A study on the reactions of different cultures reactions to foreign students visiting their town/cities and a comparison of European city and village cultures

Abstract

The aim of the expedition for this report was to experience and compare the differences between cultures in small villages and large cities in the same country and also across different European countries. Another aim was to learn about the different reactions different locations have to visiting students in their area. Consequently this report gives a broad overview of the different cultures experienced whilst visiting the many areas of Europe.

Introduction

On the exhibition, the majority of the stay was is French towns and cities, therefore the most accurate and reliable views of the different cultures in a country would have been of those collected in France. The other countries visited were Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Belgium and Austria. Even though in Liechtenstein and Luxembourg a wide range of small villages to large cities were visited, due to the small nature of these countries, little difference was noted and therefore little comparison could be made. Unfortunately only two very close towns could be visited in Austria, and therefore not much of the towns and cities in Austria could be compared for differences in cultures. I the other countries visited, sufficiently different sized towns and cities were visited to make a fairly reliable comparison.

Method

In order to collect an accurate and reliable set of views in the areas visited, a large selection of public areas, for instance; cafes, bars, museums and public squares, were visited where local residents were asked a set of questions in conversation. The questions asked aimed to find the view and first impressions of the resident upon seeing the foreign students in their area. Other questions were also asked to find their views on surrounding countries and cities and also to find out more about their culture. These questions were asked in convocation rather than as a written survey, as to receive a, what was felt to be a more honest, informal answer. Another good source of data was found in asking the owners of the campsites stayed at and also the others staying at these campsites. Also, attempts were made to have most of the convocation in the residents language, which was generally more appreciated than introducing and speaking in English right from the start.

Figure 1.1: A map showing the route of the exhibition and therefore a selection of the areas of which data was collected from. (More cities and villages than shown, were visited)
Results

In the wide range of French areas visited, from the biggest of cities like Paris, to extremely small villages like Piffonds (which consisted of two shops, a church and a castle), there was a huge difference in the attitudes towards English students in their area. In smaller places like Piffonds, Saulieu and Sochaux, the view on these young English students in their town first seemed to be a little uncomfortable, but once chatted to, especially so in Piffonds and Hazebrouck, the residents became very friendly and helpful. The friendliness, and interest in visiting foreigners in these small towns was well represented when in Hazebrouck, whilst getting I was getting out of the car, a French man exclaimed that the cars steering wheel was on the right of the car, asking if I was English, ending the conversation with “bienvenue” (welcome in French). In the large tourist cities like Paris, Versailles and Lille, the general impression was a lot frostier, with a lot less interest in and visitors. At some points it seemed the local residents were even disgusted at the presence of English students. This view on visitors only seemed to be different with residents that regularly served or talked to tourists, for example at the Eiffel tower. This frostiness was explained to us later to be because of the young English student who, most of the time, only come to the large French cities to drink a lot of alcohol and then usually cause disruption.

When visiting Switzerland, it was expected that the same trend would be seen, but generally the opposite was observed. In the large cities like Bern, the residents were very welcoming, sometimes joking about how I was from a different country. In the smaller towns however, the locals seemed to have more xenophobia of visiting foreigners and therefore were a bit more reluctant to chat. Liechtenstein in most parts adopts the Swiss cultures and views, so was expected to have the same views on visitors, but as a result of the country being so small, in every town visited, the residents were very cheery and welcoming. This was enhanced by almost all the residents knowing a lot of very good English.

The same general impression as Liechtenstein was found in Luxembourg due to the country again being very small. Although Luxembourg did seem a lot more businesslike and busy with the local residents having a lot less time to spend talking to visiting students.
Austria, in the few towns visited, was found to be not very welcoming, with most of the residents of the local towns being very off-hand and sometimes scary. Of course this still had some exceptions, for instance when the car broke down, an Austrian at a car dealership supplied me with the one part replacement I needed free of charge. Also there was an exception at a local bar where the landlady too great interest on where I was from and was very friendly.

Germany was a very difficult country, in regards to analysing the cultures. Most of Germany was extremely friendly, in both the large and small towns and cities. This was most apparent when in a small microbrewery where, in order to talk to us in English, the landlady brought out their chef who talked better English. Also in this brewery, the locals who usually visited the brewery, seemed very entertained and interested at English students.

Finally, most of Belgium was extremely friendly, and happy about English visiting their country. This seemed mostly due to their respect for what the commonwealth did for their country in both world wars, this was especially apparent in Ieper, where there is a huge commonwealth memorial at which buglers play the last post every night at 8pm without fail, in respect. Another factor emphasising this view was found when talking to a Belgian on a campsite who preferred talking to British than to another Belgian from the other side of Belgium’s very strong cultural north-south divide. The friendliness was less strong though in Brussels where you were generally treated as just another tourist they did not particularly want to talk to.

Conclusion

In general, the smaller villages of each country had a more intense but similar view on visiting English tourists as the larger cities. Also the smaller countries seemed in general to be a lot friendlier and welcoming to visitors than the larger ones. It must be noted that this is only a general overview and that most places visited did have some exceptions to the generalisations made.