

Cultural exchange programmes: Product or experience?



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INTRODUCTION

As humans, we need¹ to socialise. We are prepared biologically² to help us to improve and to find solutions to situations and problems by means of socialisation³ and that is why we have evolved. Although there are other species that share and teach behaviour, it is not quite the same. Humans have a complex language system⁴ and this is the key difference between animals and us. For these animals, ‘*Something can happen or exist only if they see it*’⁵; however, humans can transmit and create ideas by means of language which therefore defeat time and space. Interests, physiological needs, or the need to belong are what lead us to search for others. However, when we interact, we shape our behaviour and we also ‘*shape the way in which we perceive physically, physiologically and socially the world*’⁶. We add meaning and value to what we do and the world shapes us too.

Humans are creative: we create and we build concrete and abstract entities. Thanks to this ability we now have cities, technology and different ways to express ourselves. These forms of expression can differ between cultures and this happens because these cultures see, describe and expect the world to function in a particular way. The reasons for these differences in perception can be environmental, economic and/or historically related. But what is culture? How can we define it?

Zygmunt Bauman, a sociologist and philosopher, describes it as

¹ According to research, humans living in isolation suffer from mental and physical health issues. KIKUSUI, Takefumi, “Social Neuroscience: How does social enrichment produce health benefits?”, University of Azaba, Japan, 2018.

² ADOLPH, Ralph, The Social Brain, TEDxCaltech
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPj01uzRHY0&ab_channel=TEDxTalks

³ WORLD SCIENCE FESTIVAL, ‘Neuroscience and the Roots of Human Connections: The Social Synapse’, YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCXlaOKOczk&ab_channel=WorldScienceFestival

⁴ HARRIS, Marvin, *Cultural Anthropology*, 1983, page 40.

⁵ BARRET Louise, Anthropologist, *Neuroscience and the Roots of Human Connections: The Social Synapse*. Op cit.

⁶FUENTES, Agustin, Anthropologist, *Neuroscience and the Roots of Human Connections: The Social Synapse*, op cit.

Full of ambiguities. Culture is invention and preservation; novelty and tradition; routine and pattern breaking; norm-following and transcendence of norms; uniqueness and regularity; change and monotony of reproduction; unexpected and predictable⁷.

Culture attracts the attention of many scientists and people in general. These differences in the perception of the world, communication, humour, food and other customs are intriguing. That is one of the reasons we learn languages, folk dances or music that do not have an intrinsic connection with us. Learning a target language and working near the Eiffel Tower, The London Eye, The Statue of Liberty or the land of Kiwis, among other places, is the dream of many foreigners who do not know these countries. The need to satisfy our curiosity about different cultures is one of the reasons that encourages us to travel. Many of us travel on our own, but other travellers decide to enrol in a cultural exchange programme. This kind of exchange programme consists of people travelling to other countries to live, learn a new language and work in the country they choose. This practice is not new: the concept of the 'Au Pair', which is one of the oldest exchange programmes, was first introduced in 1897⁸. Another example is international exchange programmes for students, which became more popular after the world wars⁹. They were fostered by political leaders to promote understanding among countries.

Nowadays, these programmes have not lost popularity and have even gained more. Programmes such as 'Au pair', 'Work and Travel', 'Working Holiday' and several international student exchange programmes are intensely searched online¹⁰. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is the globalisation of culture¹¹. As I mentioned before, culture in how we experience the world and globalisation has given us the whole world through the internet. These interconnections bring societies closer and make exchange programmes more attractive.

As globalisation and capitalism have grown together, companies specialised in cultural exchange programmes started to be created. Business people and sometimes ex-travellers saw

⁷ BAUMAN, Zygmunt, *Culture as Praxis*, 2002, page 14.

⁸ "Au Pair - historic introduction", *Au pair one*, 02/19. <https://aupairone.com/article/au-pair-historic-introduction>

⁹ "The History of International Student Exchange", *Nwse_Blog*, 2018. <https://www.nwse.com/blog/history-of-student-exchange/>

¹⁰ Google Trends shows how these programmes have been searched since 2004.

¹¹ HELD, David, *A globalising world culture, economics, politics*, 2004, page 44.

in this trend an opportunity to do business. However, capitalism aims to produce profit and many cultural exchanges now result in the exploitation of foreigners¹².

Why is this exploitation happening? Are programmes of cultural exchange created for lovers of culture? Are they intercultural experiences or a new kind of ‘slavery’? In order to answer these questions, I will first investigate the reasons why people travel, the psychological reasons behind it. I will also analyse how these companies sell the programmes and if they correspond to theories used by marketers. Then, I will analyse whether the message behind the programmes is influenced by globalisation and capitalism.

Then in a second and final part, my goal in this research is to find out how travellers have experienced their journeys. I will ask them about their experiences, problems and vision of the programmes in order to know if the theory matches their answers. Also, I will interview an employee of a company that sells cultural exchange programmes to have both sides of the story.

¹² KOPPLIN, Zack, “They think we are Slaves”, *Politico Magazine*, 2017.
<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/au-pair-program-abuse-state-department-214956/>

PART I: Discovering

As I mentioned before, culture has been a mystery for humans. We have been travelling since the beginning of time for several reasons, generally to survive. Now we live in a globalised world and we get the chance to know other cultures and countries easily. As we enter the world of cultural exchange programmes, we can see that it is not only people who are interested in them but also institutions, governments and companies. Governments use these programmes to promote their countries but also to make connections with other countries. Institutes such as UNESCO¹³ considers these programmes a chance to promote the values such as respect, empathy and understanding of other cultures. Families consider them a way to send their members to learn other languages, learn about the world and to be open-minded people. Now when we search for these programmes, we can find many companies that prepare, promote and sell them.

However, it is not easy to fight the fears of leaving one's comfort zone and face the differences of other countries' cultures, which can cause culture shock¹⁴. Thus, companies need to promote them in attractive ways, as the majority of industries do, and they are not always as honest as we might think. Generally, in order to sell something, companies sell ideas. Conceptual selling is not new. According to the salesmen and authors Robert B. Miller and Stephen E. Heiman, *"it is not about selling a product, it deals with the prospect's concept of a product or service and relating it to the prospect's issues"*¹⁵. In other words, conceptual selling implies understanding clients' needs and providing a desirable concept not just a product to satisfy these needs. In order to do that, salespeople have to listen and understand people's desires. However, these concepts do not always reflect the reality or the responsibility of sales people. Sometimes, there is no Corporate Social Responsibility¹⁶ and people find themselves faced with situations that do not reflect the ideas that marketing sells.

¹³UNESCO, "cultural exchange programmes", Diversity of cultural expressions.

<https://en.unesco.org/creativity/policy-monitoring-platform/cultural-exchange-programmes#:~:text=Key%20objectives%20of%20the%20measure,skills%20in%20a%20globalised%20world>

¹⁴ "A feeling of confusion felt by someone visiting a country or place that they do not know". "Cambridge University Press", *Cambridge dictionary*.

¹⁵"Win with conceptual Selling-and Pipeliner CRM", Pipeliner CRM, nd. Op cit.

¹⁶ The idea that a company should be interested in and willing to help society and the environment as well as be concerned about the products and profits it makes. Cambridge University Press,op.cit.

In this chapter I research how companies sell the programmes. I will explain the reasons why we travel. Then, I will analyse their marketing and I will compare it to the new work order theory.

CHAPTER I: The Reasons Behind the Plane Ticket

When we talk about needs, we think about food, water, shelter, or in other words, everything we need to survive. However, it is not only the basic needs that count in an individual's life. According to the theory of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, humans are not only motivated by basic needs. Abraham Maslow, one of the most well-known psychologists of the world, created a pyramid to organise hierarchically these needs that had not been taken into account before. As we can see in the figure 1, this pyramid is composed of physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs.

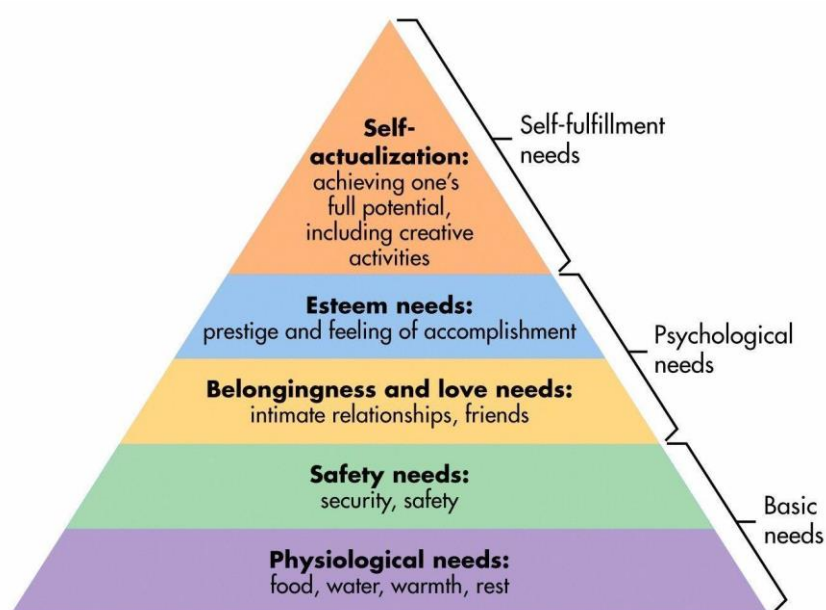


Figure 1: Maslow's Pyramid¹⁷

In order to cover their basic needs, humans have to fulfil their physiological needs, which are basically what humans need to survive: water, rest, food, shelter, health, clothing, and reproduction. Then to fulfil their safety needs humans need to feel protected from violence, dangers, emotional problems as well as health and financial issues. After satisfying these basic needs, humans need to accomplish their psychological needs. They need to create relationships

¹⁷Bernard Pradines, "Soins palliatifs en phase terminale : saper la base de la pyramide de Maslow", *GérontoLiberté*, <https://free-geriatrics.overblog.com/2017/06/soins-palliatifs-en-phase-terminale-saper-la-base-de-la-pyramide-de-maslow.html>

like having friends, family, and intimacy in order to fulfil their belongingness and love needs. But they also have esteem needs: they need to feel that they are respected and valued by people because of what they do and what they are. Also, they need to believe in themselves by means of their accomplishments and have confidence in themselves to fulfil their esteem needs too. At the top of the pyramid, we find the self-actualization needs. As I mentioned before, humans are creative. We need to create and that is why cultures are composed of dances, traditions, literature and arts in general. According to Michael Brein, a social psychologist and author, “*Once the basic needs are satisfied you may satisfy your psychological needs by growing your confidence and achieve self-actualization through the act of travelling*”¹⁸. Humans need to achieve their self-fulfilment needs. They need to educate themselves, develop different skills in different fields like music, cooking, painting, and also by having different experiences like, for example, as Brain says, travelling. I have already mentioned some of the reasons why we like to travel. We enjoy it because we are social beings, we are interested in other cultures and we are curious, and now we can add that it can also be a way to fulfil psychological and self-actualization needs.

Psychologists have studied not only why we decide to travel but also what travelling, or not having the possibility to travel, can cause in human beings. According to the psychologist Seth Meyers, travelling is a stimulating activity for our psyches on a visual, physical and social level¹⁹. It helps us to escape from the routine and pulls us out of our comfort zone. It does it by presenting us with unusual activities that we do not normally do at home. According to the psychiatrist and professor Jean Kim, the novelties that travelling presents us can improve cognition²⁰. The fact that when we travel, we need to learn new things, not only a language, but also new streets, food, rules and new culture codes, makes our brains work hard. This hard work helps our brains to stay healthy, according to Dr John N. Morris: “*Embracing a new activity that forces you to think and learn and requires ongoing practice can be one of the best ways to keep the brain healthy.*”²¹. Jane Kim also mentions that travelling can help us grow at

¹⁸ LIEBERMAN, Melanie, “Why we miss travel so much according to psychologists”, The points guy, 03/05/20. <https://thepointsguy.com/guide/psychology-why-we-miss-travel/>

¹⁹ LIEBERMAN, Melanie, op cit.

²⁰ all forms of knowing and awareness, such as perceiving, conceiving, remembering, reasoning, judging, imagining, and problem solving. Along with affect and conation, it is one of the three traditionally identified components of mind. American Psychological Association Dictionary.

²¹ Havard medical school, “Train your brain”, *Harvard Health Publishing*, 02/2021. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/train-your-brain>

an interpersonal level²² which we can associate with Maslow's Pyramid theory. As I said before, humans need to socialise, and by encountering different people in other countries we can contemplate the possibility of making new friends and even having a romantic partner with different roots. Also, travelling can develop intrapersonal intelligence, a concept coined by the psychologist Howard Gardner, which refers to the capacity of understanding oneself²³. People with a developed intrapersonal intelligence can understand their desires, fears, values, beliefs and thinking in order to recognize their actions and what motivates them. In other words, travel can help you to get to know yourself better.

In her article, Jane Kim mentioned that when she travelled, she felt grateful for the simple things at home like having an indoor bathroom and when she was travelling, she was grateful for the experiences she had. According to Harvard Medical School, gratitude helps people to have more positive emotions and to connect with other people, nature and with themselves. In their article, the Harvard Medical School says that "*It helps to deal with adversity and to improve relationships and health*"²⁴. Moreover, we can link gratitude with the fulfilment of not only esteem needs but also with belonging and love needs from Maslow's theory.

As I mentioned before, humans are complex. We are social animals, with basic, psychological, self-fulfilment needs that move a lot and the best examples are what I will call "non-tourist travellers". This group of people is composed of travellers who are not simple tourists but who have different reasons for why they are travelling. Even though there are tourists who stay in different countries and work there, these travellers, in contrast to 15-day-tourists, face the changes and experiences that I mentioned above. They have contact with the communities by working in the host country and they have to learn the new codes and rules as they work. The non-tourist travellers are people who travel for "*pleasure but also as economic migrants or prospective citizens*"²⁵. Pleasure-tourists are people who enjoy visiting other countries but in order to do it they need to work in the country because they do not have enough money or decide not to waste their money while economic migrants are people who are forced to leave

²²KIM, Jane, "Why travel is Good for your Mental Health", Psychology Today, 26/03/18.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/culture-shrink/201803/why-travel-is-good-your-mental-health>

²³ Michele, MARENUS, "Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences", *Simply Psychology*, 06/20.
<https://www.simplypsychology.org/multiple-intelligences.html>

²⁴Harvard Medical School, "Giving thanks can make you happier", *Harvard Health Publishing*", 08/21
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>

²⁵Low-cost labour or cultural exchange? Reforming the Working Holiday visa programme 2015.

their countries because of economic reasons, and prospective citizens are people who decide to stay in the country as a citizen and not as a tourist because of different reasons.

If I take Maslow's pyramid and I use it to place the people of this group of non-tourist travellers, I will put them in different positions, as you can see in figure 2. By placing these people in different scales, I want to exemplify how they try to respond to their different needs by travelling. Even though I mentioned that travelling can fulfil self-actualization needs, now by having in mind specifically non-tourist travellers I found that it is not the only need that travelling can fulfil. This classification can lead us to consider how travelling as a non-tourist can or cannot affect lives in a positive or negative way. I take into account not only self-actualization needs but also basic needs that, if they are not fulfilled correctly, can affect people in a dangerous way. Also, it is important to clarify that these "categories" are not fixed. Many "pleasure-tourists" can decide to become prospective citizens and prospective citizens can be forced to become economic migrants because they lose their money or their countries become economically unstable after they leave.

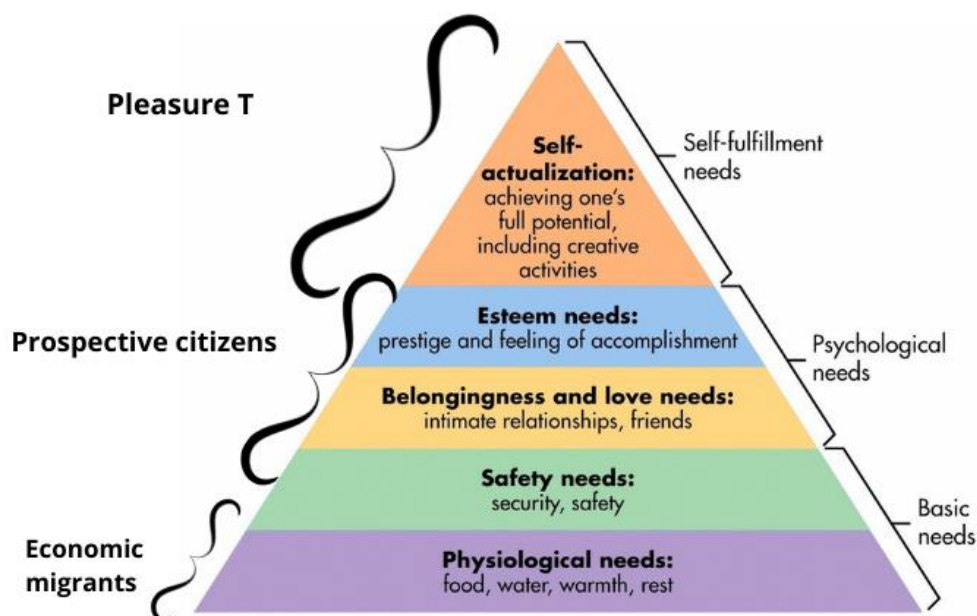


Figure 2 Maslow's pyramid analysis with types of tourists.

Perhaps people do not realise why they travel and how deep these reasons can be inside their minds. But companies do. In other words, travelling is not just taking an aeroplane, it can be

the result of the problems or desires that a traveller can have in his or her life. These desires and problems can be translated into needs by marketers who try to respond to the needs of clients by selling not only a ticket but a concept. In the following chapter, I'm going to analyse the marketing used by the companies that promote and sell cultural exchange programmes. I will try to identify if they attempt to sell "experiences" that fulfil the needs that I mentioned before.

CHAPTER II: The Marketing behind the experience

The concepts I mentioned in the previous chapter can make a person think that his or her needs are being fulfilled by the companies that offer the programmes. But this is not always the case. Marketers know and use Maslow's theory and try to fulfil the needs that are present in the hierarchy by means of products and brands²⁶. They use this knowledge to convince people that in order to fulfil a basic need like, for example, clothing, consumers need a product from Nike because it makes them "free" or "part of a group". This is how they also use another need from Maslow's hierarchy which is the need of belonging and they use it to sell a product²⁷. The pyramid not only gave psychologists the reasons why people do what they do but it also gave marketers the reason why people can or could buy products or services²⁸. Even though there are products and services that are basic and marketers may convince people that what they sell is better, there are other products that consumers do not need at all. They only appeal to the needs that humans have in order to convince them that the service or product is the answer.

However, it is not only Maslow's theories that marketers use. They also have to pay attention to the language they use to communicate the message that they try to share. Marketers use *emotive language*, which "is composed of words and phrases to elicit emotions in the reader and encourage them to do or buy something²⁹". Language is one of the best tools of marketers, it evokes emotions "which influence cognitive processes in people"³⁰. Emotions influence the learning process, memory and also motivation. In other words, emotions lead to action and behaviour. That is why marketers take into account cultural differences like languages. They also take into account the economic status, stage of life and social class. Everything is thought over thoroughly, the message has to be clear and appealing, the images are not randomly chosen nor the colours.

²⁶RUSSELL, Edward, *The fundamentals of Marketing*, 2010.

²⁷RUSSELL Edward, op cit.

²⁸RUSSELL, ibid

²⁹"The influence of language in marketing", *Dragonfly marketing*, 07/16.

<https://dragonflymarketing.co.za/blog/influence-language-marketing/#:~:text=It's%20language%20that%20uses%20words,us%20feel%20comfortable%20and%20safe.>

³⁰ M. Tyang, et al, "The Influences of Emotion on Learning and Memory", *Frontiers in Psychology*, 08/17. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01454/full>

In order to exemplify how companies that sell these programmes use these needs, I will analyse images and texts from different webpages. I did not only choose to analyse languages because of the impact images can have on people's minds. If we see many images, they are going to stick to our minds easily³¹. Images are the very first medium of human communication and they can also be a medium to create mental imagery that can create a feeling of knowing the place³². Images are used to build mental associations³³ with a product, an idea, a person, among others, and that is why they are so popular, and even more so in today's digital society.



Figure 3 screenshot from a webpage from Yo me animo y vos³⁴

The first image of this chapter is from a website from the company “Yo me animo y vos” from Argentina that sells personal advising, travel insurances and language lessons for travellers who are planning to leave their country. In the figure there is a drawing that represents the community “Yomeanimer”. This community can be a representation of belongingness and love needs. By creating a group, they are inviting people who feel lonely and lost to be part of something which is important for humans.

³¹ JOLY, Martine, *Introduction à l'analyse de l'image*, 2009.

³² JOLY, Martine, Op cit

³³ JOLY, Martine, ibid

³⁴ A company that sells consultancy and insurance for travellers from Argentina <https://www.yomeanimo.com/es-df/>

The figure 4 is from the company “Global Work & Travel”, from Australia. They sell different types of travel programmes. In figure 4 there is a description of inclusions in their programme for au pairs in the United Kingdom. There are meals, guidance, insurance, accommodation, access to the family profiles and they assure you a match with a family. In the image most of the human needs such as the basic needs of food, shelter, and safety are portrayed. In the mind of a person, this image can make them feel that every basic need will be fulfilled and they do not need to ask families if all meals are really included, or whether they need to help the family will be there.

In the image of the family, there is a heart and icons of people portraying a good family. People whose belongingness and love needs are not fulfilled and are searching for love might think that that is what they are going to find thanks to the programme.

Inclusions 🔍 Tap to show less













<p> Host family match Be matched with a host family who you have personally approved before you even leave home and earn between £120-£350 per week.</p>	<p> Dedicated Trip Coordinator To guide you through your entire journey, assist with profile building, interview preparation, matching you with the perfect host family and leaving no question unanswered.</p>
<p> Trip visa guidance Get your visa approved as cheap and easy as possible with our step-by-step instructions and personal guidance by your Trip Coordinator.</p>	<p> Personal Travel Concierge You'll get a personal Travel Concierge to plan your flights, insurance or any add-ons to synchronise perfectly with your trip. Deal with a real human and get a personalised booking experience that ticks all your boxes.</p>
<p> Access to family profiles You'll get exclusive access to view family profiles and video call each family before making a decision, ensuring you're both an ideal fit for each other.</p>	<p> Pre-approved family agreement Your agreement will be set up once you've matched with a host family and outlines your duties, earnings, time off and expectations, so you can feel comfortable before you arrive.</p>
<p> Online au pair course Arrive prepared to be the best au pair you can. Undertake a 4-hour fun, interactive & informative digital course and learn everything you need to know, before you go. Certification of completion included.</p>	<p> Airport pickup or transfer Your host family will be eagerly waiting for you at the closest major airport to take you to your new home!</p>
<p> Private live-in accommodation You'll be set up in your own private bedroom, so you'll feel right at home with your new host family. With rent and utilities covered, spend your earnings on travelling instead!</p>	<p> Meals As part of the family, you'll cook and dine together with your host family at home or occasionally in local restaurants.</p>
<p> Welcome pack With details of other au pairs in the area, so you can make friends with other like-minded travellers from all corners of the world with</p>	<p> Paid vacation You'll receive two weeks paid holidays (plus Bank holidays), so you can explore neighbouring cities and countries.</p>

Figure 4 describes the benefits of “au pair” programme by global work and travel company ³⁵

³⁵Global work and travel <https://www.globalworkandtravel.com/au-pair-abroad/uk>

Another example comes from the same webpage. They write, “*You are matched with a safe and welcoming host family and home*”³⁶. It is another example of basic and psychological needs portrayed. But I think that the most important item to analyse is the choice of the word “home” instead of the word “house”. According to the Cambridge dictionary “home” is “*the house, apartment, etc. where you live, especially with your family*”³⁷ and “house” is “*a building that people, usually one family, live in*”³⁸. The choice of language is not randomly done. Words have connotations and several studies³⁹ have demonstrated that these connotations differ. There are emotional words like “love”, “home”, “family”, and neutral words like “table”, “paper” and so on. If I had to classify the word “home” according to the definition, I would classify it as an emotional word because it uses the determiner “your” which shows a relation with the person that reads or writes the word. On the other hand, the definition of house uses the phrase “one family” leaving the emotions out by not connecting it with the person who reads it. Even though the choice of the word can be correct because an au pair is supposed to be part of the family it is not always the case and if the au pair does not take precautions, it can be disappointing.

³⁶Global work and travel company <https://www.globalworkandtravel.com/au-pair-abroad/uk>

³⁷ University of Cambridge, “Home”, *Cambridge Dictionary*.
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/home>

³⁸ University of Cambridge, “House”, *Cambridge Dictionary*.
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/house>

³⁹ Processing of emotional words in bilinguals: Testing the effects of word concreteness, task type and language status Pilar Ferré, et al, 2017.

CHAPTER III: Selling a New World

I have explained how marketing uses Maslow's theory and sells products or services by means of images, language and concepts. Now I will analyse the message behind the marketing and how it is typical of our current societies.

As I mentioned before, the Au pair programme is not new⁴⁰. “Au pair” was the term to name girls or young ladies who travelled to learn another language and taught their native language to children in a family. There is a tradition of sending young women as pupil teachers to other countries and that explains why most au pairs are women⁴¹. Even the writer Charlotte Brontë⁴² travelled to Brussels to improve her French and to teach English as a governess, which according to the Cambridge dictionary “*is a woman who lives with a family and educates the children at home*”⁴³. This description is not so different from the description of an au pair. There are companies that have existed since 1999 like “Au Pair World” or “Europair Services” that have been in business for 30 years. But most of the companies⁴⁴ that sell programmes like Work and Travel or Working Holiday are relatively new because most of them were created after the year 2008. This is not a coincidence because it is connected to how we see the world today and how a new global capitalism⁴⁵ has influenced our lives.

The New Work Order⁴⁶ theory can probably explain how these programmes respond to these new concepts that impact our societies. Generally, most jobs offered to travellers are childcare, working in fields picking fruit, restaurant businesses and tourism or construction sectors. Employers often offer travellers these positions because they find cheap labour in travellers and not because they are interested in their cultures. Most people do not know the rights they have in the host country, unlike citizens of the country. This could be an example of how

⁴⁰ The term dates back to 1897, Au pair - historic introduction, op cit.

⁴¹ BERG, Laurie, MEAGHER, Gabrielle, Cultural exchange or cheap housekeeper, 2018.

⁴² M.S Tompkins, Joyce, Charlotte Brontë, *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charlotte-Bronte>

⁴³ University of Cambridge, “Governess”, *Dictionary of Cambridge*.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/governess>

⁴⁴ Yo me animo y vos: 2009. Argentina Cultural Exchange: 2013. Global work and travel 2008. Workntravel.fr: 2015. Work and travel group 2019. étudiant-voyageur: 2009. Moveaway:2012.

⁴⁵ GEE, James, et al, *The new work order behind the language of New Capitalism*, 1996.

⁴⁶ GEE, James, et al Op cit

“Proliferation of low-paying work”⁴⁷, affects travellers because capitalism uses these people as cheap labour and disguises it in the form of cultural experience. However, it does not only cause travellers to work in terrible conditions and receive low wages, but also local citizens cannot find jobs because employers prefer to hire people who will probably not complain. It is not as if travellers hoped that these situations would occur. It happens because these jobs are offered by using storytelling. These jobs are sold as an “enchanted place”, as idyllic, as we can see in figure 5.

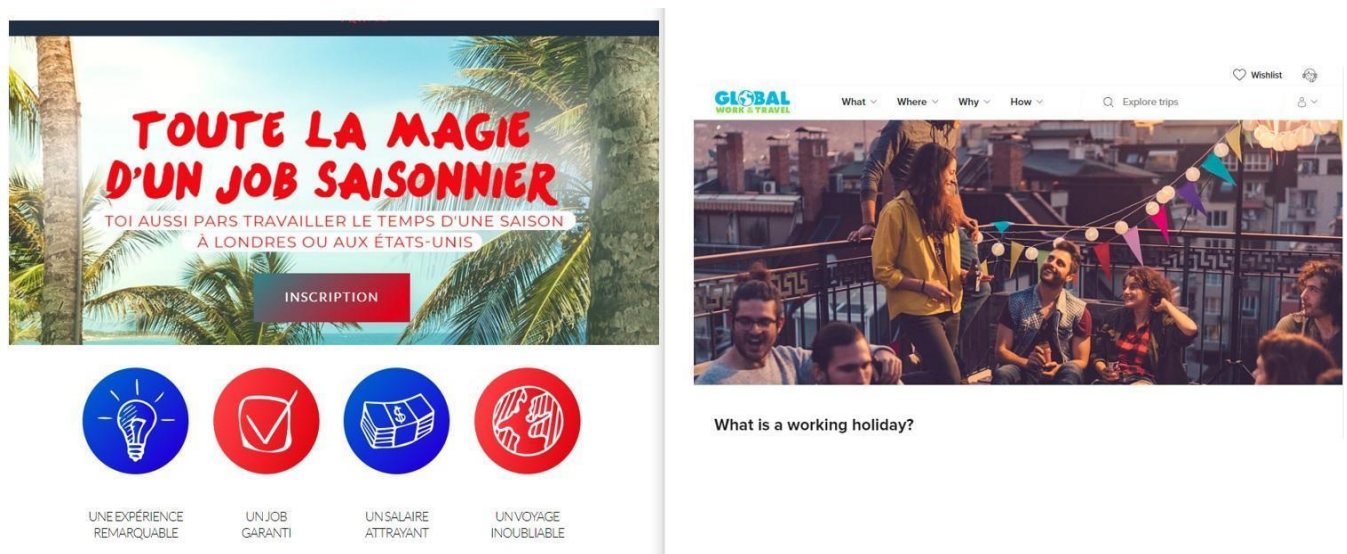


Figure 5 The idyllic place of working abroad pictured by cultural companies.

In the image from workntravel.fr there are palm trees, the sun and drawings of money and the world illustrating a kind of paradise. In the image from “Global work & travel” there are people having drinks and talking which can be used not only for a Working holiday programme but also used for a beer company. This figure is one of many examples of how these companies portrayed the programmes as enchanted places.

The choice of language, as I said before, is not a coincidence and informal language is another characteristic of the new work order that we can find in their discourse. This new informality can cause serious problems when we do not know the culture of the host country.

For example, politeness, which is not universal. There are cultures that behave in a way that they consider polite and others not. Politeness is also present in language as Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness explains that using language in certain ways can be considered

⁴⁷ GEE, James, et al ibid

polite or not⁴⁸. If companies sell these programmes without an intercultural perspective, it can cause problems to travellers. Also, when everything is extremely informal, it is complicated to question something that happens in your workplace. Travellers can be in a complicated situation with this informality that does not erase horizontality but makes people think that they are close to their bosses when it is not the case.

Another example of how these programmes can be examples of the new work order is that depending on the programme there is not a separation between work and private life. The Au pair programme is supposed to be a cultural exchange programme. However, sometimes au pairs are treated just like workers⁴⁹ and not members of the family. If they are not treated like family members, they are just workers whose private life is shared with their workplace because they live typically with the family. How will au pairs complain or say no if they are part of the family?

Another point to highlight is that, according to these companies, we can use this experience for our professional life because it “*can look great in your CV*”⁵⁰. This is an argument that I have found on several pages of cultural exchange programmes that proves that now formal learning can be replaced by experiences. If I follow the logic, if you live abroad for three months and you learn English, it can be taken into consideration by a company rather than a formal degree. This is an example of the new work order too because according to the theory, “*schools and universities, especially as they are currently structured, no longer have a monopoly on learning, and indeed are not always well suited to the task*”⁵¹. Of course, that personal experience is important but employers should have personal experience in mind when they “build” an employee's profile. That is to say, employers can see in a travellers’ experience resilience or flexibility, but travelling three months in, for instance, the US cannot replace formal education in languages. Travelling does not guarantee that the person has learned the target language or has earned experience from their intercultural experience. In other words, new capitalism has taken cultural programmes from universities and institutions to sell them without necessarily taking into account what these exchanges entail.

⁴⁸ ANDERSON Catherine, et al, Essentials of Linguistics, McMaster University, Ontario

⁴⁹ KOPPLIN, Zack, “They think we are slaves”, op cit.

⁵⁰ Global work and travel <https://www.globalworkandtravel.com/working-holiday>

⁵¹ KOPPLIN, Zack Op cit, page 6.

Other characteristics present in these programmes are customization and hypercompetition. There is a discourse of building your working holiday trip⁵² that agencies offer personalised service for the clients and that they will have a coordinator to assist them. Every experience is supposed to be unique. Concerning hypercompetition, new capitalism “*asks workers to invest their hearts, minds and bodies fully in their work*”⁵³. If travellers are hired by employers who do not care about intercultural experiences, they can be asked to work really hard. The travellers can be emotionally involved which can make it difficult for them if they need to finish a contract or stand up for their rights.

Finally, there is no doubt that technology has changed how we live. Technology has brought the world closer to people than ever before. Now with a click you can find pictures or videos of other countries and you can also find these programmes. This is not exactly negative but we might not think that these cultures are extremely different, and so the culture shock could be worse.

In the following part, I will present interviews with travellers and an employee from an agency in order to compare the theory with their answers. I will focus on the experiences, how programmes are developed, and the goal of these programmes.

⁵² <https://www.yomeanimoto.com/>

⁵³ *The new work order behind the language of the new capitalism*, op cit page 7.

PART II: The people behind the programmes

In the previous part, I analysed why people travel and how these programmes can be presented as the answer to the psychology, economics and problems that some people have. Then I analysed the marketing behind these programmes - in other words, which techniques marketers used to attract travellers. Marketers use the Maslow's pyramid to understand human needs but they also use language, colours and images. I also analyse how these programmes' messages correspond to the message of the new world order⁵⁴.

In order to continue my analysis, I am going to describe the Au pair, Working Holiday, and Work & Travel programmes. I am going to explain how these programmes are organised. I am going to describe not only their legal framework, the benefits and duties but also the travellers and hosts' duties and benefits as well as.

Additionally, in order to gather more information about these cultural exchange programmes, I carried out some interviews. After conducting these interviews, I learned that the programmes have differences depending on the country. For this reason, I am going to compare the Au pair, Working Holiday, and Work and Travel programs from the United States and France.

Firstly, I am going to explain how these programmes function and their legal frameworks. Then I will do an analysis of the travellers' experiences. Finally, I am going to analyse their answers to highlight the issues that exist with these programmes using examples from the interviews carried out and by cross-referencing information from part I.

⁵⁴ GEE, James et al ibid

CHAPTER I: The theory

In this chapter I am going to describe the Au pair, Work and Travel, and the Working Holiday programme. In order to understand better how these programmes work, we first need to know the structure, legal framework and conditions. Also, I am going to highlight some points that I consider important to analyse in depth.

Firstly, I am going to explain how the Work & Travel programme in the United States and the Working Holiday programme in France work. The Working Holiday programme is a programme made for young people who want to travel and work. On the other hand, the Work and travel programme is a programme made for students who are currently studying in the university and want to travel and save money during their holidays. It is designed for people who do not want or cannot afford to travel. The requirements differ according to the country, but there are also similarities. In the following chart, I am going to briefly describe the different characteristics and differences. Then I am going to highlight the most important ones and analyse them.

Comparative chart Working holiday France - Work & Travel United States

	<i>France</i>	<i>United States</i>
<i>Age and marital Status</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 18 - 30 (35 Canada, Argentina, Australia) Single without children or dependent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 18 - 29. ➤ Single without children or dependent.
<i>Length of stay</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 3 - 12 months ➤ Not possible to reapply (except for Canada) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 3 months + 1 month free to visit the country. ➤ possibility to apply after returning to the home country.
<i>Academic status</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ non-obligatory academic status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Student - currently enrolled in a full-time course at the university or institution.
<i>Visa application</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ origin from a country with a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ intermediate or advanced

	bilateral agreement >Sufficient economic resources for the time you need to find a job. >Travel insurance >Clean criminal record >medical certificate > hotel reservation or letter from a host	level of English. >Medical insurance >Sponsor (a company that you hire). > 1000 dollars in your bank account. >SEVIS fee ⁵⁵
<i>Travellers must:</i>	>Return to the home country after the year (except Canada) >Find their accommodation >Find the job > Plane ticket or enough money to buy it.	> Return to the home country. >Find accommodation (Some employers provide a not-free accommodation). > Return ticket
<i>Employers must</i>	>35 hours per week > time for lunch > 10,57 per hour (11,12 dollars). Smic (minimum wage).	> 8 to 15 dollars per hour > 6 to 8 hours per day. > 1 to 2 free days per week. > Sponsor

One of the most important differences that I would like to highlight is the figure of the sponsor. The sponsors are organisations designated by the Department of State to administer exchange programmes⁵⁶. These sponsors are responsible not only for choosing the Exchange Visitor Programme but also for supporting and monitoring them during their stay⁵⁷. As Alexa, the commercial director of the cultural exchange programme company said in the interview, the

⁵⁵ Student and Exchange Visitor Information System

⁵⁶. “The Summer Work/Travel Exchange Visitor Program Frequently Asked Questions”, IEE. <http://www.ieexchanges.com/FAQSummerWT.html#:~:text=The%20Department%20of%20State%20designates,located%20worldwide%20to%20assist%20you./>

⁵⁷ U.S Department of State, “Common Questions”, BridgeUSA. <https://j1visa.state.gov/basics/common-questions/>

company in the home country of the traveller chooses and prepares the worker and the sponsor looks for the employers who want to have international support staff. Both companies, the sponsor and the company from the other countries, work together in order to match the participants and the job opportunities. Travellers cannot work in the US without a sponsor because the sponsor is in charge of providing the DS-2019 form.

The DS-2019 is a multi-purpose document issued by a U.S. government-approved institution (or organisation) certifying that your admission into a programme has been accepted and that you have demonstrated sufficient financial resources to stay in the U.S. for the length of the DS-2019 form⁵⁸.

Also, in the United States there is the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

It is an Internet-based system that provides tracking and monitoring, with access to accurate and current information on non-immigrant students (F and M visa) and exchange visitors (J visa). SEVIS enables schools and sponsors to transmit electronic information and event notifications, via the Internet, to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and DoS throughout a student's or exchange visitor's stay in the United States. SEVIS will be informed of status events for students and exchange visitors including, but not limited to, entry/exit data, changes of current United States address (residence), programme extensions, employment notifications, and changes in programme of study. SEVIS will also provide system alerts, event notifications, and reports to the end-user schools and sponsors, as well as for DHS and DoS⁵⁹ offices⁶⁰.

Travellers have to pay a SEVIS fee to maintain and upkeep this system.

However, in France travellers do not need a sponsor; they just need to present the documents required for the visa, have the sum⁶¹ of money requested by the government in their bank account and fill in a form that they can find online. Also, travellers do not have to be currently studying unlike the travellers that want to travel to the United States. Nevertheless, if travellers have doubts about the programmes, there are pages like www.yomeanimoyvos.com that can offer consulting services, insurances and language courses.

⁵⁸ University of California Berkeley, "Understanding Your DS-2019", International Office.
<https://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/immigration/ds2019#:~:text=The%20DS%2D2019%20is%20a,of%20the%20DS%2D2019%20form.>

⁵⁹ Department of State

⁶⁰ "The Summer Work/Travel Exchange Visitor Program Frequently Asked Questions" Op cit.

⁶¹ This amount of money may change from year to year.

Before describing the Au pair programme, I would like to comment about certain points on the Work and Travel programme. As I mentioned, in the US you have to be currently studying. I think that the fact of being a student reduces the chances for a traveller to want to stay in the host country which in a way reduces this natural immigration social process for humans as social beings. On the other hand, the fact that France does not demand a sponsor opens the opportunity to people who do not have the money to pay for a company. However, the lack of a sponsor to control employers can easily allow situations of labour exploitation and as sponsors are supposed to organise events for the travellers, this can make the cultural exchange more difficult to finalise.

Now I would like to describe the Au pair programme from the United States and from France. Even though the programme in both countries shares some similarities, there are also differences that can possibly change the experience.

Comparative chart Au pair United States - France

	<i>France</i>	<i>United States</i>
<i>Age and marital status</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 18- 28 ➤ single without children or dependent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 18 - 26 ➤ single without children or dependent
<i>Length of stay</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 12 months + possibility to reapply for a second year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 12 months + possibility to reapply for another year.
<i>Academic status</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ High school diploma or student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> .➤ High school diploma
<i>Visa application</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A family (contract signed) ➤ Clean criminal record ➤ Medical certificate ➤ Childcare experience ➤ Plane ticket 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Driver licence ➤ Sponsor ➤ Clean criminal record ➤ medical certificate ➤ no smoker ➤ 200 hours of childcare

		experience.
<i>Au pairs must:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Minimum French level or good English level. > Work 25 hours a week. > Take care of the children and take them to the school and their activities. > Help with light housekeeping duties. > Pay round trip ticket > First aid certificate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Intermediate English level > Attend a post-secondary educational institution > Work 45 hours a week. > Take care of the children and take them to the school and their activities. > First aid certificate
<i>Families must</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Independent room (or studio) + bathroom. > 80 euros per week. > One day off per week. > One weekend off minimum/month. > One-week paid holiday every 6 months. > Medical insurance - civil liability > Free time to study and visit > Transport cart 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Independent room + bathroom. > \$195,75 (week)/783 per month. > \$500 for studies > Plane tickets > Give 2 weeks paid holidays > 1 ½ free days per week > Hire a sponsor > Car > Health insurance

The most important point that I want to highlight is that in the United States there is the figure of the sponsor. The sponsor has to provide au pairs with training in child development and child safety before the au pairs are placed with their family. The Sponsor has to provide not only orientation about life in the United States but also information about the fees and other costs that the au pair will probably face. Au pairs cannot travel by themselves; they need to hire a company and the family needs to hire a company too. Also, the sponsor has to monitor

the physical location, progress and security of the au pair throughout the program. Another difference that I have found is that there is another important figure which is the Local Childcare Consultant. Having a Local Childcare Consultant is not obligatory for the sponsors, however, it is a figure that some companies in the United States have, for example, the company Cultural Care. According to the Local Childcare Consultant from Cultural Care, Joanne Dooley, a “local childcare consultant” (LCC) is:

“A confidante, a problem-solver, and a friend. They help interview new host families for the programme; they welcome new au pairs into their local communities; they ensure that both host families and au pairs fully understand the programme regulations and then abide by those guidelines. And of course, an LCC must be passionate about cultural exchange and the work they do day in and day out – they must love what they do, so the au pairs and host families they work with love the au pair programme in return.”⁶²

There are LCCs in the different areas where Cultural Care operates which help the company because without LCC Cultural Care can probably neglect the au pairs. Additionally, LCCs are in charge of organising monthly meetings for the au pairs so they can meet other au pairs from different countries. Even though LCC are not obligatory for the sponsors, I think this figure can make the difference when choosing a company. Also, I think that it can help foreigners to feel accompanied and they can also be supported by LCCs if they have issues with the host family.

However, in France, neither future au pairs nor the families have the obligation to hire a sponsor. Both families and au pairs can just register for free and create a profile in pages like www.aupairworld.com or www.aupair.com to find what they are looking for. These pages are free and offer some premium service ranging from 39,90 a month to 98,90⁶³ or 129,90⁶⁴ euros for 6 months. In figures 6 and 7⁶⁵, we can see the differences between a basic service (6) and a premium service (7) from www.aupair.com. In figure 8 we can see that www.aupairworld.com provides the premium options as well.

⁶² Cultural Care Au Pair, “Interview with a Local Childcare Consultant, CANDY PICNIC, 2018. <https://blog.culturalcare.com/stories/interview-with-a-local-childcare-consultant>

⁶³ MultiKultur e.K, “Au pair.com”. <https://www.aupair.com/> [Retrieved 15/03/22]

⁶⁴ AuPairWorld GmbH, “AuPairWorld Disclaimer”. <https://www.aupairworld.com/en/tos/disclaimer> [Retrieved 15/03/22]

⁶⁵ MultiKultur e.K, “Au pair.com”. <https://www.aupair.com/en/p-plans.php> [Retrieved 15/03/22]

- ✓ Host Families and candidates can create a profile and search for suitable candidates for free.
- ✓ Add candidates to your favorites list.
- ✓ Receive notifications when you are added as a favorite.
- ✓ Receive suggestions of profiles that match your search criteria.
- ✓ Get a list of visitors who have recently visited your profile.

Figure 6 Basic service⁶⁶.

- ✓ Contact candidates via personalized messages. So you can be sure that candidates can read your messages in any case.
- ✓ Read and answer messages from candidates and have the possibility to exchange further data.
- ✓ Read personal descriptions and get access to videos and references.
- ✓ Get access to a complete Au Pair contract with additional content, more information and answers to the most common questions.
- ✓ Receive a Host Family guide with additional tips and information about the Au Pair program, as well as helpful information on how to find an Au Pair.

Figure 7 Premium service⁶⁷.

When you register free of charge as a host family on AuPairWorld, you create a profile in which you can present yourself and your search criteria. You then can use [AuPairWorld's EasyFind](#) search functionality to view the profiles of the thousands of au pairs registered on AuPairWorld and look for the ones that suit your specific wishes. You can say "hello" to au pairs and host families to show your interest to them in the AuPairWorld messaging system.

But as a host family, you can only exchange personal contact details with au pairs and finally choose an au pair for your family if you have purchased a Premium Membership option. Au pairs do not need a Premium Membership.

Figure 8 Au pair free and premium service difference⁶⁸.

⁶⁶MultiKultur e.K, "Au pair.com". <https://www.aupair.com/en/p-plans.php> [Retrieved 15/03/22]

⁶⁷MultiKultur e.K, "Au pair.com". <https://www.aupair.com/en/p-plans.php> [Retrieved 15/03/22]

⁶⁸ AuPairWorld GmbH, "AuPairWorld Disclaimer". <https://www.aupairworld.com/en/tos/disclaimer> [Retrieved 15/03/22]

These Tinder-like ⁶⁹ webpages offer language and childcare courses or insurances but they do not offer figures like the LCC who can help the au pair or the family. Also, they offer advice for creating the contract, knowing the rights and characteristics of the programmes but they do not offer warranties or security⁷⁰.

Before finishing the chapter, I would like to highlight that while I was searching for the legal information, I found that www.aupair.com is managed by MultiKultur e.K, which is a German cultural exchange agency. This piece of information is paradoxical because agencies are supposed to be irreplaceable because they offer services to ensure security and support to the families and the au pairs as opposed to the pages.

The goal of this chapter was to understand how these programmes work and the main differences between the countries too. In the next chapters, I am going to not only analyse testimonies from the travellers that I interviewed but also testimonies from the news. The purpose of this is to verify if the variations in the programmes noted above can make the difference or not. Also, the goal is to identify and analyse the issues that these programmes present and propose possible solutions.

⁶⁹ Tinder is a dating app in which women and men create a profile for free but they can pay in order to see who has liked your profile, change their location and undo the swipes to the right.

⁷⁰ AuPairWorld GmbH, “AuPairWorld Disclaimer” <https://www.aupairworld.com/en/tos/disclaimer>

CHAPTER II: Experiences

In the following chapter, I am going to analyse different interviews carried out with five former travellers and Alexa⁷¹, the commercial director of a cultural exchange programme company. I interviewed four au pairs; two of them hired agencies, and the other two used webpages. Also, one of these au pairs went to the United States and France. I interviewed one woman who travelled with the programme Working Holiday and one who travelled with the Work and Travel and Au pair programme too. After understanding how these programmes work, I decided to continue with the analysis by interviewing the people “behind the theory”. My goal is to examine travellers’ answers to confirm whether the programme proposal matches with reality. Also, I am going to search if there are connections between the traveller’s answers and the theory dealt with in part I.

Firstly, I am going to talk about travellers’ experiences before travelling. In other words, I am going to explain why they decided to travel and how the process was done. In the first interview Lara (Interview N°1) explained that she was an exchange student in France in 2020 but due to the pandemic she could not practise her French and experience life in France. For her, coming back as an exchange student was not economically possible and she liked working with children, so she chose the Au pair programme. Belen, another traveller (Interview N°2), wanted to improve her English and she had just ended a difficult relationship. Additionally, during the interview Belen talked about how working in the US during the holidays was more interesting economically than working in Ecuador.

Then, there is Mariana (Interview N°3). Mariana wanted to do a cultural exchange programme, and she saw it as an opportunity to improve her English. It was difficult for her to speak in English and to participate in class. She travelled to France because when she was in Colombia she wanted to continue travelling and she felt she did not fit in anymore. Also, she studied French as well and she wanted to improve it and travelled. In the interview N° 4, Mar said that

⁷¹The names of the travellers and the commercial director of the company interviewed were changed.

she has studied French since she was 12 years old. She was studying to become a French teacher, but she did not like it so she decided to travel as an au pair to France. She enjoys spending time with children and the Au pair programme was cheaper than other programmes. For her, three months as a tourist was not enough to acquire a language. The last interviewee, Darla (Interview 5), always wanted to travel and she did not like her job. After being fired she decided to do a Working Holiday programme.

In figure 9, in order to follow the same logic from part I, I placed the travellers' names in Maslow's pyramid. The names are repeated because, as I mentioned in part I, human beings are complex social animals hence there is never just one reason.

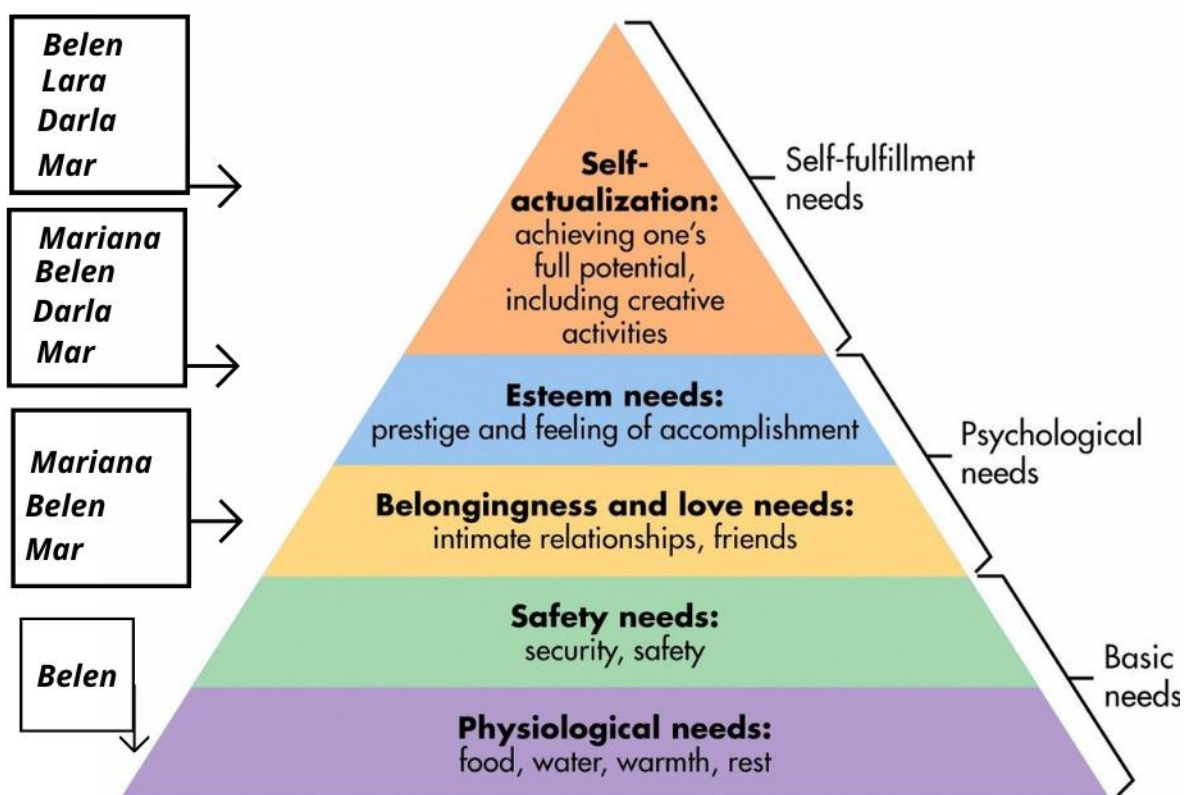


Figure 9: Maslow's pyramid with travellers' reasons for travelling.

As I previously pointed out, Belen mentioned that working in the United States was better economically speaking and that is why I placed her in Physiological needs. All the interviewees argued that one of the reasons for choosing the programmes was because it was the most economical way of having an intercultural experience. This choice does not mean that all travellers should be placed in the physiological needs stage, given that the majority did not travel because they needed the money.

I decided to place Mar and Mariana in the Belongingness and love needs stage because the last two interviewees did not fit in their home country anymore. I placed Belen in the same stage too because she probably mitigated her sentimental problems by means of travelling. As the therapist Kathleen Hendrik Ebbitt says

“After a breakup, you’re going through withdrawal- the dopamine, the oxytocin, the serotonin, all those hormones that love produces for you are no longer there...I think travel can be really great after a breakup. It can stimulate your brain and encourage new connections within your cerebral matter”⁷².

Then, I placed Mariana, Belen, Darla and Mar in the Esteem needs stage because they were not satisfied with their life or academic performance at the moment. Mariana needed to improve her communication skills in English but she wanted to be more communicative in general, which can be part of a personality trait that she wanted to improve. Finally, I placed Belen, Lara, Darla and Mar in the Self-actualization stage because they wanted to improve their second language level and because Darla and Mar were not happy with their careers so they were searching for their purposes in life.

Before continuing analysing the process of travelling, it is necessary to clarify how they learned about the programme. Three of the interviewees discovered the programmes by means of friends, family or acquaintances and two of them found out about the programme via the internet.

⁷²SPURRELL, Megan, “After a Breakup, Travel Is Sometimes the Only Answer”, Condé Nast Traveler, 2021. 31 <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/traveling-after-a-breakup#:~:text=One%20reason%20that%20I%20think,even%20leave%20home%2C%20experts%20say.>

Now that we understand why they travelled I am going to briefly explain how they proceeded with the paperwork. As I described in the previous chapter, in the United States, travellers must hire an agency and both the travellers who went to the US and Alexa confirmed that. Also, thanks to three of the testimonies of the travellers to France, I confirmed that it is possible to hire a foreigner, as an au pair or independent worker, without third parties.

On the one hand, there are the travellers who hired agencies. After paying the fees, they received the list of documents that are required for the visa. Then, they had talks about how the programme works and about the interview in the consulate. On the other hand, there are travellers who did not hire agencies and did everything by themselves; they used the internet to get the documents requested and to find the families/job offers. Regarding the agencies, Alexa said that there are always two agencies that have an agreement of cooperation. That is to say that there is one agency in the country of the traveller and one agency in the host country. The travellers only pay for the agency in their home countries and the families or employers pay for the agency in the host country. Alexa also said that agencies in the home country are in possession of the legal documents that we mentioned in the previous chapter, the SEVIS and the DS-2019 document.

Now that we learned how they proceeded with the paperwork I am going to continue with their experiences. Before travelling the interviewees claimed to be excited about it but they were also worried about the visa and getting the families/job offers. Darla, Belen, Lara and Mar mentioned that they had imagined things that did not correspond to reality. This was not necessarily negative but they also mentioned negative aspects that I am going to deal with in chapter III. Regarding the experiences, travellers were mostly happy to have travelled because most of them improved their language skills. Additionally, they argue that the places, the good moments and the people that they met were the reasons why they did not regret travelling in any respect. I would like to share some of the answers about their favourite moment of the experience:

Mariana: “I made the most of my trip. I did things that I don't think I would have been able to do while in Colombia.”

Darla: “to know places or meet people, to share with others”

Lara: “The best time is when I'm with the host kid, because we laugh, because I feel like I'm accompanied by her.”

Mar: “a ritual we used to do with the host kid on Saturday mornings or when he didn't have school and I was bored. I would prepare my mate⁷³ and we would both go to the Sena to sit and read because he loved to read, so we would go and sit and do that. Those moments were great. I had a great time and it was like a moment of exchange because he would tell me what he was reading. We shared mate because I had accustomed him to drink mate, so it was very nice that moment.

What I want to emphasise is that most of them chose, from all the moments they experienced, a moment that they shared with people. This corresponds to the social need of human beings that I mentioned in the introduction and with the Belongingness and love needs stage from Maslow's pyramid.

In terms of cultural exchange, some of the former au pairs mentioned some moments in which they shared their culture with the host family that they enjoyed. Mar commented that her last family was the best of the families she had. She claims that:

“They were the ones who included me the most, they made me go to a lot of places. The family spoke Spanish too and the grandparents were very present. They talked with my grandmother, with my family too. They were really interested in my culture and they were also interested in my life in general. It was like “Mar, how was your day, what did you do, what are you going to do”, they were interested in my projects, always, until today. One Sunday I organised a meal and they helped me to cook, we made empanadas⁷⁴ and the father whenever he could, he brought a piece of meat from Argentina and told me, “Look Mar, I brought you this”. Or the mother once saw empanadas in the supermarket and bought empanadas and said “oh let's try them and see if they are as good as yours”. When a new Argentinean restaurant opened here in the city, we went to have lunch”.

As regards Work and Travel and Working Holiday experiences, the travellers mentioned moments that they shared with other travellers from all over the world. Darla confessed that

⁷³ Typical drink of South America.

⁷⁴ South American typical dish.

she met people from her home country because she needed it but that she also met a lot of people from all over the world. On the other hand, Belen said she is a sociable person and said that:

“I met a lot of people. There were 55 communities in that park⁷⁵. We were in the coolest community, and it had the best atmosphere. Then there was a bar, every day we would go to parties, there was a machine that played music. Every day we played music, we danced, it was great. There were even ping pong championships, so that is how I met a lot of people. That was the best summer”.

These examples highlight how personalities, and experiences, may vary. On the one hand, Darla argued that she needed contact with people from her country. On the other hand, Belen criticised a little bit the travellers that shared only with their compatriots and that did not acquire the target language. However, both enjoyed meeting people from other cultures.

Finally, it is important to accentuate the fact that all the travellers had to undergo a long process before travelling. They had to study the target language to acquire some language skills, and one of them paid for an official language exam. They had to pay significant sums of money but only some of them could recover their investment and earn extra money. Some of them had to volunteer in programmes with children to get more hours of experience. As I mentioned above, they had to pay the agency as well as medical examinations and certificates. Considering that all of the travellers said that they also chose these programmes because it was the cheaper way to travel, this investment could prove how interested they were and how much effort they made to travel.

After all the answers analysed, I could conclude that these travellers are happy about their experiences and they did not regret travelling. However, there were challenging situations that proved how these programmes need to be analysed critically. As I talked to the interviewees about the agencies and webpages, some of the travellers started to complain about how companies claim how wonderful the programmes are. Also, they argued that they were not satisfied with some of the agencies that they hired and that some families were abusive on different levels. This is why in the next chapter I am going to describe the negative aspects of

⁷⁵ Yellowstone National Park

the programmes and the companies that promote them. This critique will be constructive and as objective as possible because I will also include the opinion of Alexa who started to work with one of the exchange cultural companies after being an au pair in France.

CHAPTER III: Not everything that shines is gold

In the previous chapter, I dealt with the experiences of the travellers. After analysing travellers' answers, I placed them in Maslow's pyramid and I compared the answers with the theory dealt with in the previous chapters. Even though the travellers were content about the moments they lived, there were situations that were serious and complicated. In this chapter I am going to describe the aspects of the programme that should be improved. I am going to not only compare the travellers' answers with the description of the programme and part I's theory, but I am also going to add some information about subjects that I considered relevant.

In the first place, I am going to talk about the services provided by companies. According to Alexa the company where she works offers counselling not only in matters of papers but also in cultural aspects.

“We get them the job; we give them access to a lot of vacancies and we accompany them in the process of choosing one. We prepared them for the interviews and once they have everything defined, we give them the documents necessary to get the visa. We prepare them for the interview with the consul, they come to the office and we do a checklist and we make sure that they are presenting everything they need to travel. And then once they get their visa approved, before they travel, we do a "pre-departure" talk, which is a talk that prepares them for their stay there and everything that it entails, the changes, the culture shock, what to do at the airport, what to do in case of... And also, when they enrol in the programme, we do a “Welcome session”, which is a talk to explain how the whole process is going to be, step by step and that they have to submit documentation and how to prepare the profile, how to choose the job”⁷⁶.

However, I talked with one of the interviewees that travelled with the same agency and I learned that she had not received a talk on cultural aspects⁷⁷. According to the interviewee, she was not prepared by the agency and they almost lost the documents that she handed over to the agency. This situation may have been due to apparent changes in personnel at the time but all travellers should have received the services they paid for. Also, the same interviewee compared both agencies and said the agency from France helped her to search for another family during

⁷⁶ Appendix: Interview 6 Alexa the commercial director of the cultural exchange programme company

⁷⁷ Appendix: interview N° 4

her first week in France because things did not function well. On the other hand, Belen⁷⁸, who travelled to France from Ecuador said that the agency from her home country looked after her because they called her and wrote to her. However, the agency from France did not contact her - even during the pandemic.

In contrast, according to the interviewee⁷⁹ who hired the company from the United States, the agency responded correctly and she was accompanied all the time. The au pairs were accompanied by the figure that I mentioned in part I, the LCC. This interviewee mentioned a situation that was solved by the help of the LCC and she said she could not complain about their work. Regarding the work and travel programme, the interviewee N°2⁸⁰ mentioned that the agency from her home country was in charge of the paperwork but that they do not have to assume any responsibilities if you have a problem in the host country.

Before moving to the web pages, I would like to emphasise one of the phrases that one of the agencies told one former au pair: “Your profile fits perfectly with the programme that you have chosen”. This kind of phrase corresponds to a persuasive speech to convince travellers that they are special and it corresponds to a tool used by marketers: selective choice of language.

As regards the pages like www.aupairworld.com, www.aupair.com and www.yomeanimoyvos.com, they do not offer the same services that the agencies because they do not have agreements with an international agency. The interviewees who chose to find host families with these pages did not pay anything. One of the travellers also chose the pages because according to the testimonies of former au pairs who belong to certain Facebook groups of former and current au pairs, it was not obligatory for the visa to hire agencies and that they are useless⁸¹ in France.

⁷⁸ Appendix: interview N°2

⁷⁹ Appendix: Interview N°3

⁸⁰ Appendix: interview N°2

⁸¹ Appendix: interview N°1 and interview N°3.

When I discussed these issues of organisation with Alexa, she claimed that agencies hire a lot of coordinators and it is impossible to control all of them. She argues that sometimes things work well and sometimes not but that when they have issues with another agency, they stop working with them. For example, they work with an agency in Austria and they stopped working with them because, according to her, they did not work correctly⁸².

Now I would like to describe the problems that travellers had during their experiences. First, I am going to refer to the Au pair programme and then to the Work and Travel programme. All of the au pairs mentioned that they felt exploited to different degrees. The most common problems were related to schedules, chores, private life, and roles. By way of illustration, I am going to cite some of the examples they provided:

Lara: “the parents arrive and stay with the child a little bit and then if they want to go out again, they say like “again, stay with her”. “I accepted to work 33 hours per week and it was like that at the beginning, but now I think I work 40 hours per week and I am tired.”

Belen: “It was a form of exploitation, they had me as a maid, cleaning and cooking and cleaning and cooking. It was not fair. The payment was not fair for the work I was doing.”

Mariana: “I had to wash not only the children's clothes, but also the mother's clothes. Everything, cleaning the whole house, vacuuming everything. But I was practically the one who had to be in charge of what to do, what to do without food...”

Mar: family N°2: “it did bother me that she didn't take care of her son. I was the second mother.” Family N°3: “The house where I lived, it was only me and it was very big. There was the bottom part and the top part. They wanted to build in the top part, so they started to clean at the time when I was living there. At one point the mother grabbed me and said “Mar, we are going to clean” and I did not want to clean and it was not working hours, but I still went and said “yes, I will help you”. That's when I felt like I was being used because I was on my day off and I didn't really feel like doing that.”

What we can see from these examples is that all of the interviewees had problems at different degrees. Some families did not respect the role of an au pair and forced them to clean and do more tasks than the task they were supposed to do. Others did not respect the schedules that au pairs had and did not pay the extra hours. Some families did not respect the place that the au pair has in a host family as a “big sister” because in a way they function as a replacement for a parent. Finally, one of the big issues is privacy. As I mentioned in the first part, the new work

⁸² Appendix, interview N°6

order theory mentions how not having a division between work and private life can cause problems. These examples could demonstrate that. Also, one of the interviewees claimed that she did not want to stay at the house because she knew that they would make her work because she was “there”. In other words, the au pairs were not the owners of their free time.

When I asked Alexa about these kinds of situations, she responded:

“I had friends in Paris who ironed the clothes of the whole family and they were very happy to be in Paris so they didn't mind at all. It didn't bother them and they thought it was part of the job and they did it and the families were very nice. And then you have someone who suddenly says "I don't want to iron the old man's shirt" and they get really angry and say, "I want to change my family because that's not what I came for.”⁸³

In opposition to the Au pair programme, Work and Travel and Working Holiday travellers did not have problems with the separation of private life and the workplace. Both travellers argued not feeling particularly exploited by the employees but that the tasks were hard. Darla said that there were situations but she knows that happened in her country too. She argued that in France all work-related matters, for example, the payment and the conditions were fair for her. She did claim that there was a difference between a “Working holiday visa” and a work visa in New Zealand because with a work visa she had more benefits. However, they both argued that the hard work is part of jobs that locals do not want to do. Additionally, Darla mentioned that in Australia employers proposed her working off the books and that she had to accept because she was running out of money. Belen also said that one of the companies was looking for excuses to fire employees before giving them the “attractive bonus” proposed at the beginning of the year if they worked well. As we can observe in figure 10, abusive situations happen even in the United States where there is no possibility of working without sponsors who are supposed to take care of travellers.

⁸³ Appendix: interview 6.

Exchange Student Jorge Rios Exploited by a Pennsylvania McDonald's

Opposing Views Staff • Updated: Mar 1, 2018 • Original: Mar 12, 2013

Argentinean foreign exchange student Jorge Rios claims that a McDonald's he worked at failed to pay overtime and threatened to deport employees who complained.

Rios, 27, participated in a work travel program with a McDonald's franchise in Harrisburg, Penn. He says that he paid \$3,000 to participate in the program. According to Rios, the franchise was guilty of exploiting 18 students from Latin America and Asia. The students all paid \$3,000 to \$4,000 each to participate in the U.S. State Department's J-1 Summer Work Travel Program.

Figure 10: case of summer work and travel program exploitation⁸⁴.

The next point that I would like to describe are problems that travellers had in relation to culture. For some of the interviewees, the cultural aspect was not present in their experience. I would like to share some testimonies:

Belen: “I brought them gifts from Ecuador, that also made me sad because I had brought them, for example, a little gift, an ornament to put in their office and they kept it in a closet. I had also brought them other ornaments that the dog ate and went to the garbage. I brought them a blanket. Well, they used it a lot. So, they were interested, but what they needed was help with the girls.

Mar: The worst moment was when the mother in Paris told me that I could not stay in the house for Christmas and New Year because she wanted to be alone with her boyfriend. I didn't know what to do, I had been in Paris for 3 months and I didn't know where I could stay.

Lara: I don't know if it has to do with the character of the French or what. It's like they ask you something and, as a Colombian, I answer and add more details to continue the conversation. But they say, "I asked you just this, just answer me that and that's it." “I also tried to make meals, Colombian food and I remember that the father of the family told me “Ah well, it is something different for us”, he did not say, “oh, how do you do it, what do you add, nothing”. I mean, it's not like they are interested in my culture but they have shown me many things about France.”

⁸⁴“Exchange Student Jorge Rios Exploited by Pennsylvania Mcdonal's”, *Opposing views*, 2013.
<https://www.opposingviews.com/category/exchange-student-jorge-rios-exploited-pennsylvania-mcdonald-s>
[Retrieved 15/01/22]

If I have in mind that the most important moments chosen by the interviewees, in general, were moments with people, I can come to the conclusion that these travellers probably suffered the rejection of their presence or their culture. One of the reasons why these travellers decided to do these exchange programmes was to have a different experience but finally they felt rejected. If we take into account the theory of the Affective filter⁸⁵ of the linguist Stephen Krashen, these negative emotions can produce a sort of “wall” that interferes with language acquisition.

What Alexa answered in regard to this issue is that au pairs should ask families what they expect from their au pairs and that they should express what they want. She claims that there are au pairs, mostly au pairs that have travelled several years, that only want to travel and do not care anymore about exchanging with their families - even though she says this is not common. Also, Alexa says that there are families that need someone in their homes because they work a lot and they have found in the au pair the figure they needed. In conclusion, according to Alexa, it is a matter of communication.

However, some au pairs claimed that some families lie or omit information. For example, two of the interviewees said that the families told them that there were no transportation problems and there were activities to do in the city they lived in, which was not true. Also, one of the families omitted that one of the children had serious anxiety problems. So, yes communication is important but there are some subjects that cannot be controlled by the au pair by themselves, especially taking into account that they are alone in the country. This kind of resilience position asked of the au pairs also matches with the spirit of “be your own boss” aspects of the New Work Order. By assuming that au pairs should ask everything, we are taking the responsibility not only from families but also from the companies and governmental institutions.

On the other hand, Alexa also said they had received complaints about some au pairs because they, for example, were speed driving or having inappropriate behaviour. Additionally, she

⁸⁵ “The hypothesis declares that a student's anxiety, low self-esteem, or lack of motivation can serve to cause a mental block preventing the successful acquisition of a second language”. IGI Global, “What is Affective Filter Hypothesis”, IGI Global Publisher of Timely Knowledge. <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/affective-filter-hypothesis/790#:~:text=1.,acquisition%20of%20a%20second%20language>. [Retrieved 30/04/22]

claimed that the agencies cannot control everything. Alexa says that, as it happens with families that lie, au pairs are also supposed to meet the requirements but the agency is not a 100% sure if it is always the case.

In conclusion, it is important to hear both sides of the story in order to have an objective opinion. However, there are some aspects which are neglected because the business of selling a programme or having cheap labour are more important than the people involved. There are situations that are difficult to control that occur because people are, as I mentioned before, complex. It is not a coincidence that these aspects are related to Maslow's pyramid. These issues are connected to needs, emotions, mental health, information, cultural awareness and control. All the actors involved should consider improving these aspects in order to protect not only the travellers but also the families and workers.

CONCLUSION

Culture is intrinsically part of human beings. When we interact with each other, we evolve. We transform each other's words physically, physiologically and socially. As humans we socialise and move from the beginning of our existence. We move to satisfy basic needs that several years after were studied by psychologists like Abraham Maslow. But we also move searching for meaning, experiences and connections. Within these connections, language is our tool *par excellence*. Languages are not only tools to communicate in order to survive but also to create concrete things like songs and stories and abstract things that can influence our cognitive processes.

There are people from different countries who feel the need to travel following their inquisitive spirit. These adventurers have different conscious and unconscious reasons that give them the impulse to travel. This need for travelling led them to search for cultural exchange programmes that allow them to travel in an easy way. These programmes were created with a noble purpose: to promote countries, make connections and to promote values such as empathy, understanding and respect of other cultures. Although there are people who read “culture exchange programmes” and think about experiences, there are others who think about products to sell.

In a world where capitalism allows us to sell even culture, it is important to rethink the basis of what we sell. The reason why I decided to do research on cultural exchange programmes is that it would appear that culture has started to be just a product. In order to understand this topic I did research about travelling, cultural programmes and I carried out interviews. By cross-referencing the information obtained, I have been able to catch a glimpse of the different aspects of the complicated subject that is culture and human beings.

Non-tourist travellers found in these programmes a way of satisfying their different psychological, physiological and basic needs. The agencies and webpages that sell the programmes provide an offer by means of marketing services that will not only satisfy basic

needs but also emotional needs and self-actualization needs. The travellers that I interviewed enjoyed the experiences they had. Most of them highlighted moments that they shared with the hosts or other travellers, illustrating how important it is for humans to socialise.

However, they also complained about the problems they had. They argue that the agencies did not fulfil their needs and that there are hosts that did not care about their culture. Also, they protested about the conditions in which they lived and how they felt exploited by hosts too. As I mentioned before, if basic, psychological and self-fulfilment needs are not satisfied this could affect the traveller and create barriers for acquiring languages. On the other hand, a representative of an agency argued that travellers also did not fulfil their obligations and that they made mistakes.

It is clear that this is not a simple issue to address. Humans are complex and the activities related to them are complex as well and there will always be conflicts. We cannot control each individual action. However, we can control the collective. That is to say, if we create tools and respect them correctly, these problems could be reduced.

In this world where the message of informality causes confusions, where verticality is disguised as horizontality, where you can be your own boss but cannot control your working conditions, where the workplace is “perfect” or where there is no place for privacy, it is important to rethink our practices. It is important to create not only figures that serve as intermediaries but institutions and laws that really control the conditions.

When it comes to selling a cultural programme, culture cannot be ignored. Agencies should provide real talks about culture shock and culture differences. Additionally, those that do not work with the figure of the LCC should include them in order to take care of travellers and families. Also, they should not only provide talks on culture but also promote cultural events in which travellers can exchange with other travellers.

On the other hand, families should not be forced to search in a cultural exchange programme the solution for an economic problem. Governments should offer real solutions to those families not interested in other cultures and that cannot afford childcare. However, not only agencies should control families and employers. Employees from municipalities should control families and employers frequently in order to check if there are no cases of exploitation in the communities.

These cultural exchange programmes are valuable but if they are not improved, they will only lead to more misunderstanding and frustration for all the actors, mainly the travellers. Even though travellers can make serious mistakes, the relationship between hosts and travellers is a relationship of power. As in every relationship of power, the dependent part is more vulnerable.

The analysis leads to the following conclusions: culture is not a product. It cannot be sold as a simple product because it is essential for human beings. However, there are products that can be sold if we embellish them with a cultural concept. As humans are complex, there is not a simple answer to improve these programmes but they can be improved collectively. They can be improved if we take into account what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman said: culture is full of ambiguities, is novelty and tradition and is unexpected and predictable.

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