Gender and Mobility: Insights into the field of Physics

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3. Mobility and personal development

Personal development as a motivation factor

Literature tells us personal development is often mentioned as a motivation factor for international stays [1)]. Interviewees, both women and men, also stated that experiences abroad contribute to personal development. They see benefits in knowledge growth, the widening of perspectives and increase in more confidence and independence. Moreover, improvement in technical as well as in methodological competences and improvement in a foreign language can be established.

"Obviously, it enriches your skills." (female, senior scientist) It seems as if mobility is an "*[...] occasion for personal and career enrichment."* (female, young scientist) International stays foster one's career but primarily they affect personal experiences [2)].

"In a general point of view, it's always useful for young people to travel. You need to discover new people, new ways of thinking, new cultures. It makes you more confident, more independent." (male, senior scientist) *"For me it has been a great experience and I would have not wanted to miss it. [...] For me personally the experience was much more important than the work."* (male, senior scientist)

Women's value of personal development

The differences between women and men when it comes to personal development in general are not as great as expected. Both, women and men mentioned that being mobile advances not only professional but also personal progress. *"You need to have mobility; otherwise you won't get a position. It is also important for your image."* (female, senior scientist)

Some statements given by male scientists have had a restrained character with regard to their personal experiences. Female scientists spoke more often about increasing competencies and learning new skills. They tended to be more open in terms of speaking about personal development than their male counterparts. Most of the female scientists stated that they felt an increase in self-confidence while they were abroad. *"You gain [thanks to mobility] this kind of self-confidence that you are recognized not only here at home, but also that you are important for someone abroad, you feel appreciated."* (female, senior scientist)

Cooperation fosters intercultural skills

An important aspect is the development of intercultural 'soft' skills. This effect was correlated with cooperation in international teams. *"To collaborate with other researchers enriches you, in my opinion foreign experiences are very important because [they] allow you to see things from another*

perspective." (female, senior scientist)

"It's a good chance to exchange ideas. When you go to visit different laboratories, meet new physicists, it's the occasion to enlarge your knowledge and research." (female, young scientist)

By working in these international teams specific networks can be assembled and extended. However, not only the network is helpful, but also the contact to experts in one's specific field. This is underlined by the statement "*It is crucial and good for self-esteem to create networks; social and professional skills become better."* (female, senior scientist) On the one hand personal and intercultural skills can be fostered e.g. by participating in workshops or talking at international conferences. "*You cannot perform if you don't go to conferences, workshops. You need to be part of the culture, otherwise you cannot get it."* (male, young scientist) On the other hand, these meetings and international cooperation help to enlarge a network you can use afterwards.

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1)
Netz, N., Schirmer, H., 2016, p. 11
2)
Minssen, H., 2009

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