Getting Europe back on Track? Learning Experiences during Interrail and how a free Interrail Ticket could foster Global Citizenship

Tina Schmiers
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Abstract

This study investigates learning experiences and outcomes during the train travel phenomenon Interrail. It especially focuses on transformational learning and whether and in what scope these learning outcomes correlate with the concept of global citizenship. It further analyses how the proposal of a free Interrail ticket, that is currently debated within the European Commission, could foster global citizenship in the wider context of Education for Sustainable Development. Although there has been much research on educative benefits of travel, Interrail in general and as an informal learning environment in particular, is an under-researched phenomenon. By providing a deeper understanding about transformative learning processes and outcomes during the specific case of Interrail in the context of sustainable development, this study contributes towards closing this niche. This research was carried out in form of a qualitative case study research. In total, 18 in-depth interviews were conducted with young adults representing 13 different nationalities. The interviews were thoroughly analysed by applying Jack Mezirows’ transformative learning theory and the concept of global citizenship. The results were completed with an additional documentation analysis. The study results reveal that Interrail with its specific characteristics and elements may provide an informal learning environment that can foster and promote both transformative learning and global citizenship to the individual traveller. The identified patterns and commonalities of learning experiences and outcomes were summarized within the main topics of personal development, critical thinking and reflection, cultural sensitivity and pluralism, shaping identity and sense of belonging, broadening view and change of behavior or action. Implementing a free Interrail ticket could thus arguably contribute to greater accessibility and more equal opportunities for youth to discover, experience and learn from travelling through Europe by train. Subsequently, this could help to foster Education for Sustainable Development and global citizenship. Based on the study results it is suggested, that transformative learning during Interrail could be enhanced through providing incentives and formal guidance in critical thinking and engagement in rational discourse in formal education.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Education for Sustainable Development, Transformative Learning, Global Citizenship, Interrail

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Summary

This study explores learning experiences and outcomes during an Interrail journey for the individual traveller. It focuses on whether or not Interrail provides a frame and environment that promotes transformative learning, which involves a worldview shift or a perspective transformation. The study especially focuses on a transformation that promotes the concept of global citizenship. This implies, amongst other, a critical mind, awareness of challenges and possible solutions of an interconnected world and caring and embracing cultural diversity. This research was inspired by the policy proposal of a free Interrail ticket, which was handed in to the European Commission at the end of last year and that developed to a citizen movement throughout Europe. The proposal suggests handing out a free Interrail ticket to every 18-year old European citizen. While travelling remains a privilege, this would provide a unique opportunity to the pass holder to experience and travel Europe for one month by train, regardless of their background.

Although there has been much research on educative benefits of travel, there is very little research about the train travel phenomenon Interrail, especially as an informal learning experience. The theory of transformative learning has so far been researched mainly in the context of higher and formal education. As part of Education for Sustainable Development, there is the overall aim to improve the implementation and scaling of global citizenship within educational institutions and environments. By providing a deeper understanding about the learning processes during the specific case of Interrail in the context of sustainable development, this study contributes towards closing this niche.

This study was carried out in form of a qualitative case study research. In total, 18 in-depth interviews were conducted with young adults, representing 13 different nationalities. The interviews were thoroughly analysed by applying Jack Mezirows’ transformative learning theory and the concept of global citizenship. The study results revealed that Interrail with its specific characteristics and elements may provide an informal learning environment that can foster and promote both transformative learning and global citizenship to the individual traveller. The identified patterns and commonalities of learning experiences and outcomes were summarized within the main topics of personal development, critical thinking and reflection, cultural sensitivity and pluralism, shaping identity and sense of belonging, broadening view and change of behavior or action. Implementing a free Interrail ticket could thus arguably contribute to greater accessibility and more equal opportunities for youth to discover, experience and learn from travelling through Europe by train. Subsequently, this could help to foster Education for Sustainable Development and global citizenship. Based on the study results it is suggested, that transformative learning during Interrail could be enhanced through providing incentives and formal guidance in critical thinking and engagement in rational discourse in formal education.

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No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

Nelson Mandela

1. Introduction

The motivation for this study lies in the policy proposal of a free Interrail ticket that has been developed and submitted by two activists from Germany to the European Commission in 2016. The free Interrail ticket is especially aimed at youth and suggests providing every 18-year-old European citizen with a free Interrail pass (Herr & Speer, 2015). This voucher would bring the unique opportunity to experience and travel Europe for one month by train, which can be realized anytime until the pass holder turns 26 years old. The socio-economic and financial background of youth would no longer play a primary role in the decision of whether one can go on this potentially adventurous and impactful journey, experiencing the diverse continent she or he is part of. When I first heard about this idea, I was immediately excited and wanted to know more about it. I thought that this could be a great opportunity to tackle the ongoing issue of travelling still being a privilege for the better off and well-educated fraction of society in a world of increasing internationalization and competition, with a rising inequality of wealth and income at the very same time.

Being fortunate of having experienced travelling with Interrail myself as well as working and studying abroad, I am aware of the vast learning opportunities such a unique travel experience provides and how one is offered an ability to grow as a person by being exposed to different realities and unfamiliar environments.

The motive behind the proposal of a free Interrail ticket is to tackle specific issues such as combating stereotypes and prejudices about other cultures or people as well as nationalist tendencies and developments amongst young EU citizens. It also aims to increase youth interest in the EU and its institutions and to foster intercultural friendships and relationships (Herr & Speer, 2015). Especially now, in a time were Europe and the world indeed, are facing a challenging time with rising nationalist and populist movements, including an increasing pogrom climate against refugees and migrants and a decline of democratic institutions in many states, it could be argued that it is of immense importance to support and encourage everybody to remind ourselves that freedom, peace and democracy is not something to be taken for granted. In this era of the modern history of Europe the need is great to maintain and stand up for the values that had once commonly been agreed on.

Looking back at the years 2015 and 2016, one is struck by images of social unrest, enraged citizens and environmental disaster in different parts of the world. As the world gets closer in a time of increased economic globalisation, it seems that its inhabitants are drifting more and more apart. Arguably, we are part of an era, which is shaped by a global environmental and human crisis that requires increased social and ethical responsibility on many societal levels and sectors. There is a general feeling among antiauthoritarian groups that the current neoliberal economic system cannot deliver the stability and prosperity, that its advocates and beneficiaries are promising. Instead, it widens societal gaps, where many people are being left behind and their ability to be heard and taken into account is diminishing. Not surprisingly, within such an increasingly fast changing and complex
world some people demand fast, and easy answers. While facing uncertainty and feeling threatened of losing a secure life within the welfare state, many people seem to accept easy answers of blaming “the other”, often suggested by populist parties. A general Euro scepticism is spreading across the continent and people feel disconnected rather than showing empathy.

The world is filled with different languages, cultures, ethnicities, religions, races, orientations, and diverse identities. Hence, regardless of ideology, it could be argued that it is important for young generations to understand, appreciate, and seek meaningful engagement and solidarity with one another to avoid more conflicts, racism, hatred, xenophobia and despair that are gaining more and more acceptance throughout society. Especially the youth, who determine and shape the future of Europe and the world, need to be supported in creating a holistic understanding of the environmental and social crisis and to be able to critically question the causes of the complex issues they are facing in a time of uncertainty and a rising globalization.

Moreover, in this fast changing and information rich world the importance of reflecting on and interpret of information is often given insufficient time. Media is criticized for distributing false news and events. Social media such as Facebook customizes news, so that the own worldview is continuously being confirmed. The European Commission states that today, the greatest threats Europe is facing are populism and the spread of misinformation (European Parliament, 2016). Hence, the current reality of many young people in Europe is shaped by these circumstances and demands therefore access to circumstances in which they are able to develop confidence, the ability to critically analyze information and the courage to take risks to stand for a just and peaceful future.

Drawing on the above, this research engages with the question how an Interrail journey may shape perspectives and worldviews and whether or not it supports the traveller to start questioning ones beliefs and assumptions and the role one is playing in the world. There are growing voices among policy makers, educational leaders and scholars that our current educational system will need to undertake a drastic change in order to tackle the complex issues of the 21st century (UNESCO, 2017). In doing so, the approach of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is seen as a key driver and its implementation and scaling in formal and non-formal educational sectors is therefore a priority on current international agendas. ESD strives to foster values, soft skills and capabilities for learners to be able to take informed and responsible decisions. As part of ESD, the notion of Global Citizenship specifically promotes a way of understanding and relating oneself to a broader community with respect for diversity and pluralism (UNESCO, 2014). Relating to these goals, what role could the introduction of a free Interrail ticket play in contributing towards such a shift?

The aim of this study is to explore and understand what kind of learning processes an Interrail journey implies for the individual traveller and whether or not and to what extent Interrail provides a frame and environment to promote a shift in perspective. The study especially focuses on a transformation, which implies a view that promotes the concept of global citizenship as this implies a critical mind, awareness of challenges and possible solutions of an interconnected world and caring and embracing cultural diversity.

The research questions for this study are the following

∞ What are the learning experiences and outcomes during an Interrail trip and how is learning experienced in a transformative way?

∞ How do these learning experiences relate to the concept of global citizenship?
How could a free Interrail pass contribute to the implementation of education for sustainable development and global citizenship education?

In educational research the practice of transformative learning has so far almost exclusively been studied in formal educational settings (Taylor, 2007). This indicates the need to a further exploration of informal and non-formal learning settings, that are less controlled by instructors and influenced by their natural environment and other external influences (Taylor, 2007). Although the literature about educative benefits of travel that is undertaken outside of a formal educational frame has increased, there is still a lack of in-depth research in this field, especially as research has primary focused on international and long-term travel or migration (Stone & Petrick, 2013). The benefits of short- and medium-term travel and vacation, such as Interrail, are under-researched (Stone & Petrick, 2013). The phenomenology of the actual rail experience, which plays a major role of an Interrail trip, has so far largely been untouched (Trandberg Jensen, Scarles, & Cohen, 2015) with some exceptions such as Hansson (2014), who investigates the interplay of mobility and environmental meaning making. Interrail in general is an under-researched train travel phenomenon and there is very little published research and literature available. By providing a deeper understanding about the learning processes during the specific case of Interrail in the context of sustainable development, this study contributes towards closing this niche.

2. Young Europeans in a Globalizing World

This section provides an overview of the social situation of young people in Europe. This background information is important for this study, as it gives an understanding of the broader context such as contemporary challenges, risks, aspirations, and other factors that influence life opportunities of young Europeans along their transitional path towards adulthood. The focus lies especially on young people, as Interrail is predominantly used by relatively young travellers (Trandberg Jensen, Scarles, & Cohen, 2015). The informant group of this study mainly consists of young adults and the proposal of the free Interrail ticket, which this study is referring to as well, is aimed at youth from 18 to 25 years. This section will focus on some key features, explained from an international and broad view that provides a glimpse of the complex situation of Europe’s youth.

The Europe of young people today can be described as a mosaic – a metaphor for an open, plural and multicultural Europe. In the course of time it now offers many opportunities but also presents many challenges. The European Union (EU) with a population of over half a billion, covering now most of the continent, started with a purely economic motive (Karolewski, 2006). Over time it evolved in scope and today it is the largest economy in the world, entailing policy areas from climate, environment and health to external relations and security, justice and migration, valid to all its 28 member states. Removing internal border controls through the Schengen agreement enabled people to travel freely and to work, study and live abroad in Europe. It brought people closer together and helped to boost the European economy through the free movement and exchange of goods, services and ideas. The EU is based on the rule of law, founded on treaties that have been voluntarily and democratically agreed on. It was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 for delivering stability and peace for more than half a century. The core values of the EU are human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and respect for human rights, that are being promoted both internally and around the world (Kastroyano, 2009).
However, the European unity is currently threatened by persistent inequalities of access, progress and outcomes, growing nationalist and populist voices and the spread of misinformation. There are severe changing political, economic and social trends within and between the countries which fuel a growing mistrust and scepticism towards the unity between the cultures and traditions that are serving as a basis for a common and shared European identity. Youth in many countries are facing increasing economic difficulties and high unemployment rates yet to be addressed (Eurostat, 2015). 8.7 million young Europeans are unemployed and the proportion facing long-term unemployment or involuntary part-time work remains high (European Commission, 2016). This is especially true for southern European countries such as Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal where unemployment is a common experience for young people regardless of their background and qualification (Chisholm & Kovatcheva, 2002). Southern, southeast and eastern European countries have overall a very unfavourable economic position in comparison to northern countries and the risk for young people is high to fall below the poverty line if they are unable to rely on families, relatives or social networks for additional support (Chisholm & Kovatcheva, 2002).

Disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes both across but also within European states are widening. It compounds inequality between EU regions as young professionals migrate towards the more developed and richer regions. Access to learning opportunities, chances of higher education and lifelong learning remain socially and spatially divided (Ballas, et al., 2012). It is evident that those with already fewer opportunities tend to accumulate disadvantages. The gap is widening between those who study and engage in social, civic and cultural life, and those who are at risk of exclusion and marginalisation (European Commission, 2016).

For the new generations growing up since the 1980s the creation, maintenance and change of their own identity has become increasingly important and fundamental in an ever changing and complex society. At the same time this has become very difficult and challenging due to the vast and overwhelming flow of information embedded in constant change (Illeris, 2014). Traditional, modern and future-oriented patterns exist side by side, frequently clashing with each other (Chisholm & Kovatcheva, 2002). The current transition from industrial towards information, knowledge and network based societies brings social changes and implicates individualisation processes for personal identities and social solidarities. We are entering the 4th Industrial Revolution, which comes with automation, the Internet of Things (IoT), smart manufacturing and a reduction of labour force. In a world of the Internet, there is an increasing access to information and knowledge everywhere at every time. The above stated changes bring both more opportunities and choices and more risks and constrains to youth as it implies a loosening up of the life-course as a fix sequence.

According to the survey “Generation What”, that gave voice to nearly a million young people of the millennial generation in 2016, youth feels increasingly European and tend to support the EU at higher levels than older generations (EBU, 2016). However, it also states that for the current younger generation, stability and security are very valuable and those who feel insecure and who have lost faith in political and legal institutions, are likely to have a pessimistic attitude towards Europe (EBU, 2016). Scholars highlight that there are resources, which are crucial to foster a European Identity; these are experiences of travel across European countries, knowledge of several European languages, contact to people from other European countries and trans-national mobility aspirations (Fuss & Grosser, 2006). These forms of cultural and social capital are not equally distributed amongst the population. However, travel demands are becoming increasingly cultural and normative especially in more developed and industrialized societies. Hence, people who are excluded from certain opportunities tend to experience disempowerment, powerlessness, and dehumanization due to growing competition.
on speed (O’Regan 2012; Parkins 2004). In turn, this immobility fosters and promotes xenophobic and Eurosceptic movements across the continent (Ballas, et al., 2012).

Arguably, in order to regain faith in the EU young people have to be more represented in the political arena and their voices must be included in decisions that affect our future. Accordingly there are reasons to enable greater opportunities in education and mobility for youth and indeed for all generations. It is important to bear in mind that integration, empathy and partnership begin with personal and real-life interactions between individuals since social interaction is a key component of shaping and understanding one’s identity, which is an ongoing process and open for change (Fuss & Grosser, 2006).

Young generations have a key role to play in the future of the continent. The EU therefore has to provide the means for them to discover who their neighbours are and what opportunities and barriers all members can bring to each other. It can be summarized that this kind of developments require from young people, maybe more than ever before, to gain access to and capacity for critical judgement and involvement in political debates (Chisholm & Kovatcheva, 2002).

3. Interrail – Exploring Europe by Train

The following section provides a detailed description of the case that is being explored in this study: Interrail. It starts with a historical overview, followed with aims and visions it promotes and ends with a description of the structure of Interrail. The second part looks into the policy proposal of a free Interrail ticket and introduces the movement of #FreeInterrail.

The Interrail pass was first introduced in 1972 and was formed as part of the 50th anniversary of the International Union of Railway (UIC.org). At the time, the Interrail idea entailed one month train travel in 21 European countries available to everyone aged 21 and under. Almost every train connections were included and the ticket was handed out for a single price, which at the time differed depending on the currency of each country. The Interrail travel concept was born with the aim to support intercultural exchange, originally set in pro-European political landscapes with a vision of free movement (Eurail Group). For many generations Interrail has been the symbol of European Integration as exploring the continent by train allowed to experience the European idea first hand (Interrail.eu).

Today, there is no longer a single global pass but a variety of different passes depending on the travellers’ preferences. It ranges from a one-country pass to explore a specific country in depth, to different travel days within a time frame of 15 days up to a month, to discover more than two countries. The Interrail global pass is available for European citizens and enables train travel in 30 European countries (Fig. 1). It costs between 206 € and 493 € (Interrail.eu). The Eurail global pass can be purchased by non-European citizens and covers 24 European countries. Today, Interrail is mostly used by Western Europeans and relatively young travellers (Trandberg Jensen, Scarles, & Cohen, 2015). However, travellers of all generations have the opportunity to travel with Interrail and increasingly more retired people and families are using it (UIC.org). Roughly 300.000 people are using Interrail every year (European Parliament, 2016). The mobility scheme of Interrail is managed and coordinated by the Eurail Group, which consists of representatives from all national railway operators in Europe. All passes are issued and managed by the Eurail Group and can be ordered online, however the hardcopy of the ticket is being sent out to the recipient by regular mail.
Some countries such as France or Spain request a seat reservation in advance, mostly for high-speed, international and night trains, which require additional booking fees (Interrail.eu).

![Interrail Map](image)

**Fig. 1.** Interrail Map

### 3.1. The Idea of #FreeInterrail

*Imagine it is your 18th birthday and you find a personalized letter from the European Commission in your postbox. In there: A voucher for a free 1-month Interrail pass. Your life will change.* (Herr & Speer, 2015)

These lines introduce the policy proposal of a free Interrail ticket, which two activists from Germany, Vincent-Immanuel Herr (28) and Martin Speer (30) proposed to the European Commission in 2016. The idea envisions, that every EU citizen receives a personalized letter from the European Commission on the 18th birthday. This letter includes, besides a congratulatory note and basic information on mobility in Europe and the EU, a voucher for a one-month Interrail pass. The personalised voucher will be valid until the holder turns 25 years and can be exchanged for the ticket at anytime during this period (Herr & Speer, 2015).

The main points of the proposal that argue for the implementation of a free Interrail ticket emphasize a gradual change amongst youth by fostering the European idea and to combat national and populist tendencies. In particular, the proposal states that implementing a free Interrail ticket will also raise youth and job mobility strengthen the EU labour market and the promotion of international cooperation and partnerships (Herr & Speer, 2015). It is argued that a free Interrail ticket would unite generations across borders and promote a sustainable and green way of travelling. It is estimated that not every 18-year old would immediately go on an Interrail trip after the introduction of the free ticket. Therefore, the aspired impacts and goals will arise gradually over time as the result of a snowball effect.
The story of #FreeInterrail is a story of passion, commitment and belief in embracing the European idea and values to its youth in a time of uncertainty and mistrust. It started in 2014 when Vincent-Immanuel Herr and Martin Speer went on an Interrail trip as part of a research project. While having dinner with the Austrian writer Robert Menasse in Vienna, the idea of a free Interrail ticket developed. Throughout the year 2015 the developed policy proposal found more and more favour with different EU representatives, when finally, in September 2016 the EPP-chair Manfred Weber lobbied for the idea in front of the parliament during the 2016 State of the Union. Ever since, the idea of a free Interrail ticket found great support and interest in and outside of political debates, being widely covered in various media channels in whole Europe. By the end of 2016 the European Commission announced to consider a fully funded pilot project (Herr & Speer, 2015).

However, in March 2017 the European Commission refused the idea, stating that the costs would be too high. Instead, a new initiative to promote youth mobility got presented by the Commission, which is far from the original idea of a free Interrail ticket. The project is called “Move2Learn, Learn2Move” where schools that participate in the European online learning platform “eTwinning”, can apply with a project they are currently working on. In total, 5,000 to 7,000 European students aged 16 and up can benefit from a free ticket to travel to another European country for no more than two weeks (Kostaki, 2017). However, this project is set only for the year 2017 with a scheduled assessment that will determine whether the project will continue.

Manfred Weber said to this occasion: “Our proposal for a free Interrail ticket for every young European who turns 18 is far from dead because it has a great majority of support in the European Parliament” (Kostaki, 2017). With the support of politicians and civil society, individuals and organizations from all over Europe, the proposal developed into a campaign. It is now possible to sign a petition and support the shared demand for a free Interrail ticket to become reality (freeinterrail.eu). Many politicians, individuals, organisations and parties such as the European Youth Parliament Germany (EYP), Federation of Young European Greens (FYEG), BETA Italia – Bringing Europeans Together Associations and many more, are supporting the initiative of #FreeInterrail. The campaign is present on social media and public news and aims at receiving support from across all parts of European society. It is a nominee for the 2017 European Citizenship Award by the European Civic Forum in the category “Active Citizens´ Initiative of the year”. A key factor that distinguishes the idea of a free Interrail ticket to other existing European mobility programmes within the Erasmus+
Programme of the European Commission is its availability to every 18-year old European citizen, no matter their background or occupation. There are potential challenges that need to be considered and taken into account in line with the implementation of the proposal. Although the Interrail pass will be handed out for free, there are still relatively high expenses during the trip e.g. for housing and catering, which could be obstacles to go on the trip for some youth. The majority of Interrail travel currently takes place mainly in the summer months during June to August. A key question would be in what way the free Interrail pass would affect the national carriers’ revenues. Furthermore, Many aspects of Interrail are outdated. The purchase of the ticket could be improved to a paper less solution and the online platform could be expanded with opportunities for Interrail travellers to connect with each other and share experiences. Furthermore, other modes of transportation such as busses and ferries could be included in the concept in order to travel to countries that are not connected with a railway system (such as Cyprus and Malta). Considering the stated aims of the free Interrail proposal, it can be argued that experiencing other cultures without a guidance on reflection, could lead to fostering stereotyped understandings rather than combating them.

4. Theoretical Framework

This section introduces the different theories and concepts that constitute the theoretical framework of this study and that have been applied to define and analyse the research results. I interrelate the train travel phenomenon Interrail as a non-formal educational experience, with the theory of transformative learning and the concept of global citizenship, embedded in the wider frame of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in a European context.

4.1. Informal Learning

The concept of informal learning provides the wider frame in which Interrail is embedded as an educational experience. The following section provides a theoretical background of informal learning and explains, how Interrail can be placed into this concept.

Learning has been discussed as a lifelong process that is often informal. Typically, informal learning implies a contrast to formal learning, suggesting a distinction between the two (Callanan, Cervantes, & Loomis, 2011). It can be described as learning that takes place outside of a formal education environment or institution (such as schools, colleges, universities or training centres) and it often implies questioning standardized and traditional learning. It typically involves unintentional or unplanned learning (Hager & Halliday, 2009) and generally takes place without much external facilitation or structure, which can also be referred to as learning by experience (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Informal learning is hard to standardize, systemize and assess and is highly contextual by nature. The context of the learning environment greatly affects learning practices and choices by providing different triggers for learning. Studies illustrate that informal learning is often the result of a significant, unplanned or unexpected event (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

People learn through many different ways, often through social interaction and networks, which highlights that learning is not just an individual process but also a social and cultural one (Callanan, Cervantes, & Loomis, 2011). Informal learning is also crucially linked to the learners’ personal interest and initiative: “Informal and incidental learning take place wherever people have the need, motivation, and opportunity for learning” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 28). These conditions for learning are applicable to travelling with Interrail, as the traveler, is not accompanied by any formal
educational facilitation or structure, and learning per se is not a primary aim. However, due the nature and structure of Interrail, people usually experience learning opportunities throughout the journey. A question this research considers is how learners can become aware of their, often unconscious, learning processes in unstructured environments such as Interrail. There is an imbalance within the current practices and policies of lifelong learning with a shift too far towards formal learning (Hager & Halliday, 2009). Hence it is suggested to give the informal learning sector more attention and acknowledgement in the wider political debate and practice.

4.1.1. Traveling as Informal Learning

Throughout time, it has been proposed that travelling is educational as it broadens the mind due to different experiences, new insights and unforgettable memories (Stone & Petrick, 2013, Hansson, 2014). Research suggests that learning is not limited only to formal educational travel such as studying abroad and excursions or field trips to foreign countries, but also occurs during independent travel and vacations (Stone & Petrick, 2013). Mobility in general is considered to enhance intercultural competences and to contribute to a personal development (Kronlid, 2008). Learning dimensions within mobility experiences are crucial and traveling has been acknowledged as relevant in the form of non-formal learning (Friesenhahn, Schild, Wicke, & Balogh, 2013). Learning through mobility presents a complex area of inquiry and so far, it has often been examined with a narrow scope. Although it is considered as a potential source of transformative learning (Stone & Petrick, 2013), it must be recognised that travel experiences are not inherently transformative (Stone & Duffy, 2015). Hence, this research tries to discover whether and how transformative learning is promoted during Interrail.

As Slimbach points out in the quote below, when talking about traveling and learning it is important to acknowledge, that mobility is dramatically unevenly distributed depending on affluence, ethnicity and state regulations. Accordingly, it should be recognized that

\[\text{Global learning is never completely innocent. It is saturated with difficult power relations, endemic to cultural difference, that can’t be wished away or cancelled out by a more “ethical” brand of travel. (Slimbach, 2012, p. 72)}\]

4.2. Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship

There is a growing international recognition that the approach of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a key driver to tackle emerging global challenges (UNESCO, 2014). UNESCO emphasises that a sustainable future cannot be achieved solely by technological solutions, policy regulations or financial means but it urgently requires a shift in our lifestyles and a transformation of the way we think and act as a society. Hence, education and learning for sustainable development at all levels and in all social contexts is needed.

ESD is closely tied into the ongoing international debate on the concept of sustainable development which is commonly traced back to the Brundtland Report “Our Common Future“, which was published in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development. This was the first
Internationally recognized call for common action within “a global agenda for change” to develop long-term strategies in order to protect and enhance the environment. The report stressed the devastating impacts of human activities leading to fundamental changes on the planetary systems threatening all life upon it (WCED, 1987). This new reality of increasing exhaustion of natural resources, pollution and destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity and increasing greenhouse gas emissions with all its high-grade consequences, led to the recognition that human life and prosperity, for us and future generations, is dependent on planetary boundaries and a healthy and balanced earth system. The Brundtland report defined sustainable development as: 

_Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs._ (WCED, 1987, p. 19).

Since then, the concept of sustainable development has been widely discussed, enhanced and further developed. It has grown in scale and importance and many different notions, ideas and movements emerged around the world to promote and foster sustainability. Contemporary, conventional concepts of sustainable development contain the themes of social justice, environmental stewardship and economic growth with the aim to balance their needs (Harlow, Golub, & Allenby, 2013). Especially within the discourse of development embedded in the dominant capitalist system, there are inherent tensions between the goals of striving towards economic growth, social and environmental justice and intergenerational equity (Friman, 2002). The difficulty to address these often contradictory goals and to create the most effective and appropriate strategies and solutions, requires competencies and skills that enables the individual to question status-quo (Davies, Fidler, & Gorbis, 2011) and assumptions that are taken for granted about human nature and decision making (Harlow, Golub, & Allenby, 2013). This is taken place in the frame of progressing globalization that includes increasing complexity and uncertainty, more individualization and social diversity, expanding economy and cultural uniformity and greater vulnerability towards natural and technological hazards (UNESCO, 2017).

Education is crucial for the achievement of sustainable development. Therefore, its role is now moving beyond the development of knowledge and cognitive skills towards building of values, soft skills and attitudes for learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions (UNESCO, 2014). UNESCO defines Education for Sustainable Development as follows:

_ESD empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning, and is an integral part of quality education. ESD is holistic and transformational education which addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment. It achieves its purpose by transforming society._ (UNESCO, 2014, p. 12)

To date, ESD has been integrated into many global frameworks and conventions concerning key areas of sustainable development such as climate change, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction and sustainable consumption and production (UNESCO, 2014).

The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) from 2005 to 2014 aimed at integrating the principles and practices of sustainable development as an approach to teaching and learning. Worldwide, concrete action was undertaken on local, regional and national levels to implement ESD into educational practices in formal and non-formal learning environments. The vision put forward by the Decade of ESD is: “a world where everybody has the opportunity to benefit
from education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation” (UNESCO, 2014, p.14).

In 2013 UNESCO endorsed the Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD as the follow-up to the Decade with the aim “to generate and scale up action in all levels and areas of education and learning to accelerate progress towards sustainable development”. UNESCO reports that to date more than half of UNESCO member states integrated ESD into their national educational policies (UNESCO, 2017).

The new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 addressed to all countries, reflects the importance of ESD throughout all its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, ESD is explicitly recognized in the SDGs as part of Target 4.7 on education with a focus on Global Citizenship Education (GCED):

**Target 4.7**: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution on to sustainable development.

The Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) created a strategy for the implementation and promotion of ESD on a European level in 2005. It encourages countries to integrate ESD in all forms of their education systems, covering all levels from primary to tertiary as well as vocational and adult learning (UNECE). Barriers to the implementation of ESD in both formal and non-formal education include, amongst others, difficulties of fitting ESD into different curricula, inadequate teacher training for ESD, lack of means to organize field trips and limited resource materials on ESD (Filoh, 2010).

The multifaceted landscape of sustainability research, policy and practice suggests that there is not a truth to approach sustainability. The sustainability challenge is multifaceted and therefore, arguably, needs an open-minded, and interdisciplinary work approach in a sense to be willing to learn together and from each other. Therefore, it is even more important for the younger generation to experience diverse worldviews and different realities outside of the formal educational system to gain experiences and skills that will be helpful in their future positions as active actors in society, striving towards a more just and sustainable future. UNESCO calls education officials, policy-makers, educators, curriculum developers and others upon to rethink education in order to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs (UNESCO, 2017). To put it in the words of Ernst Friedrich Schumacher:

*The volume of education has increased and continues to increase, yet so do pollution, exhaustion of resources, and the dangers of ecological catastrophe. If still more education is to save us, it would have to be education of a different kind: an education that takes us into the depth of things.*

### 4.2.1. Global Citizenship

The notion of Global Citizenship (GCP) is widely established as part of ESD and used in academia, the educational sector and activist circles. Today, it is aimed at implementing global citizenship in the curricular within schooling systems and higher education in many countries both in the Global South and the Global North. This emphasises the growing international acknowledgement of the idea of global citizenship. However, because it is a concept with a complex history involving many different disciplines and conceptions of global identity, there is a great diversity of perspectives and
corresponding practices of global citizenship with no single or fixed definition (UNESCO, 2014). Therefore, a single rule cannot be applied in every case and the concept remains fluid and ever changing (Tully, 2014).

The notion of global citizenship as it is known today has emerged to respond to challenges and opportunities posed by globalization. Traditionally, the concept of citizenship has been closely associated with the nation state. However, there is a common understanding that global citizenship does not imply a legal status but instead refers to a way of understanding and relating oneself to a broader community with respect for diversity and pluralism (UNESCO, 2014). State boundaries have become unreliable indicators of boundaries of common interests and the new global order requires duties and responsibilities of a wider scope (Enslyn & Tjiattas, 2004). In the field of education, global citizenship is commonly understood as a sense of belonging to a common humanity, linking the local to the global, while understanding, acting and relating to others and to the environment (UNESCO, 2014). Global citizenship is closely linked, but not limited to the concept of cosmopolitanism with its roots in ancient Greek and Roman thought, which is an essential resource for democratic citizenship (Nussbaum, 1997).

The Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah refers in his article “Global Citizenship” to Diogenes who was born in the late fifth century B.C.E. and who is one of the first persons reported to have said that he was a citizen of the world. Appiah (2007) describes how Diogenes interprets the metaphor of global citizenship by pointing out three important things that remain relevant in today's interpretations: (1) We do not need a single sovereign world government or another form of global domination; but (2) we should care about the fate of all fellow human beings inside and outside our own societies; and (3) we have much to gain from conversations with one another. "It is worth listening to others because they may have something to teach us. It is worth their listening to us because they may have something to learn" (Appiah, 2007, p. 2376). Globalization had made this ancient ideal relevant as human communities have gradually been drawn together into a global network of trade and information. Our actions now affect and impact directly or indirectly the lives of distant others. Furthermore, there is an increasing belief that global issues such as poverty, environmental degradation, human rights abuses and widespread violence require a sense of global responsibility on an individual level (Dower, 2000). Through media and internet we have now the opportunity to learn and know about one another which strengthens the idea that we are fellow citizens (Appiah, 2007).

Appiah suggests that at the core of global citizenship stands the acknowledgement that every human being matters and that we have a shared obligation to care for one another and respect and tolerate diversity and other peoples’ choices and ideas of how to live (Appiah, 2007). The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum suggests that this tolerance can be enhanced through cross-cultural dialogue and inquiry, leading us to question our prejudices as we are forced to find good reason for many of our deeply held feelings. Hence, local conventions and assumptions are critically reflected and we begin to realize, that habitual ways may not be “natural” for all times and indeed can be changed. We see ourselves more clearly when we see our own ways in relation to those of others (Nussbaum, 1997). She further emphasizes something important to remember:

*The accident of where one is born is just that, an accident; any human being might have been born in any nation. Recognizing this, we should not allow differences of nationality or class or ethnic membership or even gender to erect barriers between us and our fellow human beings. We should recognize humanity* (Nussbaum, 1997, p.58).
Global Citizenship Education

Global citizenship education is concerned with equipping learners of all ages with skills, knowledge and values to “engage and assume active roles, both locally and globally, to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world” (UNESCO, 2014, p.15). It encourages people to open up to different cultures, think, act and connect more widely in different ways. As a catalyst for transformative processes, it promotes an ethos of curiosity, solidarity and shared responsibility and is build on a life long learning perspective (UNESCO, 2014). Moreover, it can be viewed as a trans-disciplinary rather than a separate discipline, that can be mainstreamed within existing education interventions and programmes of all subjects and fields. However, there is no “one size fits all” model for implementation and the focus varies depending on location and context. Throughout the past years, new and more inclusive and complex approaches to global citizenship education evolved (UNESCO, 2014). It is recognized that informal and non-formal education is particularly important to effectively implement global citizenship education (UNESCO, 2014).

Critical Reflection on Global Citizenship

There are different critiques around the concept and terminology of global citizenship and debates on whether this approach can be adopted in all societies and cultural traditions. I agree with the argument that today not everybody is able to perform and act as a global citizen or have the opportunity to acquire the needed skills and knowledge to do so because of their political and socio-economic circumstances. Bowden (2003) describes today’s global citizens as “citizens of the cosmopolitan, globalised, liberal-democratic Western world that constitutes “the centre”. It is a world which outsiders are welcome to join (or are drawn into), only so long as they measure up or are happy to conform to Western values” (Bowden, 2003, p. 355). Jooste and Heleta (2017) emphasise that global citizenship is often only promoted and practiced by those, who are able and have the means to travel and engage around the world that includes possessing a “good” passport and easy access to visas, an international credit card and health insurance etc. Secondly, they argue that global citizenship is often driven by liberal, higher educational institutions, which are not accessible to all and remain a privilege to the economic elite (Josste & Heleta, 2017). Furthermore, an arena that is essential to support and enable an active global citizen such as a democratic environment allowing freedom of speech and access to differently lived religions, opinions, values and beliefs are not at all the reality for most people in the world.

Conceptualization of Global Citizenship

In order to be able to understand and demonstrate whether and to what extend the described learning experiences and outcomes of the study group correspond with the notion of global citizenship, I adopt the definition of global citizenship by Reysen and Katzarska-Miller (2013), which states:

Global citizenship is defined as awareness, caring and embracing cultural diversity while promoting social justice and sustainability, coupled with a sense of responsibility to act (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013, p. 860).

This definition is seen as most appropriate for this study as it was developed through integrating consistent themes of different disciplinary framings and views from prior discussions of global citizenship (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013). It therefore unites commonalities of a variety of different conceptions about global citizenship in a consistent model, which is applicable to a diverse study field.
The study suggests that individuals who are highly identified as global citizens are **globally aware**, express **caring and empathy for others**, embrace **cultural diversity**, promote **social justice** and **environmentally sustainable living**, and feel a **responsibility to act** to help others (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013).

In line with the above stated definition, the study defines the related constructs as follows:

**Global awareness:** knowledge of the world and one’s interconnectedness with others.

**Intergroup empathy:** a felt connection and concern for people outside one’s ingroup.

**Valuing diversity:** an interest in and appreciation for the diverse cultures of the world.

**Social justice:** attitudes concerning human rights and equitable and fair treatment of all humans.

**Sustainability:** belief that humans and nature are connected, combined with a felt obligation to protect the natural environment.

**Responsibility to act:** acceptance of a moral duty or obligation to act for the betterment of the world. (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013)

It must be recognized that the model includes certain limitations for this study. It is not a universal measurement applicable for all cultural contexts as the development of the conceptual model used mainly data from North American undergraduate college students (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013). Hence, the applicability of the scale to pupils from other cultures, national contexts and demographics has not been tested prior. However, as global citizenship is rarely conceptually or operationally defined, this model is seen as most appropriate and the above stated limitations have been acknowledged during the data analysis.

### 4.3. Transformative Learning Theory

For the analysis and interpretation of the described learning experiences by the interview participants of this study, I applied the transformative learning theory by Jack Mezirow. This theory was found to be effective in determining and capturing the meaning making processes of adult learners, particularly the learning processes of paradigm shifts (Taylor, 2007). It further helps to allocate what the main trigger points are that facilitate or foster a perspective transformation during an Interrail experience.

There are alternative theories on transformative learning with different underlying assumptions about learning and society from scholars such as Boyd (transformative education) and Freire (social transformation) (Taylor, 1998). However, Mezirow contributed most significantly both conceptually and empirically towards transformative learning in adult education and most of other studies have been in response to or are framed by his work (Taylor, 2007). The following chapter describes the concept of transformative theory in more detail and connects it to the case of Interrail and the objective of this study.

Transformative theory significantly contributed towards the field of adult education and continues to be a popular area of research (Taylor, 2007). It offers an explanation of how adults make meaning of experiences and how meaning structures can be changed.
Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change (Mezirow, 2003, p.58).

Compared to other forms of learning, transformative learning induces great change within a learner and leads to a significant effect or impact. The aspect of transformation emphasises the idea about learning as becoming something or someone new. The theory was proposed by Jack Mezirow, who describes the model to be comprehensive, idealized and universal, grounded in the nature of human communication (Mezirow, 1994). He suggests that the way learners interpret and reinterpret experience is crucial for whether it becomes meaningful to them and hence leads to learning. The concept defines learning as

The social process of constructing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide to action. (Mezirow, 1994, p.222-3)

The theory argues that every individual has a particular worldview, which is significantly shaped and influenced by prior life experiences and sociocultural contextual factors such as culture, language, moral and spiritual beliefs (Taylor, 2007). These contextual factors constitute the general framework for everyday social interaction and predate a person’s existence (Fuss & Grosser, 2006). It is important to recognize that this research studied the learning experiences of people from 13 different nations, both with European and Non-European background, which implies a variety of very different sociocultural contexts. However, the role of culture in transformative learning processes remains poorly understood (Taylor, 2007). Research suggests that there also seems to be shared transformational characteristics that are not influenced by context such as self-confidence and self-esteem, which supports the emphasis of autonomy suggested by Mezirow’s interpretation of transformative learning (Taylor, 2007).

Transformative learning offers an explanation for change in meaning structures. These meaning structures are two-dimensional, consisting of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives and act as culturally defined frame of reference (Mezirow, 1994). Meaning schemes consist of specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments and feelings, which shape a particular interpretation. Our habits and expectations that influence a particular behaviour or view are shaped by our meaning schemes and changes are a regular and frequent occurrence (Taylor, 1998). They are specific manifestations of our meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1994). Meaning perspectives provide us with principles for interpreting and criteria for judgment or evaluating right and wrong, bad and good, beautiful and ugly, true and false, appropriate and inappropriate (Mezirow, 1994). It is often acquired uncritically in the course of childhood socialization and mirrors the way our culture and numerous congruent experiences defined us. Socio-cultural concepts, such as stereotypes, are unintentionally learned regarding what it means to be a man or a women or a member of a particular racial group. (Mezirow, 1990). However, meaning perspectives may also involve ways of understanding, using knowledge and ways of dealing with feelings about oneself (Mezirow, 1990). It helps us to shape and delimit the process of learning to make meaning and becomes more ingrained into our psyche (Mezirow, 1994). Changing them is less frequent (Taylor, 1998). In summary, our meaning schemes and perspectives profoundly influence and guide what we do or do not perceive, comprehend, and remember (Mezirow, 1990).

Our meaning structures are transformed through reflection, when an old way of thinking is no longer functional and when our beliefs are not working well for us (Mezirow, 1994). We are confronted with a disorienting dilemma, which is the starting point for transformative learning as it provides the grist
for critical reflection (Taylor, 1998). A disorienting dilemma is characterized by anxiety, dissonance or discomfort and could be a single event or a series of events that occur over a longer period (Mezirow, 1994). Reflection can be described as “a process of turning our attention to the justification of what we know, feel, believe and act upon” (Taylor, 1998, p.9). It refers to questioning and critical examining the integrity of our assumptions and beliefs that are based on prior experiences. A reflective action often involves overcoming situational, knowledge, and emotional constraints which means being aware of a contradiction among our thoughts, feelings and actions (Mezirow, 1994). Most reflection takes place within the context of problem-solving (Taylor, 2007). As we reflect on the content or process of a problem, this might enable our minds to change and our meaning schemes to transform, which is an everyday phenomena. However, if we reflect on the premise of a problem, a critical reflection on assumptions, this can lead to a transformation of our meaning perspectives – a worldview shift. Perspective transformation is a less common and more significant learning experience (Mezirow, 1994).

An important theme in transformative learning that especially promotes and develops adult development, is rational discourse. Rational discourse is the catalyst for transformation as it involves the assessment of beliefs, feelings, and values within a dialogue (Mezirow, 2003). It is used when one has reason to question the comprehensibility, truth, appropriateness or authenticity of a claim or to question the credibility of the person making the statement (Taylor, 1998). In order to participate fully and freely in such critical-dialectical discourse, it is relevant to have an open mind, to listen empathetically without premature judgement, be objective and to seek common ground (Mezirow, 2003). Mezirow defined the following ideal conditions for rational discourse: (a) have accurate and complete information; (b) be free from coercion and distorting self-deception; (c) be able to weigh evidence and assess arguments as objectively as possible; (d) be open to alternative perspectives; (e) be able to critically reflect upon presuppositions and their consequences; (f) have equal opportunity to question, refute, and reflect and to hear others do the same; and (g) be able to accept an informed, objective, and rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity (Mezirow, 1994, p. 225). Whereas these ideal conditions are never achieved in real life they are still important as norms and standards to protect participants from inequalities in discursive power. It also suggests a foundation for a political philosophy by implying that freedom, tolerance, equality, education and democratic participation are essential conditions of human communication and learning (Mezirow, 1994). Accordingly, another factor that is known to promote transformative learning is the engagement in dialogue with others. Research found that establishing relationships with others is an essential factor in a transformative experience as often this implies having questioning discussions, sharing of information openly and achieving mutual and consensual understanding (Taylor, 2007). In addition, ESD scholars have recently highlighted that transformative learning may be conceptualized as a inherently valuable personal positive freedom, and that it is important to be able to address resources therefor, and to identify various environmental, social and individual factors that may convert these resources into actual learning experiences. Here, travel might arguably be such a resource and/or conversion factor (Kronlid & Lotz-Sisitka, Transformative Learning and Individual Adaptation, 2014). However, there are no recipes or strategies that can ensure that transformative learning occurs in any context (Kroth & Cranton, 2014) but there is the opportunity to create an environment that promotes and triggers individuals to critically reflect and question their old frame of reference through the above mentioned steps, which eventually can lead, depending on the individual, to transformation.

Mezirow identified ten phases that can all lead, in variation, to perspective transformation (a more significant learning experience). They specifically refer to premise reflection of premises about oneself. The more of these phases individuals engage in, the more likely they are to experience transformative learning. The following table provides an overview of the ten phases.
Table 1 Mezirow’s 10 Phases of Perspective Transformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10 Phases of perspective transformation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A disorienting dilemma</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt and shame</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. A critical assessment of assumptions</td>
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<td>4. Relating discontent to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Planning of a course of action</td>
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<td>7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills to implement plans</td>
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<td>8. Experimenting with new roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Building self-confidence in new ways</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of one’s new perspective</td>
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In summary one can say that there are different ways of transformative learning – refining or elaborating meaning schemes, learning new meaning schemes, transforming meaning schemes, and transforming meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1994). All cases are triggered by a disorienting dilemma as the starting point and followed by a critical reflection, ideally through rational discourse and engagement in dialogue. The difference lies in the reflection: „Reflection of content and process pertain to all, reflection of premises transforms meaning perspectives, only“ (Mezirow, 1994, p.224).

Research highlights the importance of preparation for transformative experiences as learner have to be able to critically reflect and cope with disorienting dilemmas (Stone & Duffy, 2015). Studies have also shown, that individuals with less prior travel experiences are more likely to develop new perspectives and perspective change (Stone & Duffy, 2015).

There is critique that Mezirow’s theory emphasizes too strongly rational and cognitive aspects of learning and does not sufficiently capture the full sphere in which transformative learning can take place (Illeris, 2014). It is suggested that meaning making is more than a rational process as it is also supported and protected by social and emotional factors. Mezirow recognizes this by indicating, that transformative learning is a theory in progress, and mentioned the importance of emotions and social relations involved in transformative learning (Mälkki, 2010). An additional criticism has been that Mezirow focuses too strongly on individual transformation and transformation being first and foremost an individual experience. For Paulo Freire, an educational reformist from Brazil, transformation is clearly a social experience as by the very act of transformation, society is transformed (Taylor, 1998). There is now a discussion aimed to extend transformative learning toward a more holistic, integrative and comprehensive conception of learning (Mälkki, 2010).

Mezirow himself emphasizes that insofar as western culture is shaped by competitiveness, confrontation and individualism, it hinders and discourages discourse as a process of adult learning. He further notes that race, gender and class often determine whether one can actively participate in discourse or not (Mezirow, 1994). He points out that in order for a person to become aware to challenge dominant ideologies highly depends on the ability to critically reflect on existing assumptions which in turn necessitates the participation in discourse. This can be understood as a vicious circle for disadvantaged people who are not able to fully experience transformative learning in our society.
By challenging predominant ideologies and systems, a perspective transformation can result in political and social action which then can lead to system change – a system change we, arguably, urgently need in order to tackle the complex challenges in our fast changing world. Hence, one has to keep in mind that from an educational point of view, our current system is not inclusive for everyone to be able to fully experience transformative learning and hence, contribute to change. Most importantly is the recognition that lasting transformation can only be enabled with ongoing institutional support and guidance on how to act in practice with this new understanding (Taylor, 2007).

4.4. The Theoretical Framework Overview

By operationalizing a theoretical framework based on the theories of informal learning, transformative learning and the presented global citizenship definition by Reysen and Katzarska-Miller (2013), I will contextualize this with the phenomenon of Interrail in order to determine and describe the learning experiences of the study group. The term learning experience in this study refers to any interaction, encounter or other experience that where described by the interview participants in which learning took place.

The interview results are analyzed according to this framework. What where the described learning experiences and outcomes? To what extent does Interrail provide an environment to stimulate and foster transformative learning? Did the interview participants state that they changed some views and perceptions towards the notion of global citizenship?

![Theoretical Framework](image)

Fig. 3 Theoretical Framework

5. Study Design

The following section provides a detailed overview of the study design of this research. It introduces and describes thoroughly the applied methodologies and the different steps that have been undertaken throughout the research process; from preparing and collecting data, to the final stages of analysing and interpreting the results. This shall provide transparency to the reader as well as clarity and a better understanding of the research design and approach.

I am starting with a short description of my stances in the role as a researcher in the context of this study towards the field of knowledge production. While this research addresses, amongst other, power relations and issues of inequality especially in the context of education, I acknowledge the fact that the
academic and educational system and environment I am part of, is mainly shaped by language, traditions, positions and processes that were once imposed by European-centred countries to ensure domination in the field. As a German student, enrolled at Uppsala University in Sweden, and with relatively vast travel experiences within European and non-European regions, I am aware of my privileged position. It is therefore important for me to emphasise that within this research, I can only be able to look at the concept of global citizenship from a Western point of view, which shapes my interpretation and analysis of the data.

The objective of this research is to provide a detailed and holistic understanding about

1. How and what kind of different transformative learning processes were experienced by the study group during their Interrail travel and
2. How and in what way these learning experiences transformed the travellers’ perceptions, values and worldviews with regards to the global citizenship concept

Therefore, a qualitative study approach was applied as it provides a methodology to understand and interpret social interactions with an in-depth description of human lived experiences (Lichtman, 2010). Qualitative research methodology is commonly used in research that aims to explore and understand the way people construct meaning of their experiences, interpretations and perceptions (Lichtman, 2010). As educational research is a truly interdisciplinary field that involves various disciplines such as education, psychology, and sociology, a diverse range of research designs can be applied.

This study however examines the specific travel phenomenon Interrail and therefore applies a case study research strategy. Yin defines case study as an empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1989, p. 23). As I am specifically interested in learning experiences and learning outcomes that an Interrail journey brings about, the data was collected after the event and the case is therefore studied in its historical integrity. Yin further emphasises the great ability for case study research to consider and investigate the wider context of the researched phenomenon, which is of high importance to this study, too. Interrail as a travel phenomenon is defined by a variety of aspects and characteristics that makes it a unique and complex case.

Yin proposes that for case study research, the researcher should have a firm grasp of the issue being studied and to understand the theoretical issues around it. He emphasises this, as the investigator must be able to interpret the collected information to make immediate decisions on whether more information needs to be gathered for clarity (Yin, 1989). Due to my personal experiences of travelling by train with Interrail and working with international youth exchanges and the application of both theory and praxis of intercultural competencies, I consider myself as confident in analysing and interpreting the case study of Interrail. Additionally, I gained profound knowledge and experiences in the field of ESD and global citizenship during my internship with the Swedish International Centre of Education for Sustainable Development and the participation in the global citizenship forum in April 2016, organized by Uppsala University.

5.1. Data collection

In order to ensure validity of the research outcomes, multiple sources of evidence form the sole basis for this study. However, the conducted interviews form the main source for data extraction and analysis. Hence, there are admitted limitations in the variety of data sources, however, the nature of the research questions and the data itself allow both an in-depth and a holistic view on the learning experiences of the study participants and Interrail as a learning environment. Fully realizing that this
case study is not generalizable to populations, it provides the opportunity for an analytic generalization, which allows generalise the case to other circumstances and situations (Wikfeldt, 2017). In doing so, the results of this case study are compared the previously developed theories of transformative learning and global citizenship.

\[By \text{ analytic generalization is meant the extraction of a more abstract level of ideas from a set}\]
\[\text{of case study findings – ideas that nevertheless can pertain to newer situations other than the}\]
\[\text{case(s) in the original case study. (Yin, 2013)}\]

However, it is important to recognize that claims being made when generalizing from cases, are not considered as “proof” in a statistical sense but rather as a tool to make assertions about similar situations to the one studied (Wikfeldt, 2017). Following this, the case study strives to extract a set of abstract ideas concerning learning while travelling with Interral and sustainable development, with the ambition that these ideas may pertain to situations other than the case study within this realm of activity. Furthermore, it attempts that these ideas may also inform the broader theories of transformative learning and global citizenship within the context of ESD-research.

5.1.1. Documentation

Documents play an explicit role in data collection for case studies (Yin, 1989). In order to gain a more comprehensive view and evidence from a variety of sources, information about Interral was reviewed and retrieved from online travel blogs, news articles, online media channels such as Facebook and various websites from politicians and organisations that support and not support the idea of a free Interral ticket.

5.1.2. In-depth semi-structured Interviews

In order to gain substantial insights and in-depth information about individual learning experiences, I chose the method of interviewing. It is an appropriate approach for studying complex and sensitive areas and to obtain detailed information for data collection (Kumar, 2005). Semi-structured interview tends to be the most common form of interview used in qualitative research within the field of educational research (Palaiologou, Needham, & Male, 2016). An interview schedule, that consisted of a set of questions served as an indicative guide. These guiding questions aimed at the overall topics that I wished to cover, namely to discover learning experiences, changes in perceptions, encounters and overall information about the Interral trip of the informant. The interview questions were open-ended, which means that possible responses were not given and the respondents could express themselves freely. The questions were carefully formulated with a simple and everyday language. The order of the questions led the respondents gradually into the topic, starting with more simple questions that aimed at helping the interviewees to think themselves back into the situation of their Interral journey. Beforehand of each interview, I explained the objectives of my study and introduced the idea of the free Interral ticket, which most of the interviewees did not know about. I also explained the measures taken to protect confidentiality and anonymity and asked for permission to record the interview. I tried to ask the questions in a general and nondirective manner to not force the informant in any one direction. At the end of each interview, the participant was encouraged to raise any further issue beyond the asked questions that was perceived as important or relevant for the interviewee to add.

The interview schedule is listed in Appendix 1. All interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were held in the period of February and the beginning of April 2017. A total of 18 interviews were
conducted of which seven were held in person and ten via Skype. One informant from New Zealand, who has a disability in hearing, answered in written form to the open-ended questions.

The participants were coming from 13 different nations both within and outside of Europe. The informants represented Australia, Bolivia, Germany, Guatemala, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, UK and Turkey. The group consisted of 9 females and 9 males with an average age of 26, whereby the youngest informant was 20 and the oldest 37 years old. All participants went on an Interrail trip between 2005 and 2017 with a travel duration varying from 2 weeks to 2 months. This allowed to draw conclusions about how travelling with Interrail possibly changed over time. The participants were recruited through different channels such as personal contact, the “snowball effect” and through the web. I announced a call on the social media platform Facebook in several travel groups where I received great response. All interviewees volunteered to be interviewed and to talk about their Interrail experiences, which indicates a general willingness and openness towards the topic and the questions. The following table provides an overview about statistics and information of the study group and their Interrail journey(s). The names of the interview participants are pseudonyms, which they were asked to choose themselves.

Table 2 Statistics Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Interrail/ Eurail trip</th>
<th>Int. Year(s)</th>
<th>Alone/Group</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambar</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>17 2005</td>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberto</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>19 2010</td>
<td>Group of 3</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audun</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>23, 29 2009, 2015</td>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>1 month 2 weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DJ Wan</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>23 2012</td>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>19 2011</td>
<td>Group of 5</td>
<td>22 days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>18 2012</td>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magda</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>21 2001, 33, 35, 36 2013, 2015, 2016</td>
<td>Group of 2</td>
<td>1 month 1 month 21 days 19 days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andre</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>24 2016</td>
<td>Group of 2</td>
<td>2 weeks (one country pass)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikki</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>20 2013</td>
<td>Group of 2</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ester</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>20 2005</td>
<td>Group of 4</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilary</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>25 2016</td>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>22 2016</td>
<td>Group of 2</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pia</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>17 2007</td>
<td>Group of 2</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>24 2013</td>
<td>Group of 2</td>
<td>22 days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>20 2015</td>
<td>Group of 3</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>20 2016</td>
<td>Group of 2</td>
<td>2 months 1 month</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guille</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>18 2002</td>
<td>Group of 2</td>
<td>2 weeks 15 days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2. Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis is considered as the least understood and most complex of all aspects of conducting qualitative research (Lichtman, 2010). Especially within case study evaluation, validity and generalization continue to be challenging aspects (Yin, 2013). Within this research, the analysis of the data was an ongoing process. It entailed constant reading and a systematic reflection on the text and voice material and other sources such as news, informal conversations and articles concerning the topic of travelling with Interrail and the discussion about the implementation of a free Interrail ticket. Throughout the analysing process, I tried to always be critical towards information and to go beyond what has been said. This section explains the different steps of the data analysis in more detail. The final part engages with limitations that have been acknowledged throughout the process.

5.2.1. Interviews

As a first step, the recorded interviews were each transcribed in order to be able to analyse the spoken language. Transcribing interviews is part of the methodology in qualitative research that aims to unpack and describe meanings of naturally occurring phenomena such as values, feelings, thoughts and experiences in social encounters (Widado, 2014). It can be described as the act of representing original spoken text in written discourse as well as analysing and interpreting these data (Widado, 2014). The process of transcribing enables the researcher to carefully listen and thus to analyse emerging themes and unexpected phenomena that should be further examined. I followed an attentive listening approach that involves the following steps: warm-up listening, follow-up listening, close listening, repeated and selective listening and analytical listening (Widado, 2014). These steps allow to make an informed decision on what to transcribe, to see and retrieve emerging data as well as to conduct an in-depth analysis and interpretation.

The transcribed data was examined using a mixed approach of both deductive and inductive analysis. In a first step, using the inductive approach, a thematic analysis was used. This is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting emerging themes or patterns within data. The process was conducted on a latent level that goes beyond the semantic content of the data and seeks to identify ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Main themes were identified from the given responses without any predefined categories and an unprejudiced and open mind. These main themes reflected meanings around the broad fields of learning, meaning making, perspective transformation as well as other discoveries that were considered as fruitful for answering the research questions. This creative and iterative process gives room for discovering new ideas and relations among categories and properties (Lichtman, 2010). Consequently, broad themes that reflect these meanings were developed. In doing so, the wording of these themes was thoroughly selected to ensure the accurately representation of the meaning of the categories under a theme. These themes were critically assessed, checked against each other, and contextualized in order to ensure internal coherence, consistence and distinctiveness.
Within the second step a content analysis was carried out, that represents a deductive process. Different codes in the form of numbers were assigned to each key theme and subcategory that where identified within the previously described process. Hence, the frequency of each theme could be determined. Furthermore, I drew on the theory of transformative learning and the concept of global citizenship in order to analyse whether and in what form transformative learning took place and if and in what way the identified learning processes are connected with the concept of global citizenship. In doing so, I identified phrases and sentences of the transcripts that corresponded to Mezirows 10 phases of transformative learning and other aspects that indicate or foster transformative learning, such as engagement in dialogue. I especially looked into descriptions that indicated change and transformation. Following that, I compared the identified learning outcomes to the previous selected definition and terms for global citizenship, which allowed examining possible connection and interrelations.

5.2.2. Documentation

Before considering documentation sources for data analysis, the authenticity, credibility and representativeness were assessed. The documentary analysis helped to better understand and examine different opinions and complex elements of the case and their relationships. This in turn strengthens the internal validity and explains causal links of the phenomenon Interrail and the proposal for a free Interrail ticket.

5.3. Limitations

This case study holds several limitations in terms of data collection and analysis. Interview as a research method is complex and more prone to bias introduced by the human interaction. The researcher has to determine whether the interview reveals the truth or whether it reflects more the dynamics and contingencies of the interview situation (Alvesson, 2011). One of the recognized limiting factors of this study is the challenge for some of the interview participants to recall accurately memory and feelings from experiences of their Interrail journey, that took place some years ago. This also includes a difficulty to distinguish and pinpoint learning outcomes and changes specifically to Interrail, as assumingly other transformative experiences took place after. Another limitation to consider is the challenge for some of the interviewees to verbally and adequately describe and articulate reflective moments and experiences in a language other than their mother tongue. Whenever I felt that a description was not clear, I confirmed my interpretation with the interviewee. Some interviews have been conducted via skype where in few cases a bad internet-connection caused a disruption of the conversation flow. Furthermore, the study group does not represent voices from Eastern Europe, as I did not succeed in recruiting people from this region. The views and experiences of the study group are not regarded as representative but shall provide some insights about the significance and impacts of the interrail trip. However, by applying an analytical generalization, I aim to refer the study outcomes to other concrete situations and already existing theories and literature, in order to identify overlaps and gaps.

6. Findings

This chapter presents the results of the study in a descriptive way, highlighted with quotes from the interviews. It is divided into two sections. The first section presents how Interrail is characterized as a learning environment. The findings were mainly drawn from the interviews, additional information was used from documentation sources about Interrail. The second section provides the identified
trends and patterns of learning experiences stated by the participants. It further analyses whether or not and to what extent these learning experiences were transformative and how it corresponds with the notion of global citizenship. Referring to the participant group or individuals of the group that were interviewed for this research, I use the term(s) “participant(s)” and “interviewee(s)” within this section.

6.1. Interrail as a learning environment

The following section provides a description of characteristics and elements that have been indicated as typical for an Interrail trip by the interview participants. Additional information drawn from the Interrail website and other official documents and media sources complement this section. These findings help to envision the typical and very unique environment of Interrail and clarifies the described and analysed learning experiences in the second part of this chapter more understandable in terms of where, how and under what circumstances they may have taken place.

Interrail is not a mere linear transport from A to B. It is not only a medium of transportation for the Interrail traveller to get from one geographical place to another, but rather it is a major part of the travel itself. As one of the interview participants phrased it:

(...) there is not really a destination when you go with Interrail because the travel is the destination. (Magda)

For the majority of the research participants, Interrail was the first big and independent travel experience as a young adult which brought about a strong feeling of freedom and adventure. Interrail is a very unique way of travelling compared to other more traditional ways of spending holidays. It allows to experience the diversity and unity of Europe with all it facets. A participant from Germany explained:

I believe that the European idea is perceived and appreciated in a complete different way if you experience it yourself instead of spending your holidays every year at the beach in Spain for example and not really be exposed to a lot of different environments. You get much more in contact if you travel in a different way then doing an all-inclusive holiday package. (Pia)

The specific mode of travelling by train from place to place implies a different perception of time and space in the context of mobility. Some participants stated that travelling by train allowed an appreciation for the distances being travelled. It also allowed a different perspective on the country being travelled and the characterising landscapes that shape it. Observing the transformations of the land formations from the train window allowed the participants to appreciate things that would otherwise be missed.

I remember travelling from Budapest to Slovenia and just driving through the most stunning images you wouldn’t be able to see from a motor way or from the air even. Just like mountains and lakes and that’s just blew it away. Beautiful. (Tara)

A majority of the participants perceived this mode of travelling less stressful compared to travelling by plane as it is comfortable and one can stand up and walk around. Interview participants described Interrail as a fast way to see as many places as possible in a short amount of time. Having the opportunity to design your own individual trip by making independent decisions and choices, sometimes quite spontaneously during the trip, was described as something valuable for most of the
participants. The flexibility and freedom of Interrail was mentioned as a great advantage by all of the participants.

> And I think the freedom of being able to choose lets got to this country, and lets go here today and I will stay here for one more day and then we'll go to the next country. That kind of freedom, you wouldn’t get to experience that really in a different context. (Tara)

It was mentioned that these spontaneous and impulsive feelings are more available on the train compared to being on a plane, as you can jump off at places that seem interesting and worth to discover. Interrail was often described as an individualistic way of travelling:

> What I really liked about the Interrail was that we tried to find places what were not so typical. We visited random, abandoned buildings that had graffiti that we really liked. Those are the things that I mostly remember of the Interrail. (Alberto)

Another point that was frequently addressed was the planning aspect. Starting with preparing the Interrail trip such as choosing different travel destinations, looking up train connections and pre-booking hostels for the first night or two, have been mentioned. These tasks of organizing food and shelter, figuring out train connections and places to visit in a limited amount of time, continue throughout the trip. These situations seemed to entail many learning aspects that also helped to develop cognitive skills.

> I had to prepare all the travel by myself. I don’t think it was difficult, it was kind of interesting. Because you have a lot of places you want to go and you have to choose where you are going to go and you have to take decisions. (Alberto)

> You got to learn to be organized. Trains don’t wait for anyone. (Fred)

Interrail cannot be looked upon as an isolated travel practice, but unfolds in everyday spaces that include regular commuters, travellers, tourists and locals. Different encounters, the development of friendships and relationships with other people from different countries during the Interrail trip, were mentioned as a very significant aspect by most of the interviewees.

> That was basically the best part about the whole trip, just meeting people from everywhere around the world. (Nikki)

These encounters and developed relationships however, were experienced very differently in depth and scope. Some reported about short and unique encounters, which marked an impression and memory but no lasting relationship or contact developed. Others developed transnational friendships, where contact was being kept over years until the present day. Linnea from Sweden for example, talked about an encounter with an American guy with whom she talked a lot during the Interrail trip. He convinced her to realize an idea, which she had in mind for a long time but of which she was not sure about - to do a voluntary service in Thailand. They stayed in touch via email until the present day. For her, this encounter had a lasting impact on her future decisions and ultimately her path in life.

Still others talked about encounters with people whom, they say, would have never talked to in a different setting. It was also reported of some participants that they met other Interrail travellers over again in different countries and places along the route.
I remember we met two guys in Greece and a few days later we met again in another country. And before doing the Interrail I met them buying the Interrail ticket. So we met along the way over again. I guess that doesn’t happen if you go by car. (Guille)

The people who travelled in a group seemed not to get as much in closer contact with other people during the trip than those who travelled by themselves. Alberto, who travelled in a group of three stated:

I mean we met people but it wasn’t really like connective relationships. Maybe it was because the trip was short, only two weeks. And we were in a group so we were most of the time together.

Most of the participants did not get in close contact with local people. This was explained due to the fact that the travellers only spent a short amount of time in each place. It was more likely to engage with the local community for people who travelled by themselves compared to people who travelled in a group. Mostly, people got in touch with other travellers in hostels and on the train.

Because we stayed at hostels along the way, it was kind of difficult. We were kind of tourists almost. In lake Blade there were a lot of Irish and UK people for example. That was kind of annoying that you kind of don’t get to interact with locals as much as you would on like Erasmus or if you went somewhere for a month. You are only in these places for like three days so its kind of difficult. (Nicole)

A majority of the participants was travelling during their Interrail trip on a small budget. Therefore, many of the participants stayed in hostels, on a camping site or used the opportunity of the Interrail ticket to sleep on night trains.

It was a good way to see a lot and you can actually sleep on the trains so you can save money in that way and still get around. Its really a budget travelling if you want to. (Magda)

A participant from Germany stated that she reflected on the situation during her interrail trip, living on a very tight budget of around 5€ per day. She had to organize food and a place to stay every day. She compared this situation to living at home, where at the time she lived with her mother and where there was always food on the table or money available to go grocery shopping. Something she learned was to realize, that she is able to confine herself to a minimum but still be able to enjoy the time. Depending on the average living expenses in their home country, participants perceived Interrail differently in terms of costs. For example, a participant from Ireland stated:

I come from Ireland so a price of beer here is like 6€ for half a litre which is crazy expensive. So you obviously have prices in your mind that wouldn’t actually relate to like Prague for example where half a litre of beer was like 1€. (Nicole)

And regarding prices for travelling by train a participant from Sweden stated:

I mean I think it depends on where you are from. But in Sweden I think all the train tickets are very expensive. So when you have this pass and you have to pay like maybe 15€ for a reserved seat and you are going from Spain to France, I don’t think that is a big expense. (Nikki)

During the interviews with the participants it emerged, that travelling with Interrail changed over time because of the increasing availability and access to the internet and the widespread use of smartphones. Participants reported that travelling with Interrail 5 to 10 years ago included walking around a lot in order to find free hostels or camping sites to spend the night. There was no GPS or
navigation, so often a hard copy of a city map had to be organized or people on the street had to be asked for directions.

_We also had to write down the address of the hostel so when we arrived at the cities, we had to buy a map everywhere. And now you have GPS. We had to walk a lot to find the hostels. I know if I do it now, I can look for it in my phone and I could go there straight._ (Guille)

Today, a hostel can be booked on the road via smartphone and movies can be watched on long distance trains. The Interrail application that is available to download for free and which is working on offline modus as well, makes the travel now way easier. Before, there used to be a handbook with the timetables of train arrivals and departures. Some participants talked about the use of online platforms such as “Couchsurfing”, that provides free accommodation with a local person. One participant stated that due to these changes, traveling with Interrail today would probably look way different for him:

_I took the plane to Amsterdam but I know that if there was the opportunity to take a Blabla car and do couchsurfing, I think it would have changed my trip. Just because it was cheaper. Maybe instead of staying two weeks I would have stayed a month._ (Alberto)

Many of the participants stated as a somewhat negative impression the extra fees for seat reservations, which are mandatory to pay in some countries and of which many were not aware before going on the trip.

**Summary**

The main points of the above presented results, which describe the characteristics of Interrail as an informal learning environment, can be summarized as follows: while travelling with Interrail, the actual train travel experience and the time spent on the train were perceived as key elements of the journey. The study group described Interrail as an independent, individual and unique experience that implies great flexibility, spontaneity and feelings of freedom and adventure. For most of the participants it was the first independent, long-term travel without their parents or other legal guardians. Some of the interviewees travelled alone, and some travelled in a group of friends. It was mostly described as a “low-budget” travel that implied camping and hostels as the most common choice to spend the night. However, depending on the available budget, economic background and average living standard of the participants’ home country, the expenses for Interrail were viewed very differently. For some it was perceived as costly, others perceived it as a comparatively cheap way to travel. Most of the participants stated that they usually spent only a short period of time at one place. Furthermore, the Interrail trip entailed often challenging and unknown situations that put the travellers out of their comfort zone. During their journey, the majority of participants experienced a variety of encounters and contacts with foreign people from various cultural backgrounds, however the intensity and lasting of these encounters varied in each case from short meetings and exchange to long-lasting friendships. The travel experience with Interrail seemingly changed over time due to increasing access to internet and smartphone use. According to the study results, this had especially an impact on the way of travelling, planning and organising accommodation and train connections.

### 6.2. Learning Experiences

The following section introduces learning experiences and outcomes that were identified as patterns and commonalities from the interview transcriptions by using a mixed approach of deductive and inductive analysis. While applying a thematic analysis, the following six key themes, that are partly divided in subcategories, developed: Personal Development, Critical Thinking and Reflection,
Cultural Sensitivity and Pluralism, Shaping Identity and Sense of Belonging, Broadening View and Change of Behaviour and Action. Table number 3 provides an overview of the key themes and subcategories. Following, identified learning processes and outcomes are presented and described in more detail. A summary closes this section.

Table 3 Study Results Learning Experiences and Outcomes during Interrail

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Experiences and Outcomes during Interrail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in talking to foreign people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soft Skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning/organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing unknown situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling on a budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Thinking and Reflection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-reflection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of own citizenship and its implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection on own culture &amp; country</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural &amp; societal norms, habits, laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic situation/issues (youth unemploy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wealth, lifestyle, infrastructure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection on Europe &amp; EU</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU more relatable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation of border free traveling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse and cultural rich Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current issues EU is facing (financial crisis,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refugees, inequalities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection on previous knowledge</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal hobby or interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Sensitivity and Pluralism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation of cultural similarities and differ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange of cultures and views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcing or dismissing of presumptions about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other cultures and people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of different realities and perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of different cultural norms and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shaping Identity and Sense of Belonging</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling connected with a broader community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Broadening View</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldly perspective &quot;Bigger picture&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change of Behaviour or Action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanderlust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lasting effects/ impacts on future decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of behaviour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the study group was reflecting on Europe and the EU, especially on aspects such as the border-free movement across the countries, the diversity of the continent and a perceived change towards Europe being more relatable after the Interrail journey. Different aspects that fall under the main theme “cultural sensitivity and pluralism” were stated very frequently as well. This was followed by a reflection on the own culture and country and personal development. The three dimensions under personal development were mentioned equally strong. Less frequently stated were aspects that fall under the main themes of “shaping identity and sense of belonging” and “taking action”.

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**Personal Development**

One of the main themes that emerged as a learning outcome from the interviews is “personal development”. It is divided into the following three subcategories: “self-development”, “soft-skills” and “social-skills”. For many of the participants, Interrail was the first big, independent travel experience in their lives, going on an adventurous trip without their parents or another authority. Some of the participants did not have any prior train travel experiences. They travelled either in groups or alone, and were put in a situation where they had to plan their daily activities, organize themselves, communicate with people who often do not speak the same language, and try to understand and interpret different cultures and societal norms they were exposed to and engaged with. In short, the participants were put out of their comfort zone, which often led to personal growth and development.

*I think I grew in that trip. It wasn’t the first time that I travelled alone but it was the first time that I had to manage myself in a different country with people that didn’t speak Spanish sometimes not even English. (Alberto)*

*There is a necessity to grow when you are in a situation where you don’t know where you will sleep say that night or the night after. It definitely teaches you a lot. (Tara)*

A majority of the participants talked about gaining greater self-confidence, self-esteem and a feeling of empowerment during and after the Interrail trip. Many stated how proud and impressed they felt about themselves, as they had to face and manage sometimes very difficult and unknown situations. Due to the various encounters and social interactions with people from different countries and background during the journey, they got more comfortable in talking English to foreign people (for those whose mother tongue is not English) and in establishing relationships with foreign people from different countries. Many talked about an improvement of their communication and language skills. Osvaldo from Turkey, who had never travelled alone outside of Turkey before, said:

*Before the Interrail trip I didn’t like to meet other people or foreigners, people I don’t know. But travelling with Interrail I met a lot of people and I practiced my English. And I made a lot of friends (...). Before I didn’t like to speak to foreigners but now I can talk. Before I couldn’t start a conversation but now I can start a conversation. (Osvaldo)*

Some participants stated that they learned to be prepared for unknown and difficult situations and to keep a cool head and stay patient. As many of the participants travelled in a group, they talked about gaining interpersonal and social skills from their experiences with the group. Travelling within a group during Interrail, often entailed intense situations, spending a lot of time together, sometimes in small spaces with very limited privacy. Sebastian, who went on Interrail together with one friend stated:

*I mean if you travel with Interrail its kind of intense if you travel with somebody else. Or in general if you travel with somebody else for a period of two, three, four weeks, you are sharing your private space quite a lot. (...) you share a lot of emotions, feelings, insights, experiences with the other person that you travel with. And different conflicts arise and also opportunities while you are there. So you learn about each other in that way. You also learn so much about yourself when you travel in this kind of setting. How you behave in different situations of stress and how others behave and how this can cause conflict. (Leo)*

**Critical Thinking and Reflection**

A second main theme that emerged from the data analysis is called “critical thinking and reflection.” It summarizes the described reflective processes that were experienced during the Interrail trip by the
participants. These experiences were assigned to the developed subcategories of “self-reflection”, “reflection on own culture & country”, “reflection on Europe and the EU” and “reflection on previous knowledge or experiences”.

Some of the participants explained how certain situations during the Interrail trip made them reflect on their own citizenship, social background and the implications that come along with it. A participant from Ireland for example talked about an incident she and her sister experienced during their Interrail trip. A group of people of color who were UK citizens, got stopped in the train by the border police in Hungary. In her eyes, this clearly was a racial act:

"Me and my sister we didn’t get stopped at all. For me it was free I could travel to Hungary without any problems, nobody stopped me it was kind of nice to be able to travel like this. It made me think that I am kind of lucky that I am from where I am from. And obviously its because of like refugees coming into Europe and all this, but it wasn’t fair in the end because they were actually from the UK anyway. (Nicole)"

She added that she never thought about this aspect before. This incident made Nicole critically reflect on her Irish citizenship, a self-examination, that she described as a growing awareness of the assets that her passport entails. She also described how this caused a feeling of privilege in her. Many of the participants stated how they were reflecting on their own culture and societal norms throughout their travel. These reflections implied cultural and societal norms and habits but also socio-economic situations and current issues such as youth unemployment, the perception of crime and caution, lifestyle or the development of infrastructure. Participants from non-European countries such as Australia, Guatemala and Bolivia especially emphasised how they appreciated the well-developed train system in Europe, which is not available in their home countries or continents. A participant from Guatemala stated:

"I am from Guatemala. We don’t have that kind of public transport, we don’t have trains for example or metro. So in a sense I was jealous. We went to several countries in Europe and they all had metros and trains. So yeah, I wished we had this kind of stuff back home. (Andre)"

Several interviewees talked about how the Interrail trip made them reflect on their own culture and societal norms and habits which they are used to and grew up with. Being exposed to and engaged with other cultures, they started to compare and become more aware of what previously was taken for granted or perceived as a given. One participant from Malaysia stated how he, when he got back to Malaysia, noticed in his culture less interaction and a lack of help and communication in everyday life situations.

"Things get a lot more clear when you have experienced something different from what you used to. Now its difficult for me to say if I ever noticed such lack of communication in my culture prior to my travels but I definitely do notice it now. (DJ Wan)"

The lived experience of visiting other European countries made some of the participants aware of the contrasts and existing socio-economic gaps and inequalities between regions, countries and even within cities and they started to reflect on different issues related to this. Many of the participants had been confronted by disorienting dilemmas during their Interrail trip. For some of the participants for example, seeing people living on a lower standard of living and realizing that some people have less opportunity, is something they had not imagined possible at home. The Interrail journey exposed the participants to other existing realities. This in turn made many of the participants reflect on their own
lifestyle and standard of living - their own reality. Nicole explained how visiting the Eastern European region made her reflect as follows:

_I had to think about countries like Slovenia or Hungary or Czech Republic. Like I come from Ireland obviously we are fairly rich, we are quite a modern country and people have jobs as in money and fancy cars and this kind of stuff. But then you go to Hungary for example and people are still kind of poor (...) How like easy it is to go for University here versus somebody in Hungary for example. I suppose I kind of take my Irish easy life for granted I suppose._ (Nicole)

Magda from Sweden stated:

_You get an understanding how good you have it in Sweden and not everybody has it like that. And if you only see Sweden you don’t really know._ (Magda)

A participant from Italy reflected on the situation for young people in her country who are exposed to high unemployment rates, which pushes many to leave the country to find employment elsewhere. Due to her experiences in Berlin, she felt that compared to Italy, youth receive more chances, opportunities and support from the state. She stated:

_I feel that in Berlin for young people the life was so easy. I mean everything was like measured and build for young people. Here in Italy I think at the moment we feel like we are not welcome here because everything is so difficult for us. I mean to find a job, to start your life alone. And no one is helping you. I mean you have to do it on your own or you have a family that helps you. (...) Maybe that’s why people are going away from Italy. In other cities of Europe the state is giving something more to young people, more possibilities, more chances to build up your life. And that’s what I liked about Berlin in particular._ (Iris)

A majority of the research participants experienced a **reflective situation** about certain aspects or current issues concerning Europe and/or the European Union. This involved in many cases a growing awareness and appreciation of the free movement without border-controls and a common use of the Euro currency in many countries. It was also reflected on Europe as a small but very diverse continent, which is well accessible and easy to travel. Especially the variety of cultures, customs and languages on a relatively small space was emphasized and acknowledged repeatedly during the interviews.

_**I suppose it kind of made me think that if you compare the size of Europe with the size of America or Africa, for such a small continent, for such a small place it got a lot diversity. I went from Ireland to Hungary for example and they are completely different countries, completely different customs (...) Its crazy like Ireland and Hungary are probably like 3000 km away from each other and they are completely different countries (...) It just made me think that so many small countries with so many different cultures and customs and food and drinks and everything exist._ (Nicole)

_Travelling around Europe makes your awareness grow about where you live and the possibilities you have living in Europe._ (Iris)

The travel experience in the train, crossing borders and entering many different countries led for some of the participants to a reflection about the current situation of refugees in Europe. One participant stated that during the Interrail travel she had to think about the journey of people who are seeking refuge in Europe. Another participant talked about a conversation she had in the train with migrants coming from war regions, living now in Sweden and who were on the way to visit relatives in
Germany. In her opinion, she would have otherwise never had the opportunity to experience this kind of conversations.

Linnea connected her experiences as a traveller being a foreigner in another country, to the wider context of contemporary debates and decision-making in migration politics. She stated that the experience of being and feeling as a migrant herself, is helping to better relate and understand. 

*Especially if we are suppose to make decisions on who is suppose to come into our country like immigrants. If you hadn’t had the experience in living in another country and being in such a vulnerable position but you still suppose to have an opinion about that or actually just have an opinion about anything… its super helpful.* (Ester)

Gabriel from Australia states how his experiences during Interrail helped him to better understand and comprehend different views, opinions and actions being taken within the EU and that are portrait within the news.

*I am able to see the different sides in opinions and actions within European situations.* (Bob)

The appreciation of the lived experiences during the Interrail trip was frequently repeated by almost all of the interview participants. It helped to feel more connected and to relate to prior unknown places and Europe as a whole. It also helped to develop and form own opinions and views.

*One thing of being from Ireland is that like obviously we are part of the EU but it still kind of feels say separately from continental Europe so there is still this slight separation from the experiences and cultures that you find on the continent. (...) I think in Ireland we live in our own little bubble sometimes. So definitely going on the trip make things more relatable.* (Tara)

*It changed a lot when I got back because you got your own perception instead of this whole imaginary picture of Europe.* (Nikki)

Some of the participants described how in certain situations they referred back to previous knowledge, which they acquired at school or university, or to their personal interest or hobby.

Before going on the Interrail trip, Linnea from Sweden worked on a project in her high school about opinions on the EU in Sweden, Germany and Denmark. Therefore they travelled to these countries and interviewed politicians, business owners and regular people. She mentioned that her personal opinion got shaped based on the outcomes of the interviews and study results. These opinions were mainly negative towards the Euro because of losses and increasing expanses with its introduction as a currency. However, by travelling around Europe she experienced the convenience to not having to change currency all the time, which she perceived as something positive. She explained:

*When we travelled around we saw it from our point of view, which wasn’t very political. It was just very individual like for us its good to just have the same currency in all these countries basically.* (Ester)

Alberto from Spain is studying Architecture and he explained his interest in architecture shaped the way he was looking at cities and how he explored them.

*Well since I am studying architecture (...) we stopped a lot to see some things. I don’t know for me it was also interesting the architectural view on the cities. Like to try to find the typical monuments and also to go inside some places that we like and see what some cities are known for and try to go there.* (Alberto)

He further explained how he discovered and learned about architecture and buildings from more recent history in different countries of which he did not know about. This broadened his view on architecture
and made him want to explore and see more. Nicole from Ireland is studying German and is interested in languages. During her Interrail trip she learned how there are other languages in Europe that are disappearing and how this is similar to Galic, the Irish language. She stated how she reflected on similarities between countries although having different histories and backgrounds. Few of the participants had a great awareness about climate change due to their studies and personal interests. Interestingly, these were the only participants that acknowledged Interrail as an environmental and carbon-low mode of traveling. They stated environmental awareness as their main motivation to travel by train. The other participants did not reflect on that at all.

*Through my studies I increased my awareness about environmental impacts and environmental concerns in modern days society. And I felt that I could at least minimize my environmental impact by travelling as environmental friendly as possible.* (Leo)

**Cultural Sensitivity and Pluralism**

The third main theme that developed from the study results is called “cultural sensitivity and pluralism”. The Interrail trip entailed for most of the participants exposures, encounters and experiences in some way or another with cultures, norms and habits, other than what they were used to or familiar with. In different settings such as in the train, hostels, train stations or exploring the city, the participants got confronted and engaged with different languages, habits, smells and noises, cultural realities and conditions of which some were familiar and some seemed foreign. This implied for most of the participants a growing awareness and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities. Especially the discovery and growing awareness of similarities between different cultures and regions were mentioned as something important and got frequently emphasised.

*For example like Irish people love potatoes and you find out that German people love potatoes. Its kind of nice to find similarities.* (Nicole)

*(...) kind of the similarities between the people on the continent and us in Ireland what I think you would not get if you didn’t get the chance to see.* (Tara)

Most of the participants experienced an exchange of cultures and views with other travellers they met on the way. It seemed that while travelling with Interrail, the majority of the participants were more likely to get in contact with other travellers rather than with local people. It occurred from the interview analysis that some of the participants dismissed certain presumptions they had about other cultures, countries or people.

*Before I came to Europe, in Turkey some people think that European people don’t like Turkish people so much. But I didn’t face any trouble. Because we have bad relations with Greece and Armenia but I met Greek people and Armenian people and they really liked me and we talked. Before I thought they will be like angry at me but they weren’t.* (Osvaldo)

*It changed my view about the people in the Netherlands. Media and friends set up a different tone about the revival of the Germans and Dutch people. It was a good way to reflect about it and to experience that the stereotypes are not true.* (Leo)

A few of the participants stated how they perceived that ideas or presumptions they had, got reinforced by their experiences. For example Linda from Sweden stated:

*And I think the funniest part was seeing like the stereotypes that you had in your head… for like when you go to Italy you just expect people to be really loud and they were… And I was like oh my god you know this is so accurate to what I was expecting.* (Nikki)
Broadening and Change of View
It emerged from the data analysis that many of the interview participants seemingly experienced a development or change towards a broader view on seeing “the world”. The main theme, these experiences were categorized to, is called “broadening/ change of view”. Some of the participants explained how their prior view towards a certain region in Europe changed and how the lived experiences were perceived as an “eye-opener”.

If I didn’t do the Interrail before, I wouldn’t have gone there for sure (to study and live in London). Because it opened my mind and I realized that there are other things. (Guille)

Prior of going there to be honest I didn’t really know much about Slovenia and Eastern Europe. I kind of expected it to be a poorer country, not much going on. Kind of not the nicest place, but in reality its not. Its like a small little Switzerland but cheaper. And I love it now. I want to go back there. (Nicole)

I think that people are so helpful. Even though we say people are selfish. But so many times during the time when we were backpacking there were just people who were so sofless. They just helped us even though there was nothing in for them. (...) and this happened so many times. (Ester)

You realize that we treat things more separately than what they really are cause at the end of the day we are all kind of... we are just people. We all have something to say and something in common. (Hilary).

Shaping Identity and Sense of Belonging
Some participants stated that they developed due to their Interrail travel a greater sense of belonging towards a wider community and some even experienced a shift towards what they called a European identity. Some explained how they experienced a growing feeling of empathy towards countries they visited.

You feel more empathy for countries that you been to. Even though you just been passing through. It becomes real. Its not just a name anymore. (Audun)

I think I actually feel more European because things like being able to travel around Europe with only my ID or being able to do the Interrail so cheap. Things like that make me feel more European. (Alberto)

As a result, Interrail helped me feel more aware and connected to the world as a whole, and where I am in it. (Bob)

You feel like you are more part of something bigger than where you grow up and what you used to growing up. (DJ Wan)

Change of Behaviour or Action
A process that can be assigned to the majority of the interview participants and which presents the last main theme of the analysed learning experiences, is called “change of behaviour or action”. It was frequently emphasized by many of the participants that the Interrail travel had a lasting impact that resulted in a change of behaviour or action after their return. Many reported about a feeling of Wanderlust, the urge to see and travel more. Some of the participants went on further Interrail trips or
other forms of travel. Guille from Spain for example, never went on holidays outside of Spain before. A friend convinced him to go on an Interrail trip in 2003 and after that he went on 4 more Interrail trips. He started to study in London and went on bigger travel journeys to the United States, explaining that he is convinced that he probably would have never chosen this path if he did not go on the Interrail trip in the first place. DeeJay wan from Malaysia felt the urge to return to Europe after his travel, which he eventually realized after one year when he started a Masters degree in the UK.

*I guess before I didn’t know anywhere else than Spain. (…) It changed my mind, because after that I started travelling a lot. I did Interrail 5 times, as I said and I went to the USA seven times after that every summer. And also after finishing University I went to live in London for one year. If I didn’t do the Interrail before, I wouldn’t have gone there for sure. Because it opened my mind and I realized that there are other things. (Guille)*

*I guess one of the impacts of the whole trip was that we really wanted to see more of the world. We were more curious about things and we were questioning things. We were just like hungry for more. (Linnea)*

Summary
All interview participants seemed to experience learning in different forms and intensity during their Interrail journeys. Largely dependent on each individual, the contexts within which they grew up and live and the way they shaped and organized their Interrail trip, the outcomes of the learning experiences differed. However, the data analysis allowed identifying several patterns and commonalities of learning experiences and outcomes that arose from the interview transcriptions. From these patterns, main themes and subcategories were developed. In summary it can be said that the case of Interrail as a specific mode of travelling to experience Europe, provides an environment that led to personal growth and development for a majority of the study group. This includes the acquisition of soft skills such as planning, managing unknown or difficult situations and an increased feeling of empowerment and self-confidence. Furthermore, an improvement of social skills such as communication and interaction in a group were stated as learning outcomes. A further important aspect that arose from the data analysis was the stimulation of critical thinking and reflection about one self and the own identity as well as ones cultural and socio-economical background compared to realities experienced in other countries. It was frequently reported that the lived experiences while travelling with Interrail enabled connectivity and a sense of belonging to a wider community. The diversity and accessibility of Europe was appreciated, especially the possibility of the free movement between the countries. Experiences during the Interrail trip were by some participants related to and reflected on previous knowledge or personal hobbies or interests. A further main theme that was identified concerns cultural sensitivity and pluralism. Due to a variety of encounters and experiences with different people from various cultural backgrounds, it appeared that cultural exchanges, an appreciation of similarities and differences between cultural and social norms and dismissing of presumptions and stereotypes was fostered. However, there were cases where ideas and presumptions of cultures got reinforced rather than dismantled. Some of the participants described how they developed a more “worldly” perspective, a “bigger picture” that allows to acknowledge prior unknown regions that have been discovered through Interrail. A last theme that was presented as a result, described how participants experienced a change of behavior after their Interrail trip. Some of the participants for example stated how their first Interrail experience changed their travel behavior and created the urge to see and travel more.
7. Discussion

The following section relates the above outlined study results to the prior presented methodological framework and therewith discusses the research questions. It ends with different suggestions and ideas that evolved from this research and which could help to improve or foster the learning outcomes of Interrail experiences.

∞ What are the learning experiences and outcomes during an Interrail trip and how is learning experienced in a transformative way?

As outlined in the theoretical framework, transformative learning induces great change within a learner and leads to a significant effect or impact. Drawing on the study results, it can be argued that Interrail with its previously identified characteristics and elements, generally provides an environment that facilitated and supported transformational learning for the study group. As outlined in the methodological framework, transformative learning is triggered by a disorienting dilemma. When a critical reflection follows, fixed assumptions and expectations can be transformed. The analysis and interpretation of the interview data indicates that many of the participants experienced a transformation of their meaning perspectives. This is argued because participants engaged in many of Mezirows’ 10 phases of perspective transformation throughout their Interrail trip. Many participants explained how they came across situations that gave them reason to question and reflect on their prior assumptions and beliefs, which can be identified as disorienting dilemmas. As Mezirow describes, reflective practices are essential for transformative learning to accrue. Examples of transformative learning within the study results are especially apparent within the subcategories of the main themes “critical thinking and reflection”, “cultural sensitivity and pluralism” and “shaping identity and sense of belonging”. In all cases, there was at least a situation where the participants got confronted with a problem, which they perceived as contradictory and which in turn made some reflect or question on the content or process of this problem. This in turn indicates a change in their meaning schemes. The analysis of the interviews brought to light, how Interrail provides a climate that was conducive to critical questioning, as opportunities for critical self-reflection seemed to be encouraged for some of the interviewees throughout the journey. Local conventions, social norms and assumptions were critically reflected by many of the participants while encountering different cultures and realities. Furthermore, many participants talked about a growing awareness and appreciation of the diversity of Europe. Another important trigger point that facilitated a perspective transformation during an Interrail experience was the establishment of relationships with others. Many of the participants stated that friendships or other forms of relationships and connections were created. This usually implies having questioning discussions and sharing information openly. Many of the participants stated that they had the opportunity to engage in dialogue and discussions with other travellers or people during their journey. This allowed engaging with a variety of different views and perceptions however, it was stated by the interviewees that sensitive issues such as political topics were barely discussed. These conversations may lead to rational discourse, which is seen as another catalyst for transformation as it involves the assessment of beliefs, feelings, and values within a dialogue (Mezirow, 2003). However, it must be recognized that Interrail as an informal learning environment does not provide a formal or professional guidance for rational discourse and critical reflection, neither before or during nor after the Interrail experience. Hence, this lose learning environment cannot facilitate ideal conditions for rational discourse, or ensure rational discourse at all. This brings about, what arguably can be seen as a risk, that parts of our views may be transformed but others, such as stereotypes or preconceived ideas about certain cultures or countries, are fostered or strengthened.
Subsequently it can be argued that Interrail, with its unique characteristics and elements, provides a learning environment with a high possibility to experience a disorienting dilemma which may lead to critical thinking and reflection and hence, transformation. Due to encounters with other people from different cultural backgrounds during Interrail, it is most likely to engage in dialogue and discussions with other perspectives, which in turn enhances and facilitates critical reflection. This process can lead, eventually, to a transformation of perspective. However, rational discourse, which is seen as essential to strengthen, guide and to give meaning to a transformation, cannot be guaranteed in the process. Arguably, this missing facilitation can lead to a manifestation of transformed beliefs in “a wrong direction”.

∞ How do these learning experiences relate to the concept of global citizenship?

Many of the above stated transformative learning experiences and processes correspond to the notion of global citizenship, which emphasizes global awareness, expressing caring and empathy for others, embracing cultural diversity, promoting social justice and environmentally sustainable living, and feeling a responsibility to act. The study results suggest that many of the participants experienced a growing connection and empathy for people outside their in-group, as well as for a wider community. It was frequently stated by many of the interviewees, that their interest and appreciation for diverse cultures increased. Some stated that their awareness of inequality and unequal treatment of people enhanced, which goes in line with the social justice component of the applied global citizenship definition. Few of the participants, who had prior knowledge and interest in environmental sustainability and climate change, felt obliged to protect the natural environment and regarded Interrail as a carbon-low mode of travelling. This attitude also refers to a responsibility to act for the betterment of the world. However, those who did not have any prior knowledge or interest in this issue were not so much concerned about environmental sustainability. It was not clear from the interviews whether or not global awareness and one’s interconnectedness with others was enhanced during the Interrail trip. As Martha Nussbaum argues, tolerance can be enhanced through cross-cultural dialogue and inquiry as it often leads us to question our prejudices. As the interview outcomes suggest, Interrail provides opportunities for these cross-cultural dialogues and discussions. Many of the participants engaged in these conversations or even developed lasting cross-cultural friendships. It enhanced inclusive and international dialogue, as some of the participants started to start conversation with people, they believe they would have never talked to in different settings. Global citizenship promotes awareness of the bigger picture and a wider and different perspective, which also many of the participants stated to have experienced. However, at core stands the ability to respect and tolerate diversity, including other peoples choices and ideas of how to live. Arguably, this study implies that this was partially enhanced by the learning experiences during Interrail as well.

This study indicates how Interrail provided the study group with the opportunity to engage with critical perspectives and to experience other realities, which present socio-cultural issues and inequalities within Europe. The question that remains is how the Interrail traveller copes with all these experiences, impressions and reflections during the trip and after returning. It is crucial to learn about the background of these complex situations, to analyse geographic conditions, historical relations and to learn about real abuses that explain the disparities being observed and experienced during the travel. Another factor that plays an important part is the skill of critical thinking, which can be seen as a preparation for transformative learning experiences and disorienting dilemmas. However, many youth that go on Interrail may not be equipped with these skills, which set the scene for the last research question that is being discussed.
How could a free Interrail pass contribute to the implementation of education for sustainable development and global citizenship education?

As the discussion above highlights, the Interrail experience brought about great learning aspects in a transformative way on different levels for each of the individuals of the study group. The experience of different realities and diverse worldviews outside of the formal educational system contributed to gain skills and fostered a change of perspectives that correlate with different aspects of the notion of global citizenship.

Education is crucial to enable civil society and each individual to participate and act fully within public spheres and debates in order to foster change and to strive towards a world that is being imagined and wished for to live in. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in particular, aim at moving towards building of values, soft skills and attitudes for learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions. With the tool of ESD, UNESCO has the vision to provide the opportunity to everybody, to benefit from education for a positive societal transformation. However the current situation looks very different, and access to lifelong learning opportunities remain socially and spatially divided while the gap is widening. The implementation of a free Interrail ticket would be a great opportunity to combine some important points the European Commission is concerned with: to implement and scale education for sustainable development, to increase access to education, fight increasing populist and nationalist movements and to combat the rising mistrust towards the European Union and its institutions.

It would be a strong sign of the EU to put the necessary trust in its youth, which in return could be rewarded with an increasing optimism of young people towards the EU and its institutions. Through providing an equal opportunity to travel and experience Europe and getting in contact with people from other European countries, a common and shared European identity would be encouraged. The study results show that personal and real-life interactions enhanced empathy and a sense of belonging to a wider community for some of the participants. Current power structures that are implicated within the different European regions would be broken up as everybody receives the same chance and opportunity. With the threat of climate change and the simultaneously increasing expansion of low-cost Airlines throughout Europe, a free Interrail ticket would furthermore contribute to a promotion of environmental sustainable travelling. Referring to the study results that showed that only a few of the participants acknowledged and reflected on Interrail as an environmental friendly mode of travelling, a free Interrail ticket brings great chances and opportunities to reach out for a vast amount of youth to increase environmental awareness. Amongst others, this is being discussed in the following section, which introduces some suggestions and ideas that could enhance learning outcomes during Interrail.

Suggestions
Considering the above mentioned challenges, which transformative learning during Interrail implies in terms of rational discourse and critical reflection, the role of formal education could be worth to be further analysed within the debate of a possible implementation of a free Interrail ticket. In order to provide guidance for a broader, more discriminating and integrative understanding of the experiences during Interrail, formal education could offer such reflective courses (or parts of courses) for both, people who went on Interrail and those who are planning to go. It is important for the learners to become aware of their learning processes in unstructured environments such as Interrail in order to not only be aware of a certain situation but also to critically question it. This goes very well in line with the aim of incorporating ESD in curricula within European schools and educational institutions as this includes, amongst others, the goal of empowering learners with skills of critical thinking and respecting cultural diversity. In the long run, this would also contribute towards meeting the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
In order to stimulate reflective processes during Interrail, the welcome letter that comes with the free Interrail ticket, could include information and highlighting facts for example on CO2-emmission reduction during interrailing or other points to consider as a mindful traveller. Furthermore, current and emerging issues regarding Europe and the EU could be included as well.

Seminars and workshops could be offered in different European cities on a regular basis. They could be open for all people who went on an Interrail trip, who are planning to go or even for people who are currently travelling with Interrail. Within these workshops, different topics could be discussed regarding current challenges, which the EU is facing, training in intercultural competencies, discussions on climate change related topics and other contemporary or socially critical issues. Date and venue could be available on the Interrail application. These workshops would also attract youth who may currently are not enrolled in a schooling system.

In order to overcome financial barriers, which could remain a problem for some youth to go on an Interrail trip even if the ticket is for free, could be the introduction of an Interrail Solidarity Fund. People who would be able to afford an Interrail ticket and who would be willing to support youth from lower income countries or from deprived backgrounds, could voluntarily pay into this fund from which these persons could partially cover their expenses for accommodation and food during their Interrail trip. There are various more creative ideas and projects, which could support and enhance the advantages and learning outcomes of a free Interrail ticket.

The vast majority of the interview participants are following a tertiary educational path or graduated with a higher educational degree. According to literature, there are still clear inequalities in Europe in participation from all sections of the populations in higher education (Nizinska, 2011). As this research came to the conclusion that an Interrail experience contributes to self-development, soft-skills, social skills and an increase in critical thinking and cultural awareness, it would be interesting to further research the impact of an Interrail trip on the later educational path. If one could find correlations between the two, this would be an additional strong argument for the implementation of a free Interrail ticket.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to closer investigate Interrail as a nonformal learning environment. Based on the research data, it first described specific characteristics and elements that define Interrail as a nonformal learning environment. It then specifically looked at learning experiences and outcomes and whether and how transformative learning is promoted during an Interrail trip. It further compared these learning outcomes with the notion of global citizenship and highlighted crosscutting aspects and themes of the two. The study showed, that certain learning patterns and commonalities arised within the study group, and that indeed transformative learning was being promoted throughout the Interrail journeys of the study group. Certain learning outcomes and transformations were also corresponding with the notion of global citizenship, such as growing empathy and relatedness for others, embracing cultural diversity, and promoting social justice and environmentally sustainable living. However, the intensity of transformation depended highly on the context of the individual and how the Interrail trip was framed and organised. By applying an analytical generalisation to this case study, referring to the theory of transformative learning, the study results may suggest similar learning processes and outcomes for a broader group of young adults going on an Interrail trip. This allows for following conclusions.

Interrail can be discribed as a train travel experience that entails different transformational learning opportunities, which may foster a European Identity and supports implications and aspects of education for sustainable development and global citizenship. The current movement of #FreeInterrail,
a citizen based initiative that promotes the introduction of a free Interrail ticket for every 18-year old European citizen, provides an additional strength and relevance to this research as it emphasizes the urgency for greater accessibility and more equal opportunities for all, to discover, experience and learn from travelling through Europe by train. The study results support the arguments of the policy proposal that Interrail may be approached as more than an extraordinary way for young people to spend their holidays. It may be a learning experience that empowers the individual, opens up for new perspectives and realities, brings people together, and most importantly provides an opportunity for a perspective change on an individual level that may evolves to a collective change. Hence, an introduction of a free interrail ticket could contribute towards enabling more youth to acquire experiences and skills that are arguably needed to tackle the wicked problems and challenges we are facing now and in the future. As critical reflection and rational discourse are essential for transformative learning but are not formally guided during an Interrail trip, this could be a chance to establish an interface between informal learning and formal learning.

Crisis can be an opportunity for change and transformation. In order to get Europe back on (the right) track, it is crucial to enable all youth with the same opportunities to engage in discussions, to experience different realities and to be able to make up their own mind. Young generations have a key role to play in the future of Europe. Especially today, it is important to provide these opportunities to them as what is at stake is large. Based on a systematic empirically and theoretically informed study, the presented outcomes aim to communicate to a wider audience to critically reflect upon whether implementing a free Interrail ticket might be an influential step to direct social transformation both towards a more open and inclusive Europe and to foster Education for Sustainable Development, in particular global citizenship. Although this could be seen as an experiment, given what is at stake considering global sustainability transition it might be worth to give it a try.

9. Acknowledgement

First and foremost I want to thank all the participants of the study group who voluntarily spend their time to talk about their Interrail travel experiences. It was a great honor to learn about the unique and interesting travel stories of each individual, that were all full of new insights and that encouraged me even more with the overall work of this research. You provided the very core of this thesis and helped me to discover new aspects of travelling with Interrail, that I would have never considered otherwise. I too learned during the process of the development of this thesis and I would like to thank my family, especially my Mother and Dietmar, for their supportive words and gestures that were always present, even from far. I would also like to thank my friends both at home and here in Uppsala for their advices and support. Last but not least I am thanking David Kronlid for his supervision and encouragement to create this thesis.
References


Yin, R. (2013). Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations. SAGE.
APPENDIX I

Interview Schedule

- Provide interviewee with an overview of purpose
- Explain intended uses for the interview data and the measures taken to protect confidentiality and anonymity
- Discuss and get permission for tape recording and note-taking

Personal data
Name:
Age:
Sex:
Highest educational degree:
Occupation:
Citizenship:

General information about you and your Interrail Trip
How old were you during the Interrail trip?
What was your occupation during the time of your Interrail trip?
When did you travel with Interrail (months and year)?
How long was the Interrail trip?
With what pass did you travel? (e.g. global pass)
What countries did you travel to?
Did you travel by yourself or in a group? With how many people did you travel?

What was your main motivation for doing the Interrail trip in the first place?

What were your travel experiences before you went on the Interrail trip?

What did you like/dislike about travelling with Interrail compared to other modes of travelling? Are there any specific aspects/characteristics of Interrail that you particularly like/dislike?

What are the learning experiences you can think of during your Interrail trip?

Did you develop/enhance new skills or competencies?

How did the Interrail trip as a whole shaped your way of thinking/acting towards certain aspects in life?

How did it transform (made you question) your previous (world)view?
What **challenges** did you come across during your Interrail trip and how did you tackle them?

Can you tell me about your **view on Europe and the EU**? Was it influenced or shaped by the Interrail trip?

Did the Interrail trip enhance your interest in the EU?

How did your views on other cultures, countries or people change?

Are there any **specific experiences/encounters** you can think of that made you change your view? And, how did it change?

Were your previous ideas or **preconceived notions** about other cultures **reinforced** during the trip, or did your ideas change over time?

What kind of relationships did you develop? Please describe the setting/ circumstances.

Did you develop new friendships with people from other countries/cultures during the Interrail trip? If yes, are these friendships still maintained?

Did the Interrail trip make you **think more sensitive towards current social, political or environmental issues within Europe** or internationally? (e.g. social inequalities, racism, migration, climate change, political tensions)

What do you think about the idea of a free Interrail ticket?