry to help them support volunteers in their return, as well as to intercultural competence research as a whole in that the findings show the importance of long-term assessment of intercultural competence.</p>	
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1. INTRODUCTION

As our world today is more connected than ever, it is not an uncommon occurrence to have frequent interactions with people from different cultures. As Chao, Kung and Jingdan Yao (2015) state, “As the world becomes increasingly globalized...individuals are no longer encapsulated by one shared meaning system” (p. 81). As we navigate through these intercultural interactions where our fundamental views and meanings may be challenged, it is imperative that individuals possess the skills and abilities to be able to interact successfully in these interactions. Intercultural competence, therefore, is seen to be a very important and valuable skill for one to have (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

As intercultural competence is not something that one is born with, but something that must be deliberately developed over time, it is important to look at how one can develop the attitudes, skills, and knowledge that comprise intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2010). Past research in intercultural competence shows that immersion experiences in particular have the potential to facilitate the development of intercultural competence. As Deardorff (2015a) states, “intercultural learning is transformational learning, requiring experiences that lead to this transformation” (p.140). When a person is immersed in another culture, they are given the opportunity to learn about, and experience, new cultures first-hand.

However, just being immersed in another culture is not enough for an individual to develop intercultural competence (Cushner & Chang, 2015). Individuals must be presented with opportunities to engage in the culture, through experiences and “meaningful interactions” (Deardorff, 2008, p. 45). While there is a lot of past research looking at study abroad experiences and the development of intercultural competence (Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018; Durán Martínez, Gutiérrez, Beltrán Llavador, & Martínez Abad, 2016), for example, one context that has not been

given much precedent in intercultural competence research is the context of international volunteering. International volunteering in particular has the potential to increase intercultural competence as the unique structure of the program gives volunteers the opportunity to have those meaningful experiences and interactions with the host culture. As Lough (2011) notes, “When volunteers are immersed in a culture, living with host families and serving side-by-side with community members, they are brought into direct contact with the host culture” (p.453). This potential makes the context of international volunteering an important one for intercultural competence research.

For this study, I will specifically look at international volunteering experiences organized by MaaIlmanvaihto ry, which is the Finnish branch of the non-profit organization, the International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE). Their mission is to:

Provide challenging intercultural learning experiences for young people. The network aims at promoting their social and personal development through international volunteer programs as well as promoting intercultural understanding, equality of opportunity, tolerance and peace among people in the world. (MaaIlmanvaihto, 2018)

According to Sherrard Sherraden, Stringham, Costanzo Sow, & Moore McBride (2006), there are two main types of international voluntary service [IVS]. The first focuses on providing developmental aid and humanitarian relief, and the second type focuses on promoting international understanding (p. 165). The international volunteer opportunities organized by MaaIlmanvaihto ry fit into the latter. As Sherrard Sherraden et al. (2006) explain:

IVS for international understanding includes programs that foster cross-cultural understanding, global citizenship, and global peace...Although the importance of the service projects and their contribution to communities is a vital part of the program, the emphasis in IVS for international understanding is on the international experience and the contributions to cross-cultural skills, civic engagement, personal development,

commitment to voluntarism, and fostering development of global awareness among volunteers. (p. 166)

For this reason, the international volunteer opportunities arranged by Maailmanvaihto ry are particularly an interesting context to study since the focus is on intercultural understanding, which can aid in intercultural competence development.

In addition, a lot of research on the effects that an immersion experience has on participants' intercultural competence is collected shortly after the immersion experience has ended (Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, & Ardichvili, 2016), which does not give participants much time to reflect on the experience and to see the changes that took place. Researchers have stressed the importance of critical reflection in the development of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2010; Lough, 2011; Mezirow, 1991). Also, the immediate collection of data does not allow for participants to show how they have actually used any of the skills and knowledge that they feel they developed; how it has actually been put into practice.

Therefore, due to the lack of research on intercultural competence in the context of long-term international volunteering and the lack of research on the effects of a cultural immersion program years after its completion, the purpose of this study is to look at how past, long-term international volunteers perceive that their volunteer experience affected their intercultural competence and what effect that has had on volunteers since, particularly in their working lives.

This thesis is divided into five chapters, the first chapter being this introduction. Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework for this study, detailing the key concept of intercultural competence. Chapter Three discusses the research questions, participant information, data collection, and data analysis. In Chapter Four, the findings of the study will be presented. And in the final chapter, Chapter Five, the findings will be discussed and analyzed, in connection with

the literature presented in Chapter Two, and the limitations of this study and areas of future research will be addressed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the key concept of this study, intercultural competence, is discussed. The following literature review is divided into three parts. The first part looks at the concept of intercultural competence itself, beginning with a brief overview of the concept and the contributions researchers have made, and then looking more closely at the specific definition and model of intercultural competence that is used as a guide for this study. The second part focuses on the development of intercultural competence, looking at how one develops intercultural competence, factors that influence development, and the importance of studying development, especially over time. The final section discusses intercultural competence in the workplace.

2.1 Concept of Intercultural Competence

2.1.1 Brief overview of intercultural competence research. Intercultural competence has been of interest to researchers for over the past 60 years, with Deardorff (2004) dating one of the first definitions of intercultural competence back to Tewksbury in 1957, when he developed a list of 21 “Characteristics of a Mature International Person” (p.39). As our world has increasingly become more globalized since then, research on intercultural competence has remained more important and relevant than ever, growing with the global needs of the times, spanning different fields and disciplines, and moving from conceptualization to development and assessment. As Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) states, “research in intercultural competence has endured the test of time and matured and grown into a rich interdisciplinary pursuit” (p. 8).

However, due to this breadth of research, and the complexity of intercultural competence itself, there does remain a lack of consensus in both terminology and an overall definition or theory of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2011; Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). While

intercultural competence seems to be the term used most often in the literature (Perry & Southwell, 2011), other terms such as global competence, cross-cultural competence, intercultural communicative competence, intercultural maturity, and intercultural effectiveness, to name a few, can also be found throughout the literature. While the different terminology may stem from differences in discipline and approach (Deardorff, 2011), at the core, the different terms are all referring to the same underlying idea. As Deardorff (2015b) states, “they all infer the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to interact successfully with others from different backgrounds” (p. 149). For the purpose of this study, intercultural competence will be the term used.

As for the definition of the concept itself, definitions are varied in scope, with some having a broader focus, and others choosing to include more specific components. For example, Spitzberg and Changnon’s definition of intercultural competence is on the broader side, defining it as “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world” (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 7). Whereas Hunter, White, and Godbey’s definition, which is “having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside one’s environment,” includes specific components within its definition (Hunter, White, & Godbey, 2006, p.277).

The dichotomy between the scope of definitions is also very relevant in most of the research on intercultural competence. For example, some researchers have chosen to focus on specific components that are important to intercultural competence, or that affect the degree of intercultural competence. Calloway-Thomas, Arasaratnam-Smith, and Deardorff (2017), for

example, focus on the importance of empathy in intercultural competence stating that “empathy is the moral glue that holds civil society together” (p. 32). Fantini (1995) focuses on the importance of language in relation to intercultural competence, as language both “reflects and affects one’s world view” (p. 144). Wiseman, Hammer, and Nishida (1989) look at the relationship between knowledge of the host culture and cross-cultural attitudes, and intercultural competence. Kim (2015a) looks at how synchrony, when non-verbal behaviors are in sync, is important to having an effective intercultural interaction. Further showing how specific the research on intercultural competence can be, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), in their review of models of intercultural competence, identified over 300 individual components of intercultural competence. Within these individual components, the complexity of the concept can be seen.

On the broader spectrum, other researchers have been interested in developing models or theories of intercultural competence that focus more on looking at how the components relate and interact with each other, and how one undergoes the development of intercultural competence (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). Bennett (1986) for instance, created the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), to show the stages that occur as individuals process and expand their view on cultural differences. In the DMIS, an individual moves from an ethnocentric mindset to an ethnorelative mindset, as they move through six stages: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. King and Baxter Magolda (2005) developed the model of intercultural maturity, which includes three areas of development: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Each area of development is further divided into 3 levels, initial, intermediate, and mature, showing how development progresses through each stage.

Further areas that researchers in intercultural competence have studied are whether or not intercultural competence should be studied from a culture-general or culture-specific point of view. Wang, Dearsdorff, and Kulich (2017) argue that intercultural competence should be studied from a culture-specific point of view, so that particular elements that are unique to a culture can be included. They specifically looked at this in the context of the Chinese culture, citing the importance of looking at the concepts of Chinese philosophy in relation to intercultural competence. Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005), on the other hand, stressed the importance of having a model of intercultural competence that can be used across cultures.

Researchers have also looked at the issue of whether intercultural competence should be viewed from an individual or interactional standpoint. Many Western models of intercultural competence tend to focus on the individual, and this has drawn criticism (Dalib, Harun, and Yusoff, 2014). Dervin and Hahl (2015) argue the importance, for instance, of looking at the interactional and contextual aspect of intercultural competence. With Dalib et al. (2014) stressing that intercultural competence is a “co-created process” between those involved in the interaction (p.134). However, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) stress that the “individual human is still the most intuitive and fundamental locus of explanation, despite attempts by many models to incorporate other interactants and contextual factors” (p.7).

So while there is a clear complexity to the research on intercultural competence, it can also be seen that there is much similarity, and some consensus, as to what intercultural competence is (Arasaratnam, 2016). As Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) put it, in the “broad brushstrokes (e.g. motivation, knowledge, skills, context, outcomes)” the similarities can be seen, yet the “extensive diversity” can be seen when looking at the specific components (p. 35).

2.1.2 Process Model of Intercultural Competence. In order to properly assess intercultural competence, it is crucial to first establish a clear definition and focus of the concept (Deardorff, 2011). As was seen in the literature presented above, there is great complexity in intercultural competence research and it would be impossible to try to study aspects of all of the different models, or all of the more than 300 components that Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) identified, for example. For that reason, it is imperative for the direction and consistency of this study to have a clear vision of intercultural competence in mind. For that reason, the Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2004, 2006), referred to here on out as just the Process Model, will be used to establish a definition and key components of intercultural competence for this study. The Process Model, created by Darla Deardorff, was developed based on a Delphi study that she carried out, which included a panel of internationally-known, intercultural scholars (Deardorff, 2004). The purpose of the study was to “determine the specific nature of intercultural competence through consensus” (p.87). The definition of intercultural competence that emerged from the study, becoming the first definition of intercultural competence based on consensus among experts, was the “ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p.171). Definitions of effectively and appropriately come from Spitzberg (1989), with effectively meaning the achievement of valued objectives and appropriately meaning the avoidance of violating valued norms (p. 249-250). In addition to a definition of intercultural competence, specific components of intercultural competence emerged from the study as well, which Deardorff classified into the different categories of attitudes, skills, and knowledge.

The Process Model was developed using the findings of the study in order to show the non-linear nature of acquiring intercultural competence. Acquiring intercultural competence is a

continuous process for life, one that can continue to be developed and redeveloped as the cycle is completed and started again (Deardorff, 2010). The cycle of the Process Model is made up of five components (each will be discussed individually below): attitudes, skills, knowledge, internal outcomes, and external outcomes, starting with attitudes and ending with external outcomes. While one may acquire a greater degree of intercultural competence if they complete the entire cycle and start again, the Process Model allows for each part of the cycle to directly affect the others as well. For example, a person could move from the attitudes component directly to the external outcomes, but their degree of intercultural competence might not be nearly as strong as if they moved from the attitudes component to skills and/or knowledge first (Deardorff, 2008). Below, each component of intercultural competence in the Process Model will be discussed more thoroughly. While the component of external outcomes is included in the following discussion, it will not be assessed in this research study as it requires the other perspectives of those involved in an intercultural interaction, and this study focuses only on each individual participant's experiences and meanings and does not include other perspectives. Nonetheless, the component of external outcomes is presented below so that the reader can gain a full understanding of the Process Model.

2.1.2.1 Attitudes. The attitudinal component of this model includes the following personal attributes: openness (withholding judgement), respect (valuing all cultures), and curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity) (Deardorff 2006, 2008). Deardorff (2004) states that the "attitudinal element is the most critical" and because of that, it is viewed as the starting point of the cycle (p. 197). Attitudes are considered to be paramount to the further development of the knowledge and skills needed to be interculturally competent (Deardorff, 2006).

2.1.2.2 Skills. The skills component of the Process Model consists of “skills to analyze, interpret and relate as well as skills to listen and observe” (Deardorff, 2004, p. 184). These are skills that allow individuals to not just acquire new knowledge, but to be able to process and apply the knowledge as well (Deardorff, 2008).

2.1.2.3 Knowledge. Perhaps the most important area of the knowledge component is cultural self-awareness, which is being able to identify the ways in which your own culture influences you and your view of the world (Deardorff, 2008). Cultural self-awareness is so crucial because “experiences of others are often measured against one’s own cultural conditioning” (p.37). Until a person has an awareness of their own culture, it is hard to be able to see from other perspectives.

Additional knowledge components include culture-specific and deep-cultural knowledge. Culture-specific knowledge looks more at the surface-level aspects of a culture, whereas deep-cultural knowledge “entails a more holistic, contextual understanding of that culture, including it’s historical, political and social contexts” (Deardorff, 2015a, p. 132).

A final component of the knowledge category is sociolinguistic awareness, or “how one uses language within a societal and social context” (Deardorff, 2008, pg. 38). While experts in this study could not agree on the role of language in intercultural competence, citing that just knowing a language is not enough to make a person competent, they do acknowledge that language is still an important component as it is “a window through which to understand another culture’s worldview” (Deardorff, 2008, p. 38).

2.1.2.4 Internal outcomes. The internal outcomes are the “aspects that occur within the individual as a result of the acquired attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for intercultural competence” (Deardorff, 2010, p.1). Internal outcomes include flexibility, adaptability, an

ethnorelative perspective, and empathy. “At this point, individuals are able to see from others’ perspectives and to respond to them according to the way in which the other person desires to be treated” (p.1). One may arrive at this stage at varying degrees, depending upon the level of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that they have previously developed (Deardorff, 2010).

2.1.2.5 External outcomes. The external outcomes are the visible outcomes of intercultural competence experienced by others that are influenced by the degree of acquisition of attitudes, skills, knowledge, and the internal outcomes (Deardorff, 2010). This in turn becomes the definition of intercultural competence agreed upon by the intercultural scholars.

2.1.3 Relevance of Process Model to this study. The Process Model is being used as the foundation for this study in terms of the definition and components of intercultural competence for a few reasons. First, the model is based on the idea that acquiring intercultural competence is a process, and for this research, I will be looking at the development of intercultural competence over time, so it is crucial that I base my research on a model that reflects the process. Secondly, the model was developed with assessment in mind, and for that reason, can be easily adapted for research purposes. Previous research (Deardorff, 2004; Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018) has indicated that it is more beneficial to look at intercultural competence in its separate components, not as a whole. The different parts of the Process Model allow an easy way to be able to narrow down and focus on specific components of intercultural competence that emerge in the data. Support can be found in previous studies that have focused on using the Process Model for assessment. Both Blair (2017) and Deardorff (2015c) used the different components of the Process Model to develop more detailed rubrics for assessment, and Odag, Wallin, and Kedzior (2016) used the Process Model as a guide in their study.

2.2 Development of Intercultural Competence

Besides looking at the conceptualization and model development of intercultural competence, researchers have also turned their attention to looking at how intercultural competence is developed. As Deardorff (2010) states, “intercultural competence is not a naturally occurring phenomenon,” meaning that intercultural competence is not something that resides in a person from birth, but something that must be developed over time (p. 2). For this reason, learning the ways in which a person can and does develop intercultural competence has become of particular interest, especially to those who recognize the importance of intercultural competence in today’s interconnected world (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017).

As Deardorff (2015a) states, “intercultural learning is transformational learning, requiring experiences that lead to this transformation” (p.140). This means that in order for individuals to engage in intercultural competence development, they need to be presented with experiences and opportunities that will challenge them and their own cultural assumptions, and allow for them to start thinking critically about culture. Such intentionally addressed opportunities might take the form of trainings, which are often conducted in the workplace. In the academic setting, many colleges have started to include intercultural competence in their mission statements, and have started internationalization efforts on campus to try to help students expand their worldviews and become more understanding (Prieto-Flores, Feu, & Casademont, 2016). However, potential downfalls with these opportunities are that trainings often only consists of a few sessions, and internationalization efforts, such as increasing the number of international students on campus, does not automatically mean that intercultural learning will take place, just by placing students from different cultures in the same proximity as one another (Lehto, Cai, Fu, & Chen, 2014). It is

imperative for intercultural competence development that an individual must “critically examine culture, not just accumulate facts and knowledge about a culture, to develop intercultural competence” (Perry & Southwell, 2011, p. 457).

Another method or experience that has been heavily studied by researchers in intercultural competence development is immersion experiences. As these type of experiences put an individual directly into another culture, they offer the potential for unique experiences and opportunities that can facilitate intercultural competence development. The effect of immersion experiences on intercultural competence is discussed further below.

2.2.1 Immersion experiences. It is important to first begin this section by establishing a clear view of how culture is perceived in this study, so that immersion experiences and their value can fully be understood. For the purpose of this study, culture is simply viewed as the “values, beliefs, and norms held by a group of people” (Deardorff, 2010, p.1). Culture is viewed as something that is learned and shared, but also something that is unique and ever evolving based on societal influences and a persons’ own unique experiences (Storti, 2009). It is important to note as well that culture is not equated with nationality in this study. While a prevalent, shared national culture is often alluded to, based on the fact that participants in this study completed their immersion experience in a specific geographical location, which is often also the case for any individual partaking in an immersion experience, it is acknowledged that there are also many other cultural deviations that are shared within these national boundaries, and that span national boundaries, meaning that there are many different sub-cultures that participants in an immersion experience may come into contact with. As one leaves what Kim (2015b) refers to as one’s “home” culture (p.9), there are bound to be differing degrees of cultural distance that an

individual encounters as they come into contact with a variety of different cultures, and this is what gives immersion experiences the potential to aid in intercultural competence development.

Mezirow (1991), in his Transformative Learning Theory, argues that learning in adults begins with “disorienting dilemmas”, which are ideas or values that challenge one’s own way of viewing the world and making sense of things (Chapter 6, location 1901). When a person experiences a “disorienting dilemma,” they then try to make sense of these differences, and through critical reflection, they can transform their perspectives (Chapter 6, location 1669). When looking at learning and the concept of “disorienting dilemmas” in the context of experiencing other cultures firsthand, as Fantini (1995) states, “what complicates matters at the intercultural level, of course, is that when interacting across cultures, we share less and less commonalities...the languages, cultures, and world views that mediate our interactions differ” (p. 143). When a person has the opportunity to be immersed in other cultures, they are likely to be faced with an abundance of “disorienting dilemmas” as they experience the customs and values of the new cultures, and have their own perceptions of the world challenged, thus giving immersion opportunities the potential to expand one’s worldview and open them up to new cultures.

Immersion experiences in this context might include opportunities such as international volunteering, study abroad, expatriate job placements – any experience that gives individuals a longer time immersed in a new culture (i.e. weeks to years), and allows for them the possibility to get to experience the culture found within their host country, and interact with host nationals, on a daily basis. This “exposure” has the potential to expand one’s worldviews through learning about another culture and developing intercultural relationships (Moore McBride, Lough, & Sherraden, 2012, pg. 983).

However, as was the same when mentioning the internationalization of college campuses, just being in the presence of culturally different others does not automatically mean that intercultural competence will be increased (Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, & Ardichvili, 2016). As Cushner and Chang (2015) found in their study on student teachers who studied abroad, “simply being exposed to a new and different culture does not seem to be sufficient to develop intercultural competence” (p.175). It is imperative that those participating in these immersion experiences are provided with “rich opportunities for exposure to the language and culture” (Czerwionka, Artamonova, & Barbosa, 2015, p. 93), as well as “meaningful interactions” (Deardorff, 2008, p. 45). In the context of international volunteering, volunteers have an increased opportunity for these “rich opportunities” and “meaningful interactions” as they may have more contact with the host community through living in homestays and working with host nationals at their volunteer placement, giving them the opportunity to learn more in-depth about the culture and to really experience everyday life in that culture (Lough, 2011; Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008; Yan, Yun Yung Luk, Webster, B.J., Wai-lap Chau, & Hok Ka Ma, 2016; Wu, 2017).

Specifically looking at the importance of intergroup contact in intercultural competence development, Allport (1954/1979), in his intergroup contact theory, suggests that intergroup contact has the ability to reduce prejudices, but only under certain conditions, such as equal status and the pursuit of common goals amongst those involved in the interaction, citing that the “deeper and more genuine the association, the greater its effect” (p. 489). These immersion experiences provide the opportunity for intergroup contact daily, and a study by Meng, Zhu, and Cao (2017) found, when looking at a group of Chinese students who studied in Belgium, that the

ones who made multi-national and/or host national friends had higher gains in intercultural competence.

Although developing intergroup relationships, particularly with host nationals, can be a positive thing, and something that immersion experiences can facilitate, it can still also be challenging. While the motivation for interaction might be there, the uncertainty and new territory that comes along with these experiences can be hindering (Schartner, 2015). As Chao, Kung, and Jingdan (2015) found, multicultural exposure can have divergent effects, causing some people to become more open and accepting, while others may become more close-minded as their culture is threatened. This is a particular potential problem in the context of international volunteering as “the very concept of aid implies a relationship of giver and receiver, which tends to create an implicitly asymmetrical relationship” (Lough & Oppenheim, 2017, p.198). Thus in the international volunteering context, the potential power imbalance and unequal status that it can create has the potential to create divides and reinforce prejudices (Gossett, 2015).

2.2.2 Importance of studying development. As intercultural competence is not something that a person is born with, but something that needs to be developed over time, it is of utmost importance then to understand “*how* one acquires the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes” that comprise intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2010). As was seen above, the development of intercultural competence is hardly black and white, with many factors that can play a role in promoting or inhibiting intercultural growth. It is therefore imperative for researchers to look more closely at the ways in which a person develops intercultural competence so that it can not only better be understood, but to have the potential to uncover aspects that can help to facilitate better intercultural competence development in the future.

2.2.2.1 Importance of studying development over time. Many research studies that have focused on the development of intercultural competence through a specific experience or context, complete post-testing immediately after the experience ends, not giving participants time to really process the learning that took place, or to put into use the potential competencies that they feel they gained. As Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) states, “it is a learning process, and the learning happens over time” (p.16). Some prior research studies have shown that the learning that took place is not immediately recognizable. Dorsett, Clark, and Phadke (2017), in their study on social work students who participated in a short-term program in India, found that “with some time to reflect on their experiences [upon returning home], students’ depth of understanding of cultural issues and modified practice perspectives were even more evident” (p. 888). Pan (2017) found, waiting six months after a volunteer tourism trip to conduct post-interviews, that participants were often made aware of their changes through others at home pointing them out. And Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, and Ardichvili (2016) mention the potential of only seeing changes that happened in a following intercultural encounter.

This implies that the true learning that takes place might not be able to be seen right away, and may take the contrast of being back in one’s home environment or in future experiences for the changes to become visible. Therefore, “it is important for individuals to be given opportunities to reflect on and assess the development of their own intercultural competence over time” (Deardorff, 2011, p.68), and therefore important for researchers to study the development process over time.

2.3 Importance of Intercultural Competence in the Workplace

As one of the aims of this research study is to look at long-term impacts of an international volunteer experience on volunteers’ intercultural competence, one of the contexts

that past volunteers may find themselves using their intercultural competencies in, is in the work environment. As Martin and Nakayama (2015) state, “one might argue that the workplace is the setting where individuals are most likely to encounter persons of different cultural backgrounds” (p.14). Because of this, it is imperative that individuals possess the skills that can allow them to be successful in these intercultural workplace interactions. “In today’s interconnected world, an organization’s success increasingly depends on its ability to embrace and manage diversity” (Jackson, 2015, p. 77).

As the world has become more globalized, due to an increase in migration and the development of technology (Martin & Nakayama, 2015), one might have culturally different co-workers, clients, or customers, or even travel to different countries for work. The importance of intercultural competence in the working context spans many fields, industries, and professions, including social work (Saunders, Haskins, & Vasquez, 2015), teaching (Cushner & Chang, 2015), nursing (Charles, Maltby, Abrams, Shea, Brand, & Nicol, 2014), the service industry (Kenesei & Stier, 2017), and expatriate management (Wang, Feng, Freeman, Fan, & Jiuhoa, 2014), to name a few. Really, in today’s interconnected world, any profession that one may find themselves in will likely bring them into contact with culturally-different others, and having the knowledge and skills of intercultural competence will help those interactions to be more successful. It therefore becomes important to understand how an individual can develop these intercultural competencies that are invaluable for the workplace, and previous research in workplace studies have found that international experiences can aide in the development of one’s intercultural competencies for the workplace (Dragoni, Oh, Tesluk, Moore, VanKatwyk, & Hazucha, 2014; Kenesei & Stier, 2017; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). For that reason, international volunteering is an especially interesting context to study this development in.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

In order to gain a better understanding about how past, long-term international volunteers perceive that their volunteer experience affected their intercultural competence and what effect that has had on volunteers since, two research questions have been created. The two research questions are presented first, and then each question will be discussed individually. The research questions are:

RQ1: How do past, long-term international volunteers describe the impact of their volunteer experience on their intercultural competence?

RQ2: How do the volunteers perceive that the impact of their volunteer experience has remained with them since completing their volunteer experience, particularly in their working lives?

Research question one, “How do past, long-term international volunteers describe the impact of their volunteer experience on their intercultural competence?”, is a foundational question for this study. In order to understand the long-term impact the international volunteer experience has on participants, it is important to first look at how they feel their experience shaped them. Past research on both intercultural competence, and international volunteering in particular, shows that this type of experience has the potential to have significant impacts on volunteers. Lough (2011), for instance, found that “international volunteers are in a unique position to acquire intercultural competence...as they experience new cultures firsthand and work side by side with host-country nationals” (p.452).

Research question two, “How do the volunteers perceive that the impact of their volunteer experience has remained with them since completing their volunteer experience,

particularly in their working lives?”, explores the major aim of this study, which is to see the continuing effects of the international volunteer experience in the lives of the participants after they have returned. As was stated in support of research question one, the international volunteering experience has the potential to have significant impacts on participants, which can help them to develop skills and abilities that can be useful in life after the volunteering experience ends. However, there is little research available that looks at these long-term impacts - at how volunteers actually perceive that they use skills and abilities that they developed during their experience in the long-term, years after the volunteer experience.

3.2 Participants and Context

All of the participants in this study participated in a long-term volunteer experience with Maailmanvaihto ry – ICYE Finland. Maailmanvaihto ry is the Finnish branch of the non-profit organization, the International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE), which provides volunteer opportunities to young adults in over 40 countries (ICYE, 2018). The aim of the volunteer opportunities provided by Maailmanvaihto ry are focused on helping volunteers to develop intercultural understanding and personal growth. This can be seen in their mission, which is “to provide challenging intercultural learning experiences for young people”, “to promote their social and personal development through international volunteer programmes”, and “to promote intercultural understanding, equality of opportunity, tolerance and peace among people in the world” (ICYE, 2018).

I first became acquainted with Maailmanvaihto ry when I was notified of an opportunity to collaborate with them on my Master’s thesis. Maailmanvaihto ry was looking to learn more about how the international volunteer experience developed skills and abilities that were useful

in working life, which they could then in turn use to help provide support to their returned volunteers. While I myself was not familiar with the organization or with the specifics of long-term international volunteering beforehand, my interest in both the impact of cultural immersion experiences, and the development of intercultural competence, which is a crucial skill for working life in today's interconnected world (Martin and Nakayama, 2015), made me instantly interested in the collaboration. Upon further research, it was determined that long-term international volunteering was actually an understudied context in intercultural competence research, but one that was of great importance as volunteers are often more immersed in the culture, often staying in a location for a longer period of time, working in local organizations, and living with host families (Lough, 2011). This then confirmed that the context of long-term international volunteering was ideal for intercultural competence research.

In total, 30 past, long-term international volunteers from Maailmanvaihto ry participated in this research study. All of the volunteers completed their volunteer experience between 2008 and 2015, meaning that they completed their volunteer experience 3 to 10 years ago. As the major aim of this study is to look at the long-term impacts of the volunteer experience, and based on previous research that indicates that the development of intercultural competence happens over time (Deardorff, 2011), it was important to look at volunteers who have had time to separate themselves from their volunteer experience and have had time to reflect on its impact. However, because Maailmanvaihto ry has been sending youth abroad for 60 years, it was crucial to specify a specific time range for this research so that the number of possible participants fit the scope of this study. Discussion between myself and my contact at Maailmanvaihto ry took place, and it was decided that three years would be chosen as the minimum number of years since a volunteer returned from their experience, which would allow them to have time to return home and enter

working life in some capacity. And 10 years was chosen as the maximum number of years for a more practical reason in that volunteers were increasingly harder to contact the longer it has been since they completed their volunteer experience.

All 30 of the volunteers were of Finnish nationality. The participants included 26 females and 4 males, and their ages ranged from 18 to 30 years old during their volunteer experience. In total, volunteers were in 17 different countries spanning Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, South America, and North America. The table presented on the following page gives a visual representation of participant data, listing for each individual participant their gender, country of volunteering, and length of volunteering. No additional information beyond that has been provided in the table as to ensure that the participants cannot be personally identified.

Table 1 <i>Participant information</i>			
Participant	Gender	Volunteer country	Duration
Volunteer 1	Female	South Korea	1 year
Volunteer 2	Female	India	6 months
Volunteer 3	Female	India	1 year
Volunteer 4	Female	Ghana	6 months
Volunteer 5	Female	India	6 months
Volunteer 6	Female	New Zealand	6 months
Volunteer 7	Male	India	6 months
Volunteer 8	Female	Iceland	1 year
Volunteer 9	Female	Bolivia	6 months
Volunteer 10	Female	Ukraine	6 months
Volunteer 11	Female	Mexico	6 months
Volunteer 12	Female	New Zealand	6 months
Volunteer 13	Male	Mexico	1 year
Volunteer 14	Male	Mexico	9 months
Volunteer 15	Female	Peru	6 months
Volunteer 16	Female	Spain	9 months
Volunteer 17	Male	India	6 months
Volunteer 18	Female	Nepal	9 months
Volunteer 19	Female	Uganda	9 months
Volunteer 20	Female	Croatia	1 year
Volunteer 21	Female	South Korea	10 months
Volunteer 22	Female	Mozambique	1 year
Volunteer 23	Female	Ecuador	1 year
Volunteer 24	Female	Nepal	9 months
Volunteer 25	Female	India	9 months
Volunteer 26	Female	India	1 year
Volunteer 27	Female	New Zealand	1 year
Volunteer 28	Female	Bolivia	6 months
Volunteer 29	Female	Taiwan	6 months
Volunteer 30	Female	United Kingdom	1 year

3.3 Data Collection

While intercultural competence assessment is absolutely possible, the complexity of the concept, which was discussed in Chapter Two, is present within assessment as well. As Blair (2017) states, “there is simply no single instrument, method, or assessment that allows us to

capture the complexity of the data” (p. 122). For that reason, researchers in the intercultural competence field stress the importance of using both direct and indirect methods for intercultural competence assessment, as well as both quantitative and qualitative measures (Deardorff, 2015a). Direct methods can be in the form of peer assessments, observations, or assignments, and often these methods are used during the learning experience, contain multiple perspectives, and show the actual learning that took place (Deardorff, 2017, p. 126). Indirect methods look at individuals’ perceptions of the learning that took place, and may include interviews, focus groups, or self-report surveys (p. 126). Often these methods are used after the learning experience has taken place (p. 126).

As the participants in this study have already completed their international volunteer experiences, the data for this study was collected using two different indirect, qualitative methods. First, open-ended questionnaires were used, and then follow-up Skype interviews were conducted. A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because qualitative research “is concerned with the meaning people attach to things in their lives” (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015, p.7), and this study is looking to elicit the meaning(s) that past, long-term international volunteers give to their volunteer experience. As Campbell and Warner (2016) found in their study of the significance of the specific experiences that take place during an international volunteer program on participant impacts, “these experiences can become important narratives in a person’s life” (p. 552). It is therefore important in intercultural competence assessment to look at the meaning that individuals give to their experiences.

An open-ended questionnaire was chosen as the initial form of data collection because it would allow for basic demographic information to be collected from participants, as well as to get a basic understanding of their volunteer experience and the effects that they perceive that it

has had on them. For this reason, the open-ended questionnaire included seven demographic questions and four broad, open-ended questions. In the pilot testing of the open-ended questionnaire, which was done by three past participants of long-term cultural immersion experiences, there were only three open-ended questions. Although all three pilot testers found no faults with the questionnaire, I decided to add a fourth open-ended question, “What were the most significant aspects and/or experiences of your time volunteering?”, to try to elicit more responses about specific aspects of the volunteer experience (see Appendix A for the full open-ended questionnaire).

Because I did not have permission to obtain the email addresses of potential participants, my contact at Maailmanvaihto ry sent the initial email about the study to participants. The initial email contained a short introduction about the study as well as a link to the open-ended questionnaire, which was completed on SurveyMonkey (see Appendix B for study introduction). My contact at Maailmanvaihto ry sent the initial email to 230 potential participants. As 31 of those emails did not go through, a total of 199 potential participants received the initial email. The open-ended questionnaire was open between Monday, June 18th, 2018 and Thursday, July 19th, 2018. During that time, two reminder emails were sent out to potential participants by my contact at Maailmanvaihto ry. The open-ended questionnaire was closed when it was determined that data saturation had been reached. Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2014) state that determining data saturation “is a matter of judgement” (p.160), and I felt that at this point, no new data was being presented.

Of the 32 responses collected, two of the questionnaires had to be disregarded. One of the questionnaires was disregarded because the participant completed their volunteer experience outside of the 3-10 year range, and the second questionnaire that was disregarded was done so

because the respondent did not answer a majority of the questions, including demographics, which made it impossible to confirm that they met the requirements for this study. This means that 30 useable responses were collected from the open-ended questionnaire.

This brings us to the second part of data collection for this study. After completing the open-ended questionnaire, participants were taken to a page that described the optional second part of this study, which consisted of a follow-up Skype interview. Interested participants were directed to a link where they could enter their email address, thus expressing their interest in participating in a follow-up interview, and also giving me the permission to contact them directly about setting up the interview. In total, three of the open-ended questionnaire respondents expressed interest in participating in a follow-up Skype interview.

After contacting all three interested participants by email, the interviews took place between Monday, August 20th, 2018 and Sunday, August 26th, 2018. The interviews lasted roughly 40 minutes, 50 minutes, and 1 hour and 15 minutes, respectively. Skype was the chosen method due to the researcher's location, which was the U.S., and the three participants' location, which was Finland.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature. The researcher did not have a structured list of questions to go by, but instead developed an interview guide. Using an interview guide creates flexibility, allowing "the interviewer to follow the flow of the conversation" (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2014, p. 158). Also, an interview guide is a good tool to use when information is already known about the participants (Taylor, Bodgan, & DeVault, 2015), which it was in this study, due to the data collected in the open-ended questionnaires. The themes of the interview guide were developed from initial coding of the open-ended questionnaire data and consisted of the following themes: relationships, intercultural interactions, challenges of experience and

overcoming them, changes in perspective, language, and effects of experience in current life. These broad themes, as opposed to specific questions, allowed for participant answers to guide how each theme was discussed, and allowed me to probe for more detailed information based on what emerged as important to each individual participant. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Participant consent was also obtained at the start of the interview. The data collected from the open-ended questionnaires and the interviews were then combined into one data set, yielding 38 pages of rich, qualitative data to be analyzed.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was the method used to analyze the data collected in this study. Braun, Clarke, and Terry (2015) define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterned meanings or ‘themes’ in qualitative data” (p. 95). The benefit of using thematic analysis is in its flexibility, being that it is a method rather than a methodology as it is not based in a specific theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke, & Terry 2015). This flexibility allows for this method of analysis to be used across multiple approaches and for a range of qualitative data. It is in this very flexibility, however, that thematic analysis also finds its criticism. Critics of thematic analysis say that the lack of theoretical framework makes this method “unsophisticated” (Braun, Clarke, and Terry, 2015, p. 97). However, although this method lacks a specific theoretical framework, researchers are urged that they must begin the process of analysis by first establishing their own theoretical position and values so that they know how they will approach the analysis, and so that they can stay consistent throughout (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2015). So while there is flexibility in the chosen approach, a proper thematic analysis is not void of theoretical framework.

Data was coded primarily in a deductive manner, using the literature from Chapter Two as a guide. However, the data was open to inductive coding as well. Braun and Clarke's six-step method of thematic analysis was the specific method used (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Step one was "familiarizing yourself with your data", which was done through transcribing the interviews, and through the reading and re-reading of the entire data set (interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses). Step two involved "generating initial codes". A code is defined as a "succinct label (a word or short phrase) that captures a key analytical idea in the data" (Braun, Clarke, and Terry, 2015, p. 100). Multiple rounds of coding were completed, yielding 45 codes found within the data. All codes were compiled into a list with their corresponding data extracts. Steps three, four, and five are "searching for", "reviewing" and "defining and naming" themes. A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* responses or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After reviewing the codes and data extracts, six initial themes were generated, but upon review, the initial themes were determined to be too narrow and did not depict the "full story" of the data (Braun, Clarke, and Terry, 2015, p. 104). Initial themes were reworked, and in the end, three themes and 12 sub-themes were defined (see table 2 on next page).

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Components of intercultural competence that emerged in volunteers' descriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness, curiosity, discovery, and respect • Cultural self-awareness • Cultural knowledge • Understanding different worldviews • Sociolinguistic awareness • Skills for processing knowledge
Theme Two: Significant aspects of the volunteer experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “disorienting dilemmas” • Intergroup interactions • Immersion / everyday life • Volunteer workplace
Theme Three: Perceived long-term development and impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In personal life • In professional life

4. FINDINGS

The following section presents the findings of this research study. The findings are arranged according to the three major themes that emerged during data analysis. Theme one is “components of intercultural competence that emerged in volunteers’ descriptions,” theme two is “significant aspects of the volunteer experience,” and theme three is “perceived long-term development and impacts”.

In total, 30 past, long-term international volunteers participated in this study, with all 30 having completed the online open-ended questionnaire, and then three of those 30 participating in a follow-up Skype interview. As all data collected was treated as one, the findings presented below include both the open-ended questionnaire and follow-up interview responses. As the open-ended questionnaires were collected anonymously, however, it is unknown which questionnaire correlates to each of the three interviewees. Therefore, the findings below will be labeled in two separate ways so that the reader knows from which of the methods the data being presented was collected. When referring to data collected through the open-ended questionnaires, participants will be referred to as Volunteer 1, Volunteer 2, and so on (see table 1 for corresponding participants). When referring to the data collected through the follow-up Skype interviews, interviewees will be referred to as Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, and Interviewee 3. Please see table 3 below for specific information about the three participants that participated in the follow-up Skype interviews..

Table 3 <i>Interviewees</i>		
Participant	Gender	Volunteer country
Interviewee 1	Female	New Zealand
Interviewee 2	Female	South Korea
Interviewee 3	Female	Nepal

In any of the direct quotes from participants that are presented in the following sections, if there were any clear grammatical errors or misspellings, meaning that there was no question as to what the participant meant, the errors were corrected by myself and the corrected quote is the one presented.

4.1 Components of Intercultural Competence that Emerged in Volunteers' Descriptions

As the overall aim of this study is to look at the development of intercultural competence in the context of international volunteering, it was thus imperative to search the data for specific components of intercultural competence that may have emerged. Findings show that aspects of intercultural competence did emerge in the data. The sub-themes below discuss the specific components of intercultural competence that were identified in the data. Sub-themes are based on the components of intercultural competence outlined in Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2004).

4.1.1 Openness, respect, curiosity, and discovery. The components of openness, respect, curiosity, and discovery, which Deardorff (2004) deemed the attitudinal components of intercultural competence, mainly emerged in the data when participants were describing their motivations for participating in their volunteer experience. For instance, participants cited reasons such as to "get new experiences" and to "grow from new challenges," showing that they were open to the potential of the new experience that they were about to embark on, and that they were willing to move beyond their own comfort zone and tackle challenges that they might be faced with during their experience.

A majority of participants also specifically mentioned "learning about different cultures" and "experiencing new cultures" as main motivations, which shows their openness and curiosity

towards not just passively learning about another culture, but actively participating in it as well. Participants also cited their desire to discover more about their own cultural influences, with Volunteer 4, for instance, stating “I wanted to find out more about the world that we are living in but also about myself”.

Through the follow-up interviews, it was possible to see how these motivations played out during the volunteer experience. For instance, Interviewee 1 talked about how she did not know much about New Zealand prior to her volunteer experience, and that she did not want to know too much, that she wanted to go there and find out for herself, which implies a notion of curiosity and discovery, that she was interested in learning about the culture, but wanted to do so authentically. When asked then how she actually went about learning about the country and culture, she mentioned that she made an effort to travel a lot throughout the country, and that she took the opportunity to interact and share cultures with New Zealanders that worked in her volunteer placement, showing that her curiosity and will of discovery remained.

4.1.2. Cultural self-awareness. As was briefly discussed in the above sub-theme, volunteers mentioned wanting to learn more about their own cultural background as a motivation for participating in their volunteer experience. Upon volunteers reflecting on their experience and what they gained from it, cultural self-awareness emerged as something significant that some of them felt they took from their experience. Volunteer 11 for instance stated “I learned a lot about myself. For example, how my cultural background affects my behavior...”, and Volunteer 23 said “I saw a different culture and a different way of thinking about things. I got some perspective to my own life in Finland”. Through experiencing another culture, volunteers were able to see and understand their own cultural influences, which often go unnoticed, and they felt that it was something important that they took away from the experience.

4.1.3. Cultural knowledge. Again, an initial motivation of many of the volunteers was to learn about new cultures, and the findings suggest that cultural learning did indeed take place. Mentions of cultural learning were often vague, just stating that “learning about new cultures” (Volunteer 15) was a significant experience and outcome of the volunteer experience, but it was something, the notion of cultural learning, that a majority of participants included in their responses.

However, when specific aspects of culture were mentioned, it was generally referring to deep-cultural knowledge. And it was generally by participants who volunteered in countries where the political and social divides were greater than in Finland. For instance, Volunteer 25, who volunteered in India stated “I saw how life circumstances and cultures are very different in different parts of the world and in different social classes even inside the same country”. Volunteer 15, who volunteered in Peru, thought that a significant part of her experience was learning about “the power structures and diversity of Peruvian society”. Time spent in the culture of their host country gave them the opportunity to look past surface-level culture and to really have the opportunity to see the political, social, and historical influences that affect culture.

4.1.4. Understanding other worldviews. Volunteers used words such as “international minded” (Volunteer 10) and “broad minded” (Interviewee 3) to describe how they feel they changed after their volunteer experience. Having the opportunity to be exposed to different cultures helped them to widen their own perspectives. They also realized that there are many ways to view this world. Volunteer 18, for instance, stated “I expanded my horizons and understood that there are many ways to live this life, one no better than the other”, and emerging as significant to Volunteer 15 were “lessons about how nothing is ‘black and white’”.

Understanding went even further in that it went past a cultural standpoint, in that participants also came to the realization that we are all humans at the core. This can be seen in the impact on Volunteer 12, who felt that a significant outcome was “The realization that people are deep down ‘all the same’ around the world. Everyone needs joy, smiles, laughter and love, no matter where they are from”. Volunteer 16 similarly stated “I also learned that a smile is a language that everybody can understand”. The volunteer experience gave participants the opportunity to expand their perceptions of the world.

4.1.5. Sociolinguistic awareness. Overwhelmingly, language emerged in participants’ descriptions, whether it was a motivation, significant aspect of the experience, or a significant outcome. Participants felt that the language skills they gained during their experience were a significant outcome; “a very good skill” (Volunteer 14). Volunteer 16 actually found that it was not just the knowledge of the language itself that was impactful but what the knowledge unlocked: “insight into Spanish language kind of opened up a new world to me”. A similar thought was expressed by Interviewee 1 who stressed the importance of language in learning about culture, saying that if one did not know the language “it would be even harder to get into the local jokes and stuff”.

Other participants stressed that learning and knowing the language was a significant aspect of their experience as it allowed them to be able to communicate with host nationals. Volunteer 3 stated “I learned their own language which helped a lot”, and Volunteer 20 found significant “meeting local people and being able to talk with them in their native language”. When Interviewee 3 was asked her thoughts on the importance of language in intercultural competence, she too felt that knowing the language was key to the experience - particularly

getting to learn the language in the context of the country, which she felt helped her to be able to interact on a deeper level with host nationals:

If I learned Nepali back here in Finland and I kept saying ‘namaste’ to everyone, and ‘dhanyabaad’, which is like thank you - which they never use there [in Nepal]. It was the first Nepali word I learned, ‘dhanyabaad’, because I thought it was very important to know how to say thank you but you don’t use it, so it was totally useless...but it’s such a key, in so many senses..they [host nationals] trust you and they feel like the warmth more if you speak their language and if you understand (inaudible) all the habits and the small sayings...basically it’s very, very important...it’s everything I would say the language...

Language was found to not just be an important tool for communication, but a way into the culture as well.

4.1.6. Skills for processing knowledge. The skills component of intercultural competence can be seen in the ways that volunteers worded their learning, for instance, by saying that they “learned to understand” instead of “learned about” another culture. This implies that there was some kind of analytical process that went on as they digested new cultural meanings. In the follow-up interviews, in particular, it could be seen in specific accounts of volunteer experiences how they processed cultural differences. For instance, Interviewee 3 discussed a particularly stressful day of her volunteer experience, which was made worse by the lack of privacy that she often felt in Nepal, which was in violation with her own cultural norms. And on this stressful day she felt that she had nowhere to go because she did not want to be stopped in the street as she often was and she did not want to have to talk with anyone, she just wanted to be alone to deal with the problem. The following excerpt shows how she analyzed the situation and was able to process this cultural knowledge:

I had to start thinking that, ok, I’m very visible to the local people there and I can’t avoid it and I sort of had to - had to get used to the idea that I’m sitting in a café for example and everybody stares at me or even starts talking to me and I still have to enjoy the

moment or sort of lose-sort of the privacy need I have - so that helped me sort of become stronger just being that it's fine that I'm here alone, and it's fine that people take contact..and yeah, it was a sort of mental change.

4.2 Significant aspects of the volunteer experience

While theme one looks at the “what”, theme two looks at the “how”. It emerged in the findings that there were particular aspects of the volunteer experience that volunteers viewed as significant and that also showed to have impacted intercultural competence. Theme two discusses these aspects and their relevant relation to intercultural competence. In the four sub-themes below, the significant aspects that emerged will be discussed individually.

4.2.1. “*Disorienting dilemmas*”. Using Mezirow’s (1991) terminology, a lot of participants mentioned that there were challenging aspects that they were faced with during their volunteer experience, and this sub-theme will look at those aspects and what meaning volunteers gave to them . The first area where participants dealt with some challenges was in regards to cultural learning. Participants who were particularly susceptible to this were ones who went to a country that was highly dissimilar to Finland. Those facing issues such as societal hierarchies and gender inequalities had some difficulties processing these topics. Two related excerpts are presented below:

India was very challenging to me because of its own hierarchy and different status of a woman. It was really eye opening in a sad way that people are treated so differently. Me surviving that half a year in a culture that was so shockingly different, gave me self-confidence. It was also touching to see that kindness and happiness can be found in the lives of people who have suffered in so many ways. It gave me a lot of perspective. (Volunteer 5)

I think it was very interesting (and frustrating) to experience how my femaleness, Europeaness, and my “high-class” status as a teacher in a rural area school affected how people treated me. Some things were forbidden because of my status and my gender (e.g. smoking, alcohol, non-Indian clothing, doing too “low” tasks like carrying water) and

some were allowed for me because of my origin (more everyday freedoms than the local girls of my age - well they were likely to be also married), often better treatment because I was considered rich, travelling alone. (Volunteer 25)

Volunteers found difficulties and frustrations in understanding, and being bound themselves, by the cultural and societal hierarchies in their host countries. However, while these cultural differences were challenging at times, volunteers still considered them to be significant aspects of their volunteer experience, and as can be seen, particularly in excerpt one, it was something that they were able to process and grow from, expanding their worldview.

Another area regarding culture that proved challenging at times for volunteers was the inability to share their culture due to the possibility of conflicting beliefs. Interviewee 3 describes how in Nepal, she sometimes felt that she had to hide her own cultural beliefs because they might cast her in a negative light. For example, in the excerpt below, she talks about trying to discuss the Western idea of living together before marriage with a woman from Nepal:

I remember every now and then I sort of tried, when I met a person that for me seemed more Western in their thoughts - at that time I think I even sort of thought that they are modern - maybe more modern..so I sort of tested- I remember at least like one case, it was quite a young girl and she seemed sort of liberal in her thoughts and sort of I felt that I had a connection with her and then I told something about the marriage - that I, for example - this thing that I believe that it's good to live together with someone before ending up in a marriage and she was really upset with that and then I remember that I was quite disappointed that ok, maybe it's not good to be honest all the time and be straightforward and yeah...yeah it was something that I was wondering because I felt that ok now they - they know me and they see I'm a good person with a good moral..or at least that's what I thought..so maybe it's sort of my obligation to speak very honest about my culture and the Western culture that people do like this and they still are moral people, that they are not bad people if they do it like that, so I was thinking that maybe I should just be very honest and then on the other hand I thought that it's-it's not good, I should sort of protect them to sort of think I'm not..or I don't know if I was protecting them or maybe protecting me, myself that I wanted them not to think bad about me...

Again, although this particular situation, as well as other similar ones, provided some frustrating and challenging elements for Interviewee 3, they helped her to understand the deep-cultural

knowledge of Nepal. And although disheartening, she stated that these challenging interactions did not stop her from continuing to interact with the Nepali people and try to share culture.

Another area that proved to be challenging for volunteers was dealing with feelings of foreignness. While these feelings may have called into light the contrast between their culture and the host culture, volunteers actually spoke more positively about these feelings. They felt that it was an impactful experience, getting to be the outsider. Volunteer 4, for instance, stated that the most significant aspect of her volunteer experience was “The fact of not being ‘one of them’. The experience of being different, standing out in every occasion, being forced to explain and not being understood”, and Volunteer 25 noted “I got to feel like an outsider and I was treated differently because of my skin color and origin”. While it could be challenging at times to be viewed and treated as an outsider, it also gave them perspective.

4.2.2. Intergroup interactions. Intergroup interactions proved to be the most important aspect of the volunteer experience according to volunteers. It is through the relationships that they developed that volunteers shared culture and expanded their horizons, and actually *experienced* their volunteer opportunity. The two main interaction types emerging were between volunteers and other volunteers, and volunteers and host nationals.

When describing their relationships with other volunteers, participants said things like “my most significant experiences happened with other volunteers...” (Volunteer 30). When asked about her interactions with other volunteers, Interviewee 1 stated:

I think the other volunteers- I think they became the most important thing that I took from my volunteer experience...you could share the things that happened in that place [volunteer placement] and also they became kind of a net in the country that you could travel to...the other volunteers were like - they became your friends, and they became – I stay in contact with a lot of people and I think we will be for many years because you shared like the good and the bad there, and they were there when we came back home. And it was easier for some, and you could also share the experience of getting back

home. Maybe if it's difficult, or not difficult, and we can like remember the times in New Zealand together...

For her, the volunteers were her lifeline in the country, the people that she could turn to in good or bad times. She also went on to say that the volunteers exchanged their cultures with one another as well, so they were not just learning about the host culture and language, but that of the other volunteers as well.

On the other hand though, some of the participants were very adamant about avoiding the other volunteers because they thought that it would hinder their experience. Interviewee 3 talks about how she "consciously avoided other volunteers" so that she could focus on befriending more host nationals. She would not go to the places in town where she knew the other volunteers would hang out, and she would sometimes deliberately work on different days if she could. However, because of this, she befriended a lot of host nationals. And while it took work, she said "It was still worth it, I think, because for example I learned a lot of Nepali and it was quite very wonderful in the end to speak more with the locals".

Interviewee 2, who had previously been in South Korea and had good Korean language skills, said that "98%" of her friends during her volunteer experience were South Koreans. And she said that she felt by having so many South Korean friends that she never had "any feelings like I was alone in a foreign city". However, others commented on the difficulty in making host national friends as well. Interviewee 1 states that "even though I wanted to learn and meet so many Kiwis, and have local people as my friends, it wasn't so easy".

Also, the host family interactions emerged as being very significant. Volunteers noted that some of the most important aspects of their experience included "the family and life with them" (Volunteer 23), and "getting to know my host family" (Volunteer 15). Interviewee 3 stated

that “they [host family] were the most important people to me”. She said that it was through her host family that she really had the opportunity to learn so much about the Nepali culture, just getting to experience daily life with them and being included in family functions, such as important family festivals. And they really became like her family. She said “I cried a lot when I left there (laughs)”.

4.2.3. Immersion / Everyday life. When describing his volunteer experience, Volunteer 17 said my “most meaningful experience was that I was able to live a completely different life in a wholly different environment. Immersing oneself in a culture and in another “lifeworld” was invaluable in giving perspective”. Through having the opportunity to experience a new culture firsthand, it gave volunteers the opportunity to see and understand other perspectives beyond their own. Perhaps showing how strongly immersion can affect a person, Volunteer 26 stated, “I immersed myself in the local life and culture...to the extent that I forgot how to sing any Finnish songs”.

Volunteers commented on having the opportunity to experience everyday life in their host culture, and its significance: “Just everyday life including the place, host family, food, work, and freetime was significant because it was so normal and recurring, but still so different from my own life” (Volunteer 25). Volunteer 16, who volunteered in Spain, demonstrated specifically how the immersion experience opened her up to an important aspect of the culture: “I really liked how meal times were social situations for sharing food and company”. Being immersed in the culture the way that they were, gave them the opportunity to really get to know the culture.

Also, the aspect of immersion went further than just the volunteers living in the culture and observing the cultural differences, but some had the opportunity to truly live day-to-day the same as their host community. As Volunteer 17 states:

Perhaps the most significant aspect was that I requested to go to the rural country side in a developing country, and Maailmanvaihto delivered that. Being in what could be described as an impoverished village, where the average wage was less than 5 euros a week, made a huge impact, in the sense that I was also living in these conditions and eating the same food. The living conditions were the experience I cherished the most.

This experience really opened volunteers up to new perspectives, new ways of thinking, and put their own cultural-perspectives into question.

4.2.4. Volunteer workplace. The volunteer work setting itself emerged as an important context as it provided participants with meaningful experiences, as it was where they often developed relationships and learned about culture. Interviewee 1 commented on the fact that it was where she got to spend:

normal days with them [New Zealand workers in placement]. They would talk about their life..and [we would] figure out our little differences..you know what they do there and what's normal for New Zealanders to do in their spare time...

The daily interactions in the volunteer workplace served as a way to exchange cultures. She also mentioned about how her volunteer placement showed her the friendliness of New Zealanders:

It [work with disabled adults] gave me so much because the people were so open and when they were happy they were *so, so* happy. And they greeted me with *su* – of such love there, that I couldn't believe it that people are actually like this (laughs). And the whole New Zealand was actually like this. People were so friendly that I was like amazed of the whole country

Interviewee 2 talked about the significance of getting to share her own culture with her volunteer workplace. She wrote a paper in Korean in one of her volunteer placements, where she talked about how shelters are run in Finland. The paper was appreciated, and kept moving through higher officials, and they actually adopted some of the ideas that she presented in her

paper. She stated, “I managed to change something in how social service works in Seoul so I think that’s quite big”. The volunteer workplace gave her the opportunity to meaningfully share aspects of her culture with others.

4.3 Perceived long-term development and impacts. Theme three will discuss the perceived long-term impacts that volunteers feel that their volunteer experience has had on them. Perceived impacts in this section will focus on those dealing more specifically with intercultural topics as to keep the aim of this study in mind. Perceived impacts emerged in both volunteers’ personal and professional lives, and the two sub-themes below are grouped accordingly.

4.3.1. In personal life. As was discussed earlier in the findings, it emerged that volunteers learned to understand other worldviews, but specific examples mentioning empathy did not emerge. However, when talking about the long-term impacts that the volunteer experience had, specific examples of empathy appeared in volunteers’ descriptions as they mentioned that they can now understand and relate to international persons in Finland. The following two excerpts show this development:

I can relate to those coming from totally different cultures, trying to cope and integrate here in Finland. I am more understanding and empathetic and try to speak for them in different forums, at work and with friends and family. (Volunteer 4)

Well in many senses...[I] understand foreigners more. Like people coming to a different culture and here they are living in Finland and adapting here and trying to keep up their own culture as well at the same time..then understanding their situation more - it’s something that is sort of eye opening for me. Before they were just foreigners, you know, who cares - and I didn’t see them enough (inaudible) and now I see them and how they cope here..so yeah, that - it’s a huge thing - it was a huge thing for me and it still is - this sort of warmth and sort of deeper understanding of life. (Interviewee 3)

Findings show that some volunteers perceive that aspects of the volunteer experience have influenced interests or experiences that they have pursued since their volunteer experience has ended. For example, Volunteer 23 states “One of the most important things was to learn Spanish because that has given me so much; I have Spanish speaking friends, I started dancing Latin dances, and I studied a minor in Spanish”. Interviewee 3, for instance, mentioned that she returned to Nepal to conduct research for her Master’s thesis. And a few of the volunteers mentioned that they are still part of Maailmanvaihto ry, participating in exhibitions and events. Interviewee 1 states that this is “keeping my own memories alive”.

Finally, participants also acknowledged general ways that their experience has affected them. Interviewee 1 has found that she has become more open, which she has noticed since returning to Finland in that she feels like she talks “with everyone, even with people that I’m working with, and just random people in the street”, which she feels is a contrast to norms in Finland. Volunteer 17 was struck by the issues of gender inequality that he saw during his volunteer experience, and he feels that “it has stuck to me and I have kept coming back to these questions in my work and studies”. And Volunteer 28 feels that she has used the language skills that she made to make important international connections.

4.3.2. In professional life. Out of the 30 participants in this study, only two felt that their volunteer experience has had no effect on their working lives. The rest felt that their experience has had some effect on their working lives, whether in more general or specific ways. A number of volunteers actually stated that their volunteer experience made them change their career paths to social work or within the international field; “It also persuaded me to a career with foreign news reporting, as I realized that I have an “international” mindset and my biggest, biggest interests are towards foreign reporting, and foreign countries and policies” (Volunteer 10).

Some of the general impacts that volunteers have felt in their working lives that they attribute to their volunteer experience include skills and abilities like “problem-solving; people skills” (Volunteer 6), “accepting uncertainty” (Volunteer 25), “patience” (Volunteer 15), and “cultural understanding” (Volunteer 20). They feel like their volunteer experience has helped them to be able to interact better with co-workers, tackle new challenges, and have more self-confidence in the workplace.

Many volunteers also felt that their volunteer experience has more specifically impacted their working lives. For instance, a few volunteers mentioned that they travel or reside abroad for their work, and that they feel that their volunteer experience gave them abilities to be able to interact and communicate with culturally different others quite successfully:

I work in a field which requires me to speak Arabic. Going to India taught me important intercultural skills which greatly helped my cultural and linguistic skills in Jordan and Palestine. (Volunteer 7)

My work includes about one third of traveling in different countries in Europe and in North America. I use the experiences I had during volunteering in all my daily cooperation with customers of different nationalities and backgrounds. (Volunteer 13)

Aspects of empathy also emerged in the workplace context as well, with volunteers showing that they feel more successful in their working lives because they can empathize with those that they work with. Interviewee 2, for example, works in family care and she interacts quite regularly with foreign mothers and their children living in Finland, helping them with applying to Kela or to find work or schooling opportunities. She feels that it is her own past experiences, trying to figure out similar processes in South Korea, that helps her to be able to understand what her clients might be going through and what they need from her. Similarly,

Volunteer 23 also feels like her experience has helped her to be able to empathize with those she works with:

Nowadays I work in a University which has a very international atmosphere. There I can use my knowledge and perspective about different cultures and ways of communication I gained during the volunteer year. I can imagine exchange students might be having some similar feelings during their exchange in Finland as I had during my stay.

Some additional examples of direct workplace impacts, showing the long-term effects that the volunteer experience has had on participants, include the following three excerpts:

I have more courage to do things. I have also worked with immigrants and global citizenship education and I feel that my whole experience in Bolivia has helped me with my work. I get more perspective and it is always good. (Volunteer 9)

I work in the social field. So absolutely it helped when I started to understand different kinds of people and cultural differences. (Volunteer 22)

I work in Helsinki-Vantaa airport and the experience I got during my time volunteering helps me to communicate with people from different countries and backgrounds. The time volunteering also gave me a lot of confidence to meet and get to know new people. It makes my daily work life a lot easier in my customer service job with hundreds of co-workers. (Volunteer 29)

These examples show that volunteers perceive years after the volunteer experience that they are using skills and abilities that they developed during their experience, helping them in communication with co-workers and customers, to understand different cultures, and to get perspective on work situations.

It is also important to mention that some volunteers indicated that they have noticed that employers have appreciated their volunteer experience and the skills and abilities that it has developed. For instance, Volunteer 20 stated “My language skills and abroad experience have

been appreciated by employers”, and Volunteer 17 noted “It has garnered a lot of interest in job interviews and opened a lot of possibilities”.

5. DISCUSSION

The aim of this research study was to look at how past, long-term international volunteers perceive that their volunteer experience affected their intercultural competence and what effects that has had on volunteers since, particularly in their working lives. The findings of the study indicate that intercultural competence can be developed through an international volunteering experience, and that the impacts of the experience do stay with volunteers years after the experience has ended.

The findings show that components of intercultural competence (attitudes, skills, and knowledge), as outlined by Deardorff's Process Model (Deardorff, 2004), were indeed present, and developed, during participants' international volunteer experience. Highlighted was the importance of the personal attributes that comprise the attitudinal component, which Deardorff (2004) deems as the "most critical", as they are seen as foundational to the further development of intercultural competence (p. 197). The volunteers overwhelmingly showed these personal attributes through their discussions of their motivations for participating in their volunteer experience, setting the stage for the possibility of intercultural competence development.

Under the knowledge component, volunteers perceived that they had expanded their world views, and developed cultural knowledge. In particular, deep-cultural knowledge stood out as a development for those who were volunteering in countries with social hierarchies and gender inequalities different than Finland, indicating that greater distances between two cultures can cause more significant changes, which is supported in previous research (Dragoni, Oh, Tesluk, Moore, VanKatwyk, & Hazucha, 2014).

The study also highlights the importance of language in intercultural competence, as many models of intercultural competence seem to neglect the linguistic side (Byram, 2012).

Language was perceived as an important skill developed by volunteers. Volunteers who cited language learning as a significant outcome indicated that their experience put them into a unique position to acquire language skills, and that then having those language skills also served as a vehicle for learning about culture, and for interacting with host nationals.

The study also highlights the importance of looking at a program's specific aspects in facilitating intercultural competence development. Past research shows that international volunteering may offer up unique experiences, such as living with host families and working in volunteer placements with host nationals, that would have the potential to increase a volunteers' intercultural exposure and thus increasing their intercultural competence (Lough, 2011). The results of the study show that the unique aspects of the volunteer experience, compared to say a study abroad experience, do indeed offer the potential for increased intercultural competence development. As the structure of the volunteer experiences offered by Maailmanvaihto ry gave participants the opportunities to really be immersed in a new culture, and have the opportunities to interact with culturally different others, whether it was other volunteers or host nationals, they showed signs of increased cultural growth.

Also emerging was the importance of intergroup interactions in facilitating intercultural competence, which has been determined as important in previous research (Meng, Zhu, & Chai, 2017; Schartner, 2015). While some volunteers acknowledged trying to avoid other volunteers for fear that they would be too Western in their actions and miss out on learning about the host culture, the relationships with other volunteers still emerged overall as the most important. This is supported by Schartner (2015) who found that international students' relationships with other international students were often the strongest and most important due to the fact that they could

relate more to one another as they were going through their experience, and this proved to be the case in this study as well.

Another important aspect that can be seen through this study is the importance of each individual person's motivation in intercultural competence development. As was seen in the findings, volunteers were confronted with challenges of cultural difference, of feelings of foreignness, of being misunderstood - and it was ultimately up to each individual volunteer to decide whether or not they were going to try to overcome these obstacles and push on. This correlates with the study conducted by Covert (2014), that also noted the emerging notion that an individual's personal motivation plays a role in intercultural competence development.

And most importantly, this study looked at the long-term impacts and development of intercultural competence, which is lacking in the literature (Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018; Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, & Ardichvili, 2016). The study uncovered that intercultural competence developed during an international volunteering experience may not be noticed in its entirety right away, but that through returning home and integrating back into one's old life, and through future intercultural interactions, one may become aware of the full impact of their volunteer experience. This then shows the importance of long-term research in intercultural competence.

And lastly, this study shows that the volunteer experience can, and is likely to, have an impact on participants years after their volunteer experience has ended. It essentially becomes a part of them, and has a lasting impact on their hobbies, areas of interest, and personal attributes. And in particular, the study found that according to participants, the volunteer experience does help to develop long-lasting skills and abilities that are crucial to the workplace. Volunteers cited that their volunteer experience has helped them communicate better with co-workers and

customers, to have better intercultural interactions in their work travels, to better face new challenges and uncertainty, develop perspective, and have more self-confidence.

5.1 Limitations of this Study

One of the major limitations of this study is the small amount of follow-up interviews that were conducted. The way in which the study was designed anticipated that the open-ended questionnaires would be used as a preliminary method to seek out the important aspects of the volunteer experience, which then could be focused on more in-depth during the follow-up interviews. As only three participants were interested in participating in the follow-up interviews, the amount of follow-up interviewees compared to the 30 total participants that participated in the open-ended questionnaires, was low. However, the data collected from the three follow-up interviews yielded rich descriptions of the volunteer experience, as did a majority of the data collected from the open-ended questionnaires, so the quality of the study was not affected, the potential was just there for more rich descriptions to be collected.

Another limitation to this study is found in the methods used for data collection (open-ended questionnaires and interviews). As both of these methods rely on self-assessment, distorted results could have been produced. Dunning (2014) argues that people tend to over-estimate their own abilities during self-assessment, often because one's own incompetencies are invisible to oneself. Therefore, the potential is there that participants in this study could have over-estimated their own levels of intercultural competence. Particularly in intercultural competence research, the importance of using direct methods in addition to indirect methods for assessment is stressed, as including the observations of others in intercultural competence assessment gives a more dynamic and well-rounded view, and can help to balance out the

potential self-assessment biases (Deardorff, 2017). However, due to the fact that the data in this study was collected years after the volunteer experiences ended, direct methods were not able to be used in this particular study.

A third limitation is in the scope of the study. While the results of the study will be highly useful to MaaIlmanvaihto ry, due to the small number of participants, all coming from one volunteer organization, and looking at individuals' perceptions and experiences, it makes the findings of this study more difficult to be generalizable. Also, the overwhelmingly positive accounts of the volunteer experience could indicate that the individuals who took the time to participate in the study are the ones who had a highly positive experience, and the ones who might have had a more negative experience, if there are any, might not have participated, which would create a skewed overall account.

5.2 Areas for Future Research

For MaaIlmanvaihto ry, this study shows that the volunteer experience can facilitate the development of intercultural competence, and that the impacts can be long-lasting, having the ability to play a role in volunteers' working lives once they return home. This indicates that it is crucial for their future research to look at how they can still help volunteers facilitate the development process once they return home. This could be done through long-term, periodic assessments at different points after volunteers' returns. This would not only provide MaaIlmanvaihto ry with important assessment data, but could help returnees by giving them the opportunity for periodic debriefing and critical reflection of their experience over time, which could help them to better be able to identify and put into words the learning that took place. Some participants also mentioned that they are still involved with MaaIlmanvaihto ry, attending

events and hosting volunteers in Finland. Maailmanvaihto ry could organize a workshop or seminar specifically designed for returned volunteers that could help them to be able to recognize the impact of their volunteer experience and their own strengths in intercultural competence, and how they can use that in relation to employability.

As for this study's implications for future intercultural competence research, it yields two future areas for research. First, this study shows intercultural competence development can still continue after an individual returns home from an immersion experience. It is therefore important that future studies expand the time-frame of their post-testing, and allow individuals to have more time to reflect on their experience, especially against their home environment once they return. And secondly, this study indicates that it is also important for researchers to look at intercultural competence development over time to see how individuals actually use, and put into practice, the knowledge and skills that they may gain from an immersion experience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Online Open-ended Questionnaire

- 1. What is your nationality?**
 - a. Finnish**
 - b. Other (please specify)**
- 2. What is your gender?**
- 3. Did you volunteer through Maailmanvaihto?**
 - a. Yes**
 - b. No (please specify)**
- 4. In what year(s) did you complete your volunteer experience? i.e 2009; 2009-2010**
- 5. How long did your volunteer experience last? i.e 6 months; 1 year**
- 6. How old were you during your volunteer experience?**
- 7. In what country did you volunteer?**
- 8. What were your motivations for participating in your volunteer experience?**
- 9. What do you feel are the most meaningful things that you learned/took from your volunteer experience?**
- 10. What were the most significant aspects and/or experiences of your time volunteering?**
- 11. Specifically in your working life since completing your volunteer experience, do you feel that you have used skills and knowledge that you developed during your time volunteering? If so, in what ways?**

Appendix B. Research study explanation included in initial email to participants

Hi! My name is Lacey McKivison, and I am a Master's student in Intercultural Communication at the *University of Jyväskylä in Jyväskylä, Finland*. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study that I am conducting for my Master's thesis in collaboration with Maailmanvaihto. The purpose of this study is to find out more about past, long-term international volunteers' perceptions of how their volunteer experience affected their intercultural competence, and continues to affect their intercultural competence, particularly in their working lives. You have been invited to participate because you have been identified as having participated in an international volunteer program with Maailmanvaihto. If you would be interested in participating in this study, below you will find a link to an anonymous questionnaire on SurveyMonkey. The questionnaire will take approximately 25-30 minutes to complete and will consist of basic background questions as well as four open-ended questions, all related to your international volunteer experience with Maailmanvaihto.

QUESTIONNAIRE LINK: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CMG9NQT>

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider taking part in this study. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions, or would like any additional information about the study:

Researcher: Lacey McKivison
Email: lacey.m.mckivison@student.jyu.fi

**The data collected from participants in this study will be used in the researcher's Master's thesis. The results published in the Master's thesis may also be used by Maailmanvaihto in their own publications and materials. The researcher, however, is the only one that will have access to the raw data collected from participants. Data collected from participants will not be used in any way that would allow for participants to be identified individually."

Appendix C. Participant interview consent form used for follow-up Skype interviews

Participant Interview Consent Form

Thank you so much for your participation in this study, and for agreeing to participate in a follow-up Skype interview. Below you will find some important information about the study and your rights as a participant. Please take the time to read over the information below prior to the Skype interview. We will go over this information at the start of the Skype interview, and you will be asked to give verbal consent that you have read, understand, and agree to the information below. If you have any questions or would like any additional information about the information below, please do not hesitate to contact me.

- 1) Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in the study or to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) that you are asked that you do not wish to answer, or to end the interview at any time.
- 2) The Skype interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Notes may also be taken during the interview.
- 3) The Skype interview will be a semi-structured interview and will last approximately 30-45 minutes. The interview questions will focus more in-depth on your specific experiences and learning during your time volunteering.
- 4) Your confidentiality in this study will remain secure. The researcher is the only one that will have access to the raw data collected directly from participants, and the researcher will use the data collected from participants in a way that will not allow for anyone to personally be identified.
- 5) The data collected from participants will be used in the researcher's Master's thesis. The data published in the thesis may also be used by Maailmanvaihto in their own publications or materials. Again, only the researcher will have access to the raw data collected directly from participants.
- 6) All data collected from participants (questionnaires; interview audio recordings; interview transcriptions/notes) will be kept until the final thesis is submitted and approved, and then it will be disposed of securely.