



Temporary youth mobility: motivations and benefits from a life-course perspective

Lucas Haldimann, Marieke Heers, Brian Kleiner & Patrick Rérat

To cite this article: Lucas Haldimann, Marieke Heers, Brian Kleiner & Patrick Rérat (2021): Temporary youth mobility: motivations and benefits from a life-course perspective, Children's Geographies, DOI: [10.1080/14733285.2021.1980499](https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2021.1980499)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2021.1980499>

 [View supplementary material](#) 

 Published online: 01 Oct 2021.

 [Submit your article to this journal](#) 

 [View related articles](#) 

 [View Crossmark data](#) 



Temporary youth mobility: motivations and benefits from a life-course perspective

Lucas Haldimann ^a, Marieke Heers ^b, Brian Kleiner ^b and Patrick Rérat ^a

^aInstitute of geography and sustainability, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland; ^bFORS, c/o University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

ABSTRACT

Temporary mobility experiences, such as linguistic stays, volunteering, or backpacking have become popular among young adults. This article takes a life-course perspective to understand young adults' motivations for becoming temporarily mobile, as well as the perceived benefits. We analyse data from an almost entire cohort of Swiss men ($N = 40,503$) and a representative sample of 2,000 young women. First, we provide a descriptive analysis of young adults' motivations for and perceived benefits of temporary mobility. Second, we focus on the young men and establish a typology of motivations, revealing utilitarian, hedonistic, and opportunistic dimensions. Three groups of young adults with different motivations and perceived benefits are identified: the *Professionals*, the *Curious*, and the *Pragmatic*. Our results highlight that motivations relate to young adults' life-course trajectories and vary mainly according to previously accumulated mobility capital. Many young adults with low mobility capital seek to accumulate it in order to gain professional advantage.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 November 2020
Accepted 7 September 2021

KEYWORDS

Temporary mobility; youth; motivations; benefits; life-course; mobility capital


1. Introduction

An increasing number of young adults pursue a temporary mobility experience, such as going abroad to learn a new language or taking a gap year (Haldimann, Heers, and Rérat 2021; King and Raghuram 2013; Smith, Rérat, and Sage 2014; Van Mol and Timmerman 2014; Zimmermann and Neyer 2013). Temporary mobility can be educational, professional, or cultural, but excludes holidays. It is characterised by a return planned from the start.

Motivations to engage in temporary mobility typically relate to education, personal development, or lifestyle factors (Deakin 2014; Waters and Brooks 2011). Motivations and benefits often overlap in the sense that fulfilled motivations tend to become benefits. They include the development of personal and professional competencies, such as language skills and autonomy (Frändberg 2015).

Educational institutions, particularly universities, consider temporary mobility as beneficial and promote it (Findlay et al. 2006). Simultaneously, policymakers increasingly attempt to allow broader populations to embark on temporary mobility experiences: the European Union (EU) has launched the programme DiscoverEU, encouraging 18-year-olds to travel around Europe. Both conceptually and for policymaking, more evidence is needed on the motivations of broader populations of young adults for becoming temporarily mobile and on their benefits. Existing studies tend to focus on university students (e.g. Findlay et al. 2006; Grabowski et al. 2017; King and Ruiz-

CONTACT Lucas Haldimann  lucas.haldimann@unil.ch

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2021.1980499>.

© 2021 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Gelices 2003) and high school students spending a school year abroad (Carlson, Gerhards, and Hans 2017; Weichbrodt 2014).

Prior research shows that participation in temporary mobility is selective, particularly in terms of socio-economic background (Carlson, Gerhards, and Hans 2017; King et al. 2011). More knowledge is needed about the factors that lead to different motivations for temporary mobility among young adults, particularly beyond student populations. This study sets out with a life-course approach, to account for the heterogeneity of the young adult population and the multiple factors shaping motivations for temporary mobility. Our theoretical framework builds on a triple biography, consisting of individuals' socio-familial, educational/professional, and mobility trajectory (Rérat 2014). This perspective provides a distinct but complementary one on temporary mobility, which can be motivated by and have repercussions on factors related to the family environment, professional and/or educational choices, and by mobility capital. Thereby, we also contribute to filling the gap on the mobility dimension in life-course theory (Findlay et al. 2015).

We address the research questions *What are the motivations that drive temporary mobility, what are the perceived benefits of these stays, and how are they related to young adults' life-course?* We use data from the *Swiss Federal Survey of Adolescents* (FORS 2020), providing information on an almost entire cohort of Swiss men aged 18–20 ($N = 40,503$) and on a representative sample of 2,126 women of the same age-group. We establish motivation profiles that allow us to assess the multiple motivations that are often pursued when undertaking mobility, the roles that individuals' life-course trajectories play therein, and how young adults benefit from those experiences.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Motivations for and benefits of temporary youth mobility

Motivations for and benefits of temporary mobility are closely related. In this study, we consider young adults' perceived benefits as the realisation of initial motivations. Additionally, unanticipated benefits can result from temporary mobility. The most common motivations are learning or improving a foreign language and cultural exploration (King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003). These factors can enhance employment opportunities (Bagnoli 2009; Carlson, Gerhards, and Hans 2017; Deakin 2014; Findlay et al. 2006; Grabowski et al. 2017). Sometimes, young adults consider temporary mobility a way to have 'the time of their lives' (Weichbrodt 2014, 9). Prior research highlights an interesting paradox: youth mobility can accelerate the process of attaining independence, confidence, and autonomy (Deakin 2014). Simultaneously, it can be a strategy for prolonging the period of adolescence (Frändberg 2015). Often, individuals have several motivations for the same mobility experience (Deakin 2014; King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003; Weichbrodt 2014).

When focusing on the benefits of temporary mobility the latter is considered retrospectively. Temporary mobility forces young adults to navigate outside their comfort zone, which stimulates self-discovery (Bagnoli 2009). Studies attest to the benefits of temporary mobility experiences in terms of long-term personal and social consequences (Ogden, Streitwieser, and Van Mol 2021; Zimmermann and Neyer 2013). While the literature has identified some benefits of temporary mobility (Ogden, Streitwieser, and Van Mol 2021), more research is needed on the relationship between initial motivations and benefits.

2.2. Life-Course trajectories and motivations for temporary mobility

Temporary mobility is the result of complex and longitudinal processes and events in young adults' life-courses (Carlson 2013). This approach allows us to structure the complex set of events that eventually lead to a temporary mobility and to account for three interdependencies (Heinz, Hui-nink, and Weymann 2009): (1) an interdependence of the past, the present, and the future;

(2) an interdependence between individuals' different spheres of action; and (3) a multi-level interdependence between individual action and political, economic, social, and cultural contexts.

We assume that young adults' life-courses give rise to a (set of) motivation(s) for temporary mobility. Different life-course characteristics may lead to different motivations for a mobility experience and, thereby, affect the nature of and the benefits from a temporary mobility. To apprehend the mechanisms leading young adults to become temporarily mobile, we start from a triple biography and decompose young adults' life-courses into three trajectories: the socio-familial trajectory, the educational/professional trajectory, and the mobility trajectory (R erat 2014).

The *socio-familial trajectory* consists of individuals' social class, family composition, age, and gender. Young people from higher social classes are more mobile (Findlay et al. 2012; King et al. 2011; King and Raghuram 2013), mostly because mobility requires financial resources. Given easier access to temporary mobility for individuals from better-off backgrounds (Carlson, Gerhards, and Hans 2017; Findlay et al. 2012), they may also have different motivations for temporary mobility compared to those from lower social classes, as well as different outcomes (Hurst 2018). For example, young adults from higher social class backgrounds can more easily afford a period away for cultural reasons, while those from more disadvantaged backgrounds can be expected to undertake a stay with more tangible and employment-related returns. This assumption is based on literature showing that parents from better-off backgrounds tend to have different child-rearing strategies (Gerhards 2017; Lareau 2011), which are likely to also involve encouraging their children to engage in temporary mobility. Parents from higher social classes are often more aware of the potential returns of temporary mobility in the labour market, and may therefore be more likely to encourage a stay (Carlson, Gerhards, and Hans 2017). With increasing age, professional motivations for temporary mobility are likely to become more important. Gender may be regarded as another constituent of the socio-familial trajectory. The migration literature posits that women are more mobile than men (Netz et al. 2021; Pietro 2021; Van Mol 2021) and has shown that they are motivated differently: men cite employability more often, while women refer more often to cultural discovery and personal reasons (Deakin 2014; Tompkins et al. 2017).

The *educational/professional trajectory* stresses that education and professional aspirations are major mobility drivers (Netz and Finger 2016; Smith, R erat, and Sage 2014). Often, opportunities for temporary mobility are embedded in educational pathways. University education provides more mobility opportunities than other educational trajectories, and mobility experiences are generally well-perceived when entering the labour market (Waters 2009). Educational and professional trajectories also define how much time young adults have to embark on a mobility experience.

The *mobility trajectory* concerns the mobility history of young adults and their families; including migration, residential mobility, or holidays. Individuals learn to be mobile by accumulating mobility experiences (Carlson 2013; Carlson, Gerhards, and Hans 2017). The literature refers to this phenomenon as mobility capital (Murphy-Lejeune 2003), which represents the mechanisms that facilitate mobility through the accumulation of experiences, such as the habit of moving, encountering otherness, or being able to cope in different contexts. Kaufmann and Widmer (2005) show that mobility capital can be transmitted intergenerationally. The notion of capital also relates to the possibility of exchanging mobility capital for another capital later (e.g. economic, in terms of employability). We define mobility capital as the accumulation of different mobility experiences, composed of specific knowledge and skills that have been acquired in the past and that facilitate mobility experiences. Hence, mobility capital encompasses the mobility trajectory as well as elements from the other trajectories – in particular, language skills and having relatives abroad. Having accumulated mobility capital tends to incite another stay and facilitates actually embarking on a new stay. An exception to this phenomenon is migration, because migrants tend to be socioeconomically disadvantaged (Netz and Sarceletti 2021). Thus, motivations for temporary mobility may vary depending on the accumulation of various previous mobility experiences. Yet, starting to accumulate mobility capital can be a motivation in itself for embarking on temporary mobility.

3. Context, data and method

3.1. Data and samples

The context of our study is Switzerland, situated centrally in Europe and closely tied to its neighbouring countries. Its globalised economy and four linguistic regions require individuals to have a good understanding of several languages in order to integrate into the labour market.

We use secondary data from the 2016–2017 edition of *Swiss Federal Survey of Adolescents* (FORS 2020), covering young adults' life-courses trajectories and mobility experiences. The data collection was administered in two parts, drawing on two different populations. The first part took place during the recruitment procedure for the Swiss military. This is mandatory for young Swiss men between 18 and 20 years old ($N = 40,503$)¹ and determines their potential fit for a basic four-month military service. Despite mandatory participation in the recruitment, we do not expect significant response bias. The focus of the survey was on temporary mobility experiences, which is unrelated to the recruitment (the military service itself is not considered temporary mobility), and it was conducted by military-independent survey experts trained to administer the survey. Participants were informed that their answers would only be accessible to researchers (Ferrez and van den Hende 2019).

The second part of the data stems from a representative sample of 2,126 young women drawn from the Swiss population.² Experts were responsible for administering the same questionnaire as filled in by the men with a certain number of young women, aged 18 and 19, determined to be representative based on regionally stratified registry data.³ The male population is weighted to have a sample size comparable to that of the women – this allows us to compare both samples. Due to its smaller size, the female sample could not be included in all steps of the analysis.

3.2. Definitions

3.2.1. Temporary mobility

In the survey, temporary mobility was defined as a stay of more than three weeks, carried out by an individual aged 12 or older, without parents and without a purely touristic objective (Stam and Rérat 2019). These sojourns can be educational (e.g. language stays or study exchanges), professional (e.g. internships or employment), or cultural (e.g. backpacking trips), and must have been carried out abroad or in another Swiss linguistic area. The latter entails living in another linguistic and cultural context and is, therefore, similar to a mobility experience abroad. Including an analysis of intra-national temporary mobility in a multilingual country represents an important addition to the literature, which usually focuses on international temporary mobility. The data contain detailed information about the stays: the purpose, the moment in the life-course, age at the time of the stay, duration, whether the respondent left alone, with friends, or with family members (except parents), and destinations (see Table 1). If respondents had had more than one stay, they were asked to refer to the most recent one. We analyse two subsamples. The first consists of young men who had had an experience of temporary mobility ($N = 5,732$; 14.3% of the male sample), while the second consists of women with a mobility experience ($N = 449$; 21.4% of the female sample).

Most sojourns were linguistic stays and took place during respondents' free time (Table 1). Most respondents were between 16 and 18 years old. The duration of men's stays was mostly up to two months, while women's stays tended to be somewhat longer.⁴ The majority of respondents carried out their stays alone. More respondents went abroad as opposed to staying in Switzerland. The most common destinations were the English-speaking UK and USA and Switzerland's neighbouring countries (Germany, France, and Italy). Respondents were also retrospectively asked about motivations for temporary mobility. To minimise the risk of memory bias, they were presented with a

Table 1. Characteristics of men's and women's temporary mobility (N_{men} = 5,732; N_{women} = 449; percentages).

Characteristics of temporary mobility		Men		Women	
		%		%	
Type of stay	Linguistic stay as part of schooling	22		27	
	Linguistic stay outside the framework of school	26		31	
	Secondary or university studies	5		7	
	Professional training	4		1	
	Employment/paid internship	3		8	
	Unpaid employment (or internship)	2		2	
	Stay with relatives	7		3	
	Backpack adventure trip or the like	8		6	
	Other cultural stays	11		6	
	Missing	12		9	
Moment in life-course	At a time of transition	21		35	
	During holidays	40		32	
	In the course of training/employment	27		26	
	Other	6		4	
	Missing	6		4	
Age at time of stay	12–13	5		4	
	14–15	12		15	
	16–17	38		53	
	18–19	34		27	
	20+	8		0	
	Missing	3		2	
Duration	<1 month	30		18	
	1–2 months	36		35	
	3–4 months	10		12	
	5–6 months	7		8	
	7–12 months	12		24	
	> 12 months	4		2	
	Missing	1		1	
With whom*	Alone	58		72	
	Family members (except parents)	17		8	
	Friends	15		12	
	Colleagues/schoolmates	10		7	
	Other	3		4	
Destinations*	In Switzerland	16		27	
	In another country	85		73	
	Missing	2		1	
Destination country*	UK	19		14	
	USA	15		8	
	Other English-speaking countries	14		25	
	Germany	12		7	
	France	10		7	
	Italy	5		2	
	Other	60		45	
	Missing	13		27	
	Total (N/%)	5,732	100	449	100

Note: All individuals with temporary mobility experiences are included. * indicates that the items of these variables add up to more than 100% as respondents could select several items. For example, individuals can have visited France and Germany during the same temporary mobility.

closed list of potential motivations. The same applies to benefits, which were asked about in a subsequent question to avoid participants tailoring their motivations to benefits.

3.2.2. Motivations for and benefits of temporary mobility

Motivations for temporary mobility are defined as follows. Respondents with a temporary mobility experience were asked to indicate the motivation(s) that applied to their stay. They were presented with eleven motivations and answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. To measure the benefits of temporary mobility six items were presented, with the same 5-point Likert scale.

3.2.3. Life-Course trajectories

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the three life-course trajectories for men and women. While women are not included in the main analyses, getting an idea of the comparability of the male and female sample helps us to make assumptions about women's potential motivation profiles.

The *socio-familial trajectory* is composed of respondents' highest parental educational attainment (of either parent) and the financial situation during childhood; age at the time of the survey; whether the respondent has experienced a parental divorce; is in a relationship; and/or left the parental home. The *educational/professional trajectory* comprises information on the number of languages spoken, the current level of education or the highest level achieved for those who are no longer in education, and professional status. Finally, the *mobility trajectory* includes the following indicators: whether the respondent was born abroad; whether at least one parent was born abroad; whether the respondent has moved and how far; the number of visited countries (including all types of mobility); whether one of the parents has worked or studied abroad; and if the individual has immediate or extended family abroad. It also includes the residential context, that is, the linguistic regions, and a rural-urban gradient of the place of residence.

Individuals' mobility capital cuts through the life-course trajectories. Mostly it is part of the mobility trajectory, that is, respondents' own past mobility experiences. Additionally, their families' past mobility experiences play an important role in terms of having immediate or extended family abroad, as well as language skills.

3.3. Analytic strategy

Our empirical analysis consists of two steps. First, we describe the motivations for and benefits of stays. Second, we establish profiles of young men with similar motivations for temporary mobility. While the second set of analyses does not allow for the inclusion of women, we speculate on women's potential motivation profiles. To create the motivation profiles, we apply a principal component analysis (PCA) that reduces the information and synthesises the 11 motivation items into a small number of dimensions. The dimensions derived from the PCA are then used in a 'two-step cluster' analysis to divide the population into groups of young adults sharing the same motivations. Three clusters were chosen based on the AIC and BIC criteria⁵, as well as on the interpretation of the results. Each cluster can then be described in terms of the intensities of the PCA-dimensions. Finally, we use a multinomial logistic regression to examine how the different motivation groups differ from each other in terms of life-course trajectories (Table 2). The results can be accessed in the online supplementary material (OSM). Information on characteristics of the mobility experience (Table 1) is used to further differentiate the groups. With this set of analyses we assess who tends to act upon which motivations with a single temporary move, along with individuals' life-courses characteristics, and how this relates to perceived benefits.

4. Results

4.1. Motivations and perceived benefits of temporary mobility

4.1.1. Motivations

Young men's most common motivations for a temporary mobility relate to personal development, the acquisition of linguistic skills, and cultural discovery: many left to have a new adventure, learn a new language, discover a new culture, become independent, and enjoy life (Table 3). For this age group the acquisition of language skills is at the intersection of a cultural experience and obtaining professional qualifications, even more in a multilingual country such as Switzerland. Other professional skills are probably abstract to them. Overall, profession-related motivations were less

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for life-course trajectories for men and women with a temporary mobility experience (percentages).

		Men %	Women %
<i>Sociofamilial trajectory</i>			
Parental education (Highest level of both parents' education)	Mandatory	2	1
	Secondary professional	17	23
	Secondary general	13	12
	Tertiary	61	61
	Unknown	6	3
Financial situation in childhood	Modest	22	20
	Good	78	80
	Age		
Age	18	30	68
	19	39	32
	20	17	0
	21+	14	0
Parental separation		26	23
	In a relationship	35	36
Left parental home		7	2
	Family Abroad		
	No family abroad	49	49
	immediate family	15	8
	Extended family	36	44
<i>Educational/Professional trajectory</i>			
Number of languages spoken	1	3	4
	2 or 3	64	61
	4 or more	33	35
Educational level	Mandatory	3	2
	Secondary professional	33	25
	Secondary general	52	65
	Professional status		
	Tertiary	11	9
	In education, working	24	22
	Working, not in education	59	66
	In education, not working	11	6
	Not in education, not working	7	6
<i>Mobility trajectory</i>			
Country of birth	Switzerland	91	95
	Europe	3	3
	Other	6	2
Parents' birth place	Both in Switzerland	58	73
	At least one abroad	42	27
Moves by distance	None	27	34
	In the same canton	48	45
	To another canton	14	12
	To/from another country	11	9
Number of foreign countries visited	None	0	0
	1–2	1	2
	3–5	13	14
	6–10	39	41
	More than 10	47	44
Parents studied/worked abroad	No	46	62
	Yes	48	37
	Don't know	6	1
Family Abroad	No family abroad	49	49
	Immediate family	15	8
	Extended family	36	44
Linguistic region	German-speaking	73	63
	French-speaking	19	31
	Italian-speaking	8	5
Urban-rural gradient	Rural municipalities	19	31
	Periurban and suburban areas	49	37
	Small towns and regional centres	11	16
	Big and medium cities	21	16
Total (N/%)		4,964; 100	395; 100

Note: The numbers of observations differ from those in Table 1. Here, only respondents with information on all variables are included. For the male sample, this refers to the analysis sample included in the PCA and cluster analysis.

Table 3. Motivations for temporary mobility for men and women (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree), means and standard deviations (SD).

	Men		Women	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Have a new adventure	4.16	1.16	4.48***	0.8
Learn a new language	3.94	1.40	4.47***	1.09
Discover a new culture	3.75	1.29	3.94*	1.17
Become independent	3.43	1.35	3.91***	1.09
Enjoy life before having too many responsibilities	3.43	1.35	3.28	1.3
Improve chances on the job market	2.82	1.53	2.82	1.42
Time before education/employment	2.38	1.61	2.28	1.61
Obtain professional skills	2.44	1.44	2.38	1.32
Join family/friends	2.12	1.55	1.72***	1.32
Take distance	2.19	1.41	2.49**	1.50
Didn't know what else to do	1.76	1.26	1.58*	1.14
Number of observations	$N_{min} = 5,480; N_{max} = 5,571$		$N_{min} = 437; N_{max} = 443$	

Note: The number of observations differs across items, therefore, we have indicated the minimum and maximum number of observations per sub-sample. The items are ordered by importance for men's stays.

*/**/*** refers to 0.05/0.01/0.001 significance levels of the results from t-tests comparing men to women.

common for men's stays. Yet, more than a third left to improve their chances on the job market. Almost a third wanted to benefit from the time they had before starting a new educational programme or job. Around a fifth left to visit family or friends.

Women are more likely than men to engage in mobility for becoming independent, having a new adventure, and taking distance from their current lives. While previous studies suggest that men's motivations are more professionally focused than women's (Deakin 2014), we observe no significant gender differences along these lines. Few men and women refer to a lack of alternatives as a motivation.

4.1.2. Perceived benefits

Men and women rank the benefits similarly, yet women claim to benefit somewhat more (Table 4). While being important for both men and women, more women said that they benefitted in terms of improving linguistic as well as personal skills. Women also more often broadened their social networks. Men are more likely to become mobile again; both men and women cited professional skills least. For both women and men, a mobility experience changed their perspective on life and future projects, demonstrating that a temporary mobility experience is a crucial event in young adults' life-courses. This finding is supported by the observation that a stay encourages another similar experience: More than three-quarters intend to carry out another stay.

Table 4. Perceived benefits of temporary mobility (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree), means and standard deviations (SD).

	Men		Women	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Improved language skills	4.07	1.313	4.41***	1.028
Acquired personal skills	4.02	1.145	4.32***	0.91
Encourage other stays outside region	4.09	1.222	3.29*	1.047
Expanded social network	3.91	1.259	4.15***	1.053
Changed the way of looking at life and future plans	3.24	1.385	3.31	1.276
Acquired professional skills	2.56	1.466	2.51	1.297
Number of observations	$N_{min} = 5,580; N_{max} = 5,630$		$N_{min} = 444; N_{max} = 447$	

Note: The number of observations differs across items; therefore, we have indicated the minimum and maximum number of observations per sub-sample. */**/*** refers to 0.05/0.01/0.001 significance levels of the results from t-tests assessing the differences in means between men and women per item.

4.2. Motivation groups among mobile young men

The above reveals that various motivations lead young adults to become temporarily mobile. With respect to their mobility experience, on average, both men and women refer positively to five out of eleven proposed motivations. As a novelty to the literature, we establish a typology of motivations, focusing on the sample of young men with a mobility experience ($N = 5,235$).

The PCA reduces the eleven motivations for temporary mobility into three underlying dimensions (see Table OSM1). We call the first dimension *hedonism*, characterised by motivations relating to experiencing something new, discovering a new culture, enjoying life, and becoming independent. The second dimension is *opportunism*: the underlying motivations are using the time available to join family and/or friends, to distance oneself from the situation one was experiencing, to take advantage of the time available before the start of a new training or job, as well as a lack of alternatives. The third dimension is *utilitarianism*: the motivations relate to the development and acquisition of skills to increase future labour market chances. The motivation of learning a language is represented in both the utilitarianism and hedonism dimensions but plays a relatively weak role for both.

Next, a cluster analysis is applied to the three dimensions. Based on this we split the respondents into three groups: the *Curious* (34%, $N = 1,778$), the *Professionals* (39%, $N = 2,020$), and the *Pragmatic* (27%, $N = 1,437$). Figure 1 presents the levels of the different motivation dimensions in terms of factor scores for each motivation cluster.

The average factor scores can take negative or positive values, indicating the relative significance of each PCA-dimension for the respective cluster in comparison to the other groups. The higher the value, the more important this motivational dimension is for the respondents in that cluster; the lower the value, the less important the motivational dimension. Below, we describe how each group compares to the other two in terms of motivations and life-course trajectories, as well as characteristics and benefits of their stays (Table OSM2).

4.2.1. The curious

In comparison to the other groups, the *Curious* are mostly motivated by hedonism (Figure 1). With their temporary mobility, these young men wanted to enjoy life, have an adventure, and dive into a culture. They were less concerned about the acquisition of professional skills and exhibit a lower degree of utilitarianism.

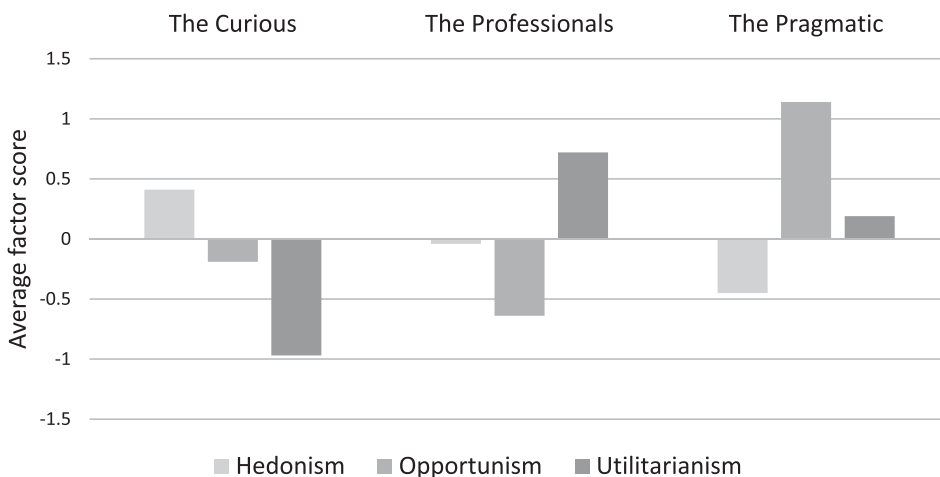


Figure 1. Average factor scores of the PCA dimensions by motivation groups of young men ($N = 5,235$).

With respect to the *sociofamilial trajectory*, the *Curious* are younger than the others, indicating that motivations related to curiosity are predominant earlier in the life-course. Distinctive patterns appear in terms of the *Curious' mobility trajectory*. They have acquired a mobility capital that they can draw on to engage in a mobility experience and have visited more foreign countries than the other groups. Moreover, they are more likely to have extended family members abroad, which may provide them with more opportunities for mobility and may encourage imitation behaviours. This suggests that another part of their mobility capital stems from their families.

The *Curious* carry out more adventurous sojourns than respondents in the other groups (Table OSM1). More than two-thirds have done their stay outside an institutional framework, and more than half left for a non-professional purpose. A higher proportion than in the other groups left for a backpacking trip or for other cultural stays. More than half of the *Curious' stays* (56%) took place during holidays⁶, while this holds significantly less for the other groups. With respect to the destinations, more than a third of the *Curious* went to countries where the official language is neither English nor one of the official languages in Switzerland. This suggests that they want to explore more adventurous destinations rather than increase their employability.

The *Curious* seem to have benefitted from their stays in terms of personal and linguistic skills, as well as by broadening their social networks (Table 5). Moreover, the stay usually led to the wish to leave again. This indicates that their mobility experience further strengthened their mobility capital and that they want to deploy it again in the future.

4.2.2. The professionals

The *Professionals* constitute the largest group (39%). They are driven by utilitarian motivations and focus on increasing their employability. They seem to respond to anticipated labour market demands and to consider mobility as part of their qualifications.

The *Professionals* differ from the other groups in the *educational/professional trajectory*: More individuals are in education (not working) and they speak more languages. In terms of their *mobility trajectory*, they are less likely to have foreign-born parents and, compared to their counterparts in the other groups they less often have immediate family members abroad. Hence, the *Professionals* do not have a mobility capital accumulated by their families, but they accumulate it themselves.

With their mobility the *Professionals* seek to accumulate skills and to shape their professional future. More than 95% left for reasons related to skills acquisition, and for 43% the stay was part of their educational or professional pathway (Table OSM1). Often, they embarked on long stays: more respondents in this group than in the other groups left for seven months or longer. Almost two-thirds (63%) of the young men who went abroad went to English-speaking countries (33% to the UK, 17% to the US, and 13% to other English-speaking countries), 14% went to Germany, and 11% to France. The languages spoken in those countries are important to qualify for the Swiss

Table 5. Perceived benefits of temporary mobility, by motivation groups of young men (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree; N = 5,235).

Benefit	Curious		Professionals		Pragmatic	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Improved language skills	3.85	1.36	4.59	0.84	3.67	1.51
Acquired personal skills	3.79	1.1	4.37	0.81	3.66	1.38
Encouraged other stays outside region	4.45	0.93	4.06	1.13	3.68	1.48
Expanded social network	3.86	1.25	4.16	1.07	3.66	1.42
Changed the way of looking at life and future plans	3.06	1.41	3.28	1.34	3.35	1.38
Acquired professional skills	1.59	0.97	3.12	1.43	2.95	1.41
Number of observations	1,778		2,020		1,437	
%	34		39		27	

Note: *t*-tests indicate that the differences between the groups (i.e. Curious vs. Professionals, Curious vs. Pragmatic; Professionals vs. Pragmatic) are statistically significant. The only exception is that the item *Changed the way of looking at life and future plans* does not differ significantly between the Professionals and the Pragmatic.

labour market. They also went more than the other groups to another linguistic region of Switzerland (18%).

The *Professionals* perceive their stays as highly beneficial (Table 5) in terms of linguistic and personal skills, as well as for a broadened social network and professional skills. While the improvement of professional competencies is less important than other benefits, it is more important than for the other groups. Moreover, the acquisition of linguistic skills is an important professional qualification for the age group considered here.

4.2.3. The pragmatic

The third and smallest group is the *Pragmatic* (27%). They become mobile as the opportunity arises and are in a phase of their lives where they can easily do it.

The *Pragmatic* differ in terms of their *educational/professional trajectory*: they are less often in general secondary or tertiary education than the others. Hence, they follow educational pathways with few mobility opportunities and have to create opportunity themselves.

Compared to the other groups, the *Pragmatic* choose a larger variety of stays. The most popular type of mobility for this group is linguistic stays outside the framework of school. The stays took place during an educational or professional transition (33%) or during holidays from work or education (40%). They went more often than the other groups to a neighbouring country (40%), and 14% of them went to another linguistic region in Switzerland. This may be for employability reasons (e.g. learning or improving a second Swiss language), but also because these stays are easier to organise.

They report fewer benefits than the other groups (Table 5); nevertheless, they agree that the stay was valuable for all the queried items. Fewer of the *Pragmatic* than those in the other groups want to leave again. This reinforces the impression of a profile of young men who use the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to leave. It seems that the *Pragmatic* have to put forth the strongest initiative to carry out a stay, since they lack the mobility capital and institutional framework encouraging them to leave.

4.2.4. Motivation groups among women

Young women are more motivated by discovering a culture, having an adventure and becoming independent. It is also notable that they leave less often than men with the motivation that they do not know what else to do, and they go less often to join friends and family. Therefore, we would expect a larger female group amongst the *Curious* and a smaller group of *Pragmatic*. As mentioned above, the professional motivations are the same for men and women. Thus, the group of *Professionals* would probably be similar.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This article has shed light on three questions: what motivates young adults to become temporarily mobile; what are the perceived benefits; and how do their life-course trajectories relate to different motivations. Moving beyond the population of students, our study provides an in-depth analysis of the motivations for and benefits of temporary youth mobility by focusing on a broad population.

Young adults become mobile for multiple reasons relating to different life domains. For both young men and women, personal motivations are more important than professional ones. This fits with previous research suggesting that temporary mobility allows young adults to engage in identity work and to learn more about themselves (King et al. 2011), but also broadens the focus beyond stays carried out by university students.

Based on a large-scale survey, we established a categorisation of mobile young men into three motivation groups. The *Curious*, who are motivated by hedonism, want to experience new adventures and explore different cultures. The *Professionals* put forward utilitarian reasons. The *Pragmatic* benefit from an opportunity before starting a new education programme or profession,

take distance from their current life, and are somewhat concerned about their future and the acquisition of professional skills.

There are few differences between the three groups' socio-familial trajectories. The *Curious* are younger, suggesting that this set of motivations is more relevant earlier in the life-course. Interestingly, the two indicators of social class do not significantly relate to the motivation categories. However, we have focused on the mobile part of the population, a selective group in terms of social class (Findlay et al. 2012; King et al. 2011; King and Raghuram 2013). Another potential reason for the absence of this relationship is that mobility capital – which encompasses skills and ease of travel – is indeed more decisive than social class.

The *educational/professional trajectory* is a strong determinant for mobility motivations. The *Professionals* tend to be enrolled in an education programme (not working) and speak more languages; the *Pragmatic* are less often in general secondary or tertiary education. Overall, for the *Professionals*, temporary mobility represents a way to accumulate skills and knowledge, and it is also at that level that they benefit most.

Our study provides novel insights about the importance of mobility capital (Murphy-Lejeune 2003). The stays of the *Curious* are mostly driven by their mobility trajectory. They already possess a significant mobility capital, they seem comfortable coping in different contexts, allowing them to easily carry out stays outside an institutional framework early in their lives. Their mobility capital seems to be transmitted by the family through mobility opportunities or potential imitation behaviours. The *Professionals* have not received such a capital from their parents but have started to accumulate it themselves. The *Pragmatic* take advantage of an opportunity to carry out a temporary mobility and thereby accumulate their own mobility capital. Overall, motivations for temporary mobility are closely linked to young men's mobility capital, or a lack thereof. Based on their mobility capital, the three groups also choose different destinations: the *Pragmatic* tend to go to neighbouring countries, the *Professionals* go more often to English-speaking countries, and the *Curious* to more adventurous destinations.

All groups report significant benefits from temporary motility. The *Curious* are the most encouraged to embark on further stays in the future. This motivation is probably strengthened by the substantial mobility capital they have acquired during their life-course favouring future stays. In line with their rather adventurous stays, they report fewer professional benefits. The *Professionals* benefited from better linguistic and personal skills, and an expanded social network: they seem to have achieved their goals, and their mobility capital is increased. Finally, the *Pragmatic* report fewer benefits than the other groups. This may be explained by their low mobility capital, which did not allow them to benefit from their stays as much as the other groups. In contrast, it allowed them to change the way they look at life and their future plans.

Better understanding why young adults embark on a temporary mobility is crucial for policymaking and for improving programmes. Existing programmes tend to be tailored towards young people falling mostly into the category of the *Professionals* (e.g. Erasmus). Other young people more easily initiate mobility by themselves, here represented by the *Curious*. Others require more support to be able to leave, such as the *Pragmatic*, who take advantage of an opportunity. The benefits of temporary mobility are lower for this group with less mobility capital. Nonetheless, to give this group the opportunity to acquire mobility capital policymaking should focus on this category in order to create opportunities and allow broader access to temporary mobility in the population. Moreover, the finding that young adults also leave for reasons related to adventure and curiosity and benefit in terms of language acquisition and other domains should be seen by future employers as a signal for their efficacy in global labour markets.

This paper focused on young adults who have been mobile. Yet, some young adults may be motivated but cannot leave. Those individuals are excluded from our analysis. It would be interesting to assess how young adults without a temporary mobility experience would have benefitted from one. Moreover, the sample of women analysed in our study did not allow for an in-depth analysis corresponding to that of men. Nevertheless, we were able to formulate some assumptions

concerning their likely membership in the different motivation groups. A larger sample of data on women would allow verification of these hypotheses. New longitudinal data longitudinal data would also be useful to analyse how changing life-course characteristics relate to motivations for and benefits of temporary mobility. Finally, qualitative data would allow for further exploration of the observed differences across the motivation groups.

Notes

1. Depending on their educational trajectories, some individuals postpone participation until age 25.
2. While for men the recruitment is mandatory, women can participate in the recruitment on a voluntary basis. Therefore, they represent a very specific population and were excluded from the analyses (N=263). Moreover, women included in the study outside the context of the recruitment participated on a voluntary basis; therefore, we cannot exclude response bias towards women who are more interested in mobility.
3. Sampled women received several reminders by phone. Their response rate was 70%.
4. The difference was established by a t-test and is statistically significant.
5. AIC and BIC refer to the Akaike and Bayesian information criterion respectively.
6. While holidays are not considered a temporary mobility, the stay could occur during a holiday period.

Acknowledgement

This study uses data from the Swiss Federal Surveys of Adolescents. The questionnaire was developed by FORS and administered by the ch-x team. We would like to thank Alexandra Stam, Eliane Ferrez, Peter Farago, Boris Wernli and Anthe Van Den Hende for their help and advice, as well as the editors and reviewers for their comments which greatly helped to improve the paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding


This work was supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation under Grant Nr. 100017_165726.

Availability of data and material

FORS. (2020). *FORS: Life-course and experiences of mobility (ch-x 2016/2017)* [Data set]. FORS - Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences. doi:10.23662/FORS-DS-1107-1

ORCID

Lucas Haldimann  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0369-2287>

Marieke Heers  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0479-910X>

Brian Kleiner  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1521-0997>

Patrick Rérat  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6980-3336>

References

- Bagnoli, A. 2009. "On 'An Introspective Journey': Identities and Travel in Young People's Lives." *European Societies* 11 (3): 325–345. doi:10.1080/14616690902764674.
- Carlson, S. 2013. "Becoming a Mobile Student - a Processual Perspective on German Degree Student Mobility." *Population, Space and Place* 19 (2): 168–180. doi:10.1002/psp.1749.
- Carlson, S., J. Gerhards, and S. Hans. 2017. "Educating Children in Times of Globalisation: Class-Specific Child-Rearing Practices and the Acquisition of Transnational Cultural Capital." *Sociology* 51 (4): 749–765. doi:10.1177/0038038515618601.

- Deakin, H. 2014. "The Drivers to Erasmus Work Placement Mobility for UK Students." *Children's Geographies* 12 (1): 25–39. doi:10.1080/14733285.2013.851063.
- Ferrez, E., and A. van den Hende. 2019. "Enquête [Survey]." In *Entre mobilité temporaire et ancrage local: portrait de la jeunesse suisse : analyse des séjours dans d'autres régions linguistiques de Suisse et à l'étranger*, edited by A. Stam, and P. Rérat, 43–51. Chur/Glarus: Somedia Verlag AG.
- Findlay, A., R. King, F. M. Smith, A. Geddes, and R. Skeldon. 2012. "World Class? An Investigation of Globalisation, Difference and International Student Mobility." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37 (1): 118–131. doi:10.1111/j.1475-5661.2011.00454.x.
- Findlay, A., R. King, A. Stam, and E. Ruiz-Gelices. 2006. "Ever Reluctant Europeans: The Changing Geographies of UK Students Studying and Working Abroad." *European Urban and Regional Studies* 13 (4): 291–318. doi:10.1177/0969776406065429.
- Findlay, A., D. McCollum, R. Coulter, and V. Gayle. 2015. "New Mobilities Across the Life Course: a Framework for Analysing Demographically Linked Drivers of Migration." *Population, Space and Place* 21 (4): 390–402. doi:10.1002/psp.1956.
- FORS. 2020. FORS: Life course and experiences of mobility (ch-x 2016/2017) [Dataset]. Distributed by FORS, Lausanne, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.23662/FORS-DS-1107-1>
- Frändberg, L. 2015. "Acceleration or Avoidance? The Role of Temporary Moves Abroad in the Transition to Adulthood." *Population, Space and Place* 21 (6): 553–567. doi:10.1002/psp.1851.
- Gerhards, J., Hans S., and Carlson S. 2017. *Social Class and Transnational Human Capital: how middle and upper class parents prepare their children for globalization*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Grabowski, S., S. Wearing, K. Lyons, M. Tarrant, and A. Landon. 2017. "A Rite of Passage?" *Exploring Youth Transformation and Global Citizenry in the Study Abroad Experience*. *Tourism Recreation Research* 42 (2): 139–149.
- Haldimann, L., M. Heers, and P. Rérat. 2021. "Between Stuckness and Stillness: Why do Young Adults not Undertake Temporary Mobility?" *Population, Space and Place*.
- Heinz, W., J. Huinink, and A. Weymann. 2009. *The Life Course Reader: Individuals and Societies Across Time*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus-Verl.
- Hurst, A. L. 2018. "Classed Outcomes: how Class Differentiates the Careers of Liberal Arts College Graduates in the U.S." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39 (8): 1075–1093. doi:10.1080/01425692.2018.1455495.
- Kaufmann, V., and Éd Widmer. 2005. "L'acquisition de la Motilité au Sein des Familles [The Acquisition of Motility Within Families]." *Espaces et Societes* 120-121 (1): 199–217.
- King, R., A. Findlay, J. Ahrens, and M. Dunne. 2011. "Reproducing Advantage: The Perspective of English School Leavers on Studying Abroad." *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 9 (2): 161–181.
- King, R., and P. Raghuram. 2013. "International Student Migration: Mapping the Field and New Research Agendas." *Population, Space and Place* 19 (2): 127–137. doi:10.1002/psp.1746.
- King, R., and E. Ruiz-Gelices. 2003. "International Student Migration and the European 'Year Abroad': Effects on European Identity and Subsequent Migration Behaviour." *International Journal of Population Geography* 9 (3): 229–252. doi:10.1002/ijpg.280.
- Lareau, A. 2011. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (2nd ed., with an update a decade later). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Murphy-Lejeune, E. 2003. *Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Netz, N., and C. Finger. 2016. "New Horizontal Inequalities in German Higher Education? Social Selectivity of Studying Abroad Between 1991 and 2012." *Sociology of Education* 89 (2): 79–98. doi:10.1177/0038040715627196.
- Netz, N., D. Klasik, S. Entrich, and M. Barker. 2021. "Socio-demographics: A Global Overview of Inequalities in Education Abroad Participation." In *Education Abroad: Bridging Scholarship and Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon, edited by A. C. Ogden, B. T. Streitwieser, and C. Van Mol, 28–42. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Netz, N., and A. Sarcletti. 2021. "(Warum) Beeinflusst ein Migrationshintergrund die Auslandsstudienabsicht?" In *Migration, Mobilität und Soziale Ungleichheit in der Hochschulbildung*, edited by M. Jungbauer-Gans, and A. Gottburgsen, 103–136. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien.
- Ogden, A. C., B. T. Streitwieser, and C. Van Mol, eds. 2021. *Education Abroad: Bridging Scholarship and Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Pietro, G. D. 2021. "Changes in the Study Abroad Gender gap: A European Cross-Country Analysis." *Higher Education Quarterly*.
- Rérat, P. 2014. "The Selective Migration of Young Graduates: Which of Them Return to Their Rural Home Region and Which Do Not?" *Journal of Rural Studies* 35: 123–132. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2014.04.009.
- Smith, D., P. Rérat, and J. Sage. 2014. "Youth Migration and Spaces of Education." *Children's Geographies* 12 (1): 1–8. doi:10.1080/14733285.2013.871801.
- Stam, A., and P. Rérat. 2019. *Entre mobilité temporaire et ancrage local: portrait de la jeunesse suisse : analyse des séjours dans d'autres régions linguistiques de Suisse et à l'étranger*. Chur/Glarus: Somedia Verlag AG.

- Tompkins, A., T. Cook, E. Miller, and L. A. LePeau. 2017. "Gender Influences on Students' Study Abroad Participation and Intercultural Competence." *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 54 (2): 204–216. doi:10.1080/19496591.2017.1284671.
- Van Mol, C. 2021. "Exploring Explanations for the Gender gap in Study Abroad: a Case Study of the Netherlands." *Higher Education*.
- Van Mol, C., and C. Timmerman. 2014. "Should I Stay or Should I Go? An Analysis of the Determinants of Intra-European Student Mobility." *Population, Space and Place* 20 (5): 465–479. doi:10.1002/psp.1833.
- Waters, J. 2009. "In Pursuit of Scarcity: Transnational Students, 'Employability', and the MBA." *Environment and Planning A* 41 (8): 1865–1883. doi:10.1068/a40319.
- Waters, J., and R. Brooks. 2011. "'Vive la Différence?': The 'International' Experiences of UK Students Overseas." *Population, Space and Place* 17 (5): 567–578. doi:10.1002/psp.613.
- Weichbrodt, M. 2014. "Learning Mobility: High-School Exchange Programs as a Part of Transnational Mobility." *Children's Geographies* 12 (1): 9–24. doi:10.1080/14733285.2013.850852.
- Zimmermann, J., and F. J. Neyer. 2013. "Do we Become a Different Person When Hitting the Road? Personality Development of Sojourners." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 105 (3): 515–530. doi:10.1037/a0033019.