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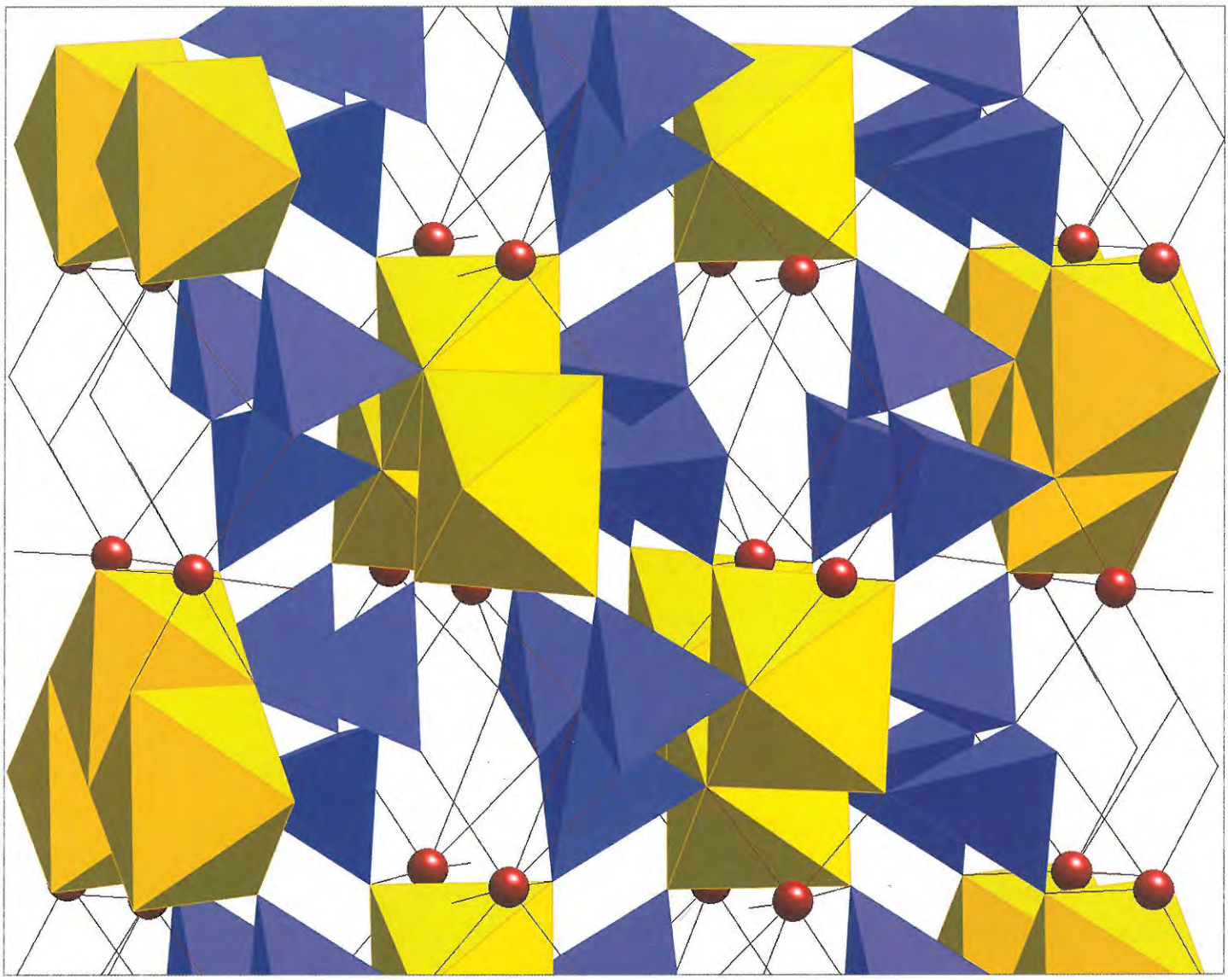

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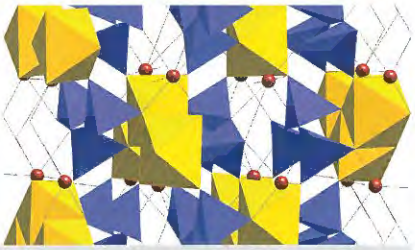
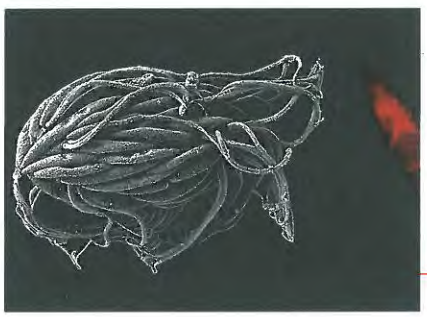
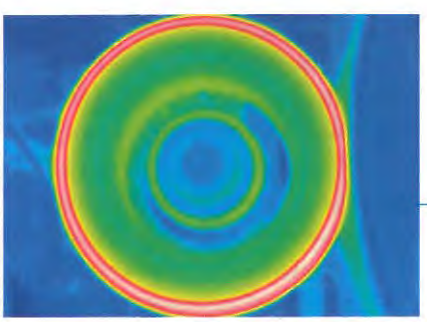


Cover: GFZ Potsdam

Structure of the mineral enstatite, a chain silicate from the pyroxene family of rock-forming minerals (Colour code: blue: SiO_4 tetrahedra, yellow: MgO_6 octahedra, red: magnesium).





Susanne Krogull and Annette Scheunpflug

Illustration: Welsch / Deutsche Pfadfinderschaft Sankt

When Good Intentions Aren't Enough

Youth exchange programmes between industrialised and developing countries are flourishing. But how do they help young people learn more about world society? An empirical study shows that the pedagogical setting and organisational framework are decisive factors.

Learning to understand globalisation is an important educational goal. In order to understand political and economic processes, interrelationships in a global context, tolerance and interculturality, it is crucial to have a global perspective. This can be acquired through numerous learning opportunities, including travel and international exchanges. Educational trips and exchanges for young people have been popular ever since the Second World War, as European cooperation and German-American understanding increased. But it is well known in pedagogical research that they do not always, or automatically, remove prejudices or build mutual understanding.

For over ten years, exchange programmes for young people have taken place not only in Europe and North America, but also in devel-

oping countries. In Germany, the federal and state governments promote and encourage such trips, for example through a development-oriented schools exchange programme known as ENSA, with the motto "Learning to see one world". Until recently, little was known about the demonstrable effects of such programmes. But what do young people and young adults aged between 14 and 20 actually learn from these trips? And what lessons can we draw from this with respect to the process of learning about world society? The research project is concerned with the experiences, reflections and learning processes of young people and young adults who participated in two- to four-week trips, six months to two years after returning home. Participants were selected from among young people in Germany, Bolivia and Rwanda, with those from an industrialised nation having visited a developing country and vice versa. Contact was made with the young people and the group discussions, usually involving four to eight participants, were recorded.

In this way it was possible to reconstruct the learning experiences of one group from Germany who travelled to Rwanda, four groups from Germany who travelled to Bolivia, and eight Rwandan and nine Bolivian groups who travelled to Germany. In total, the views of over 130 young people were incorporated in the empirical study. What were the key findings?

Firstly, it is too optimistic to expect the visit to automatically produce an understanding of the economic and political situation in the host country. Instead, rather like analyses of intercultural learning in Europe, it is apparent that a carefully supervised "pedagogical learning setting" is necessary to stimulate interest where none was previously present, to challenge stereotypes and to promote understanding. If the young people receive no guidance, prejudices are often reinforced. Simply living in another culture does not create understanding, especially not with respect to complex development issues.

However, if young people receive such guidance, for example by being encouraged to reflect on their experiences or being made aware of other points of view in evaluation discussions, they gain a better understanding of global interrelationships. Working together on a "third topic" also facilitates the process of learning from each other. In other words, an exchange is more effective when participants not only experience the local culture but either engage with a third topic (such as climate change) or participate in a group activity (such as renovating a kindergarten).

Secondly, the study shows that the organisational structure of the groups is significant. School groups are markedly more snscep-

A tent school in Rwanda (left) and a primary school classroom in Germany. The vast differences between developing and industrialised countries aren't limited to the home environment for children and young people.

Illustration: Susanne Krogull

Illustration: Dieter Schütz / pixelio.de

tible to the reinforcement of prejudices and feelings of superiority or inferiority than groups from international youth organisations. School groups may generate a climate in which, as with the presumed situation in the classroom, differences are put down to differences in individual effort and ability, with social and political factors not being taken into account. School groups from the North exhibit orientations that could be described as assistance-oriented, paternalistic and with a tendency to romanticise poverty. One German high school pupil, Nadine (all names have been changed), said after a four-week school trip to Bolivia: "The people there are different from people here, very open, friendly. You get to know new people quickly. There is always a good atmosphere, almost everywhere. Even the poor people seemed to radiate something, a kind of cheerfulness."

School groups from the South tend to be deficit-oriented and not infrequently romanticise affluence. François, a high school pupil from Rwanda, was particularly struck by two things: "Flying to Germany in an aeroplane, travelling to another conntry, another continent, that is very good. That is the first thing. And the second thing for me was visiting a white [emphasis] family. We shared meals at the same [emphasis] table. That is the second thing." Feelings of inferiority and superiority are in evidence.

In other words, these groups lack the (thought) categories with which to approach these experienced differences constructively. By contrast, young people in youth organisations which are internationally organised and permit a high degree of codetermination (such as scout associations), exhibit greater sensitivity to development issues. In the case of yonng people belonging to organisations with strongly uniform traits (such as Catholic youth groups travelling as part of church activities), the characteristic trait of this institution is dominant, with the result that experiences of foreignness take a back seat. Thirdly, we were able to demonstrate that it is clearly necessary to possess sufficiently differentiated knowledge about societal structures, societal orders and different concepts of society before a trip in order to

Discussing and reflecting as a group: The "written conversation" is a useful technique. It presents questions, answers and thoughts generated by a group.

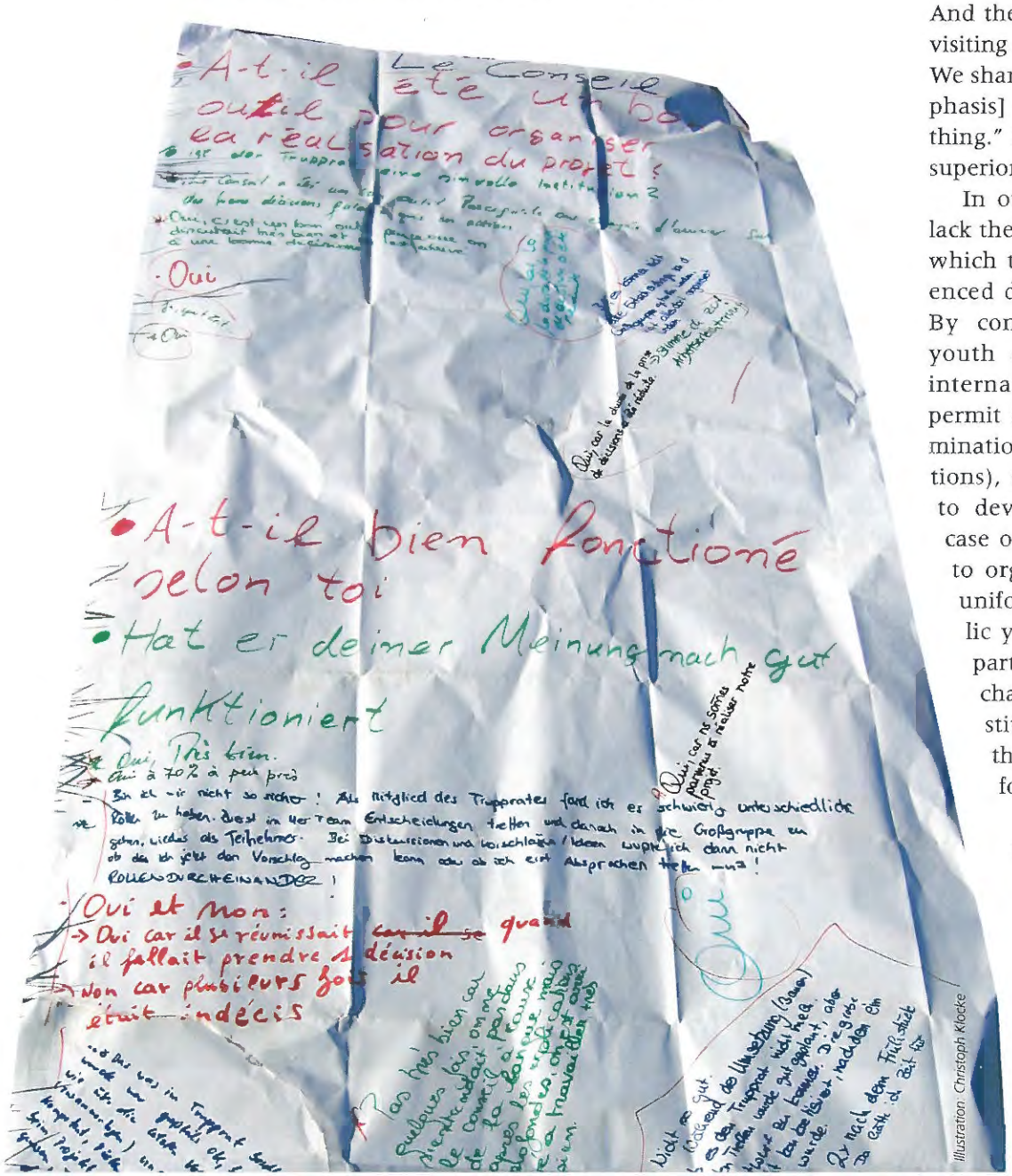


Illustration: Christoph Klocke

Buying fruit and vegetables: on the left a "colourful" farmers' market in Bolivia, on the right a neatly arranged display in a German supermarket. Outer appearances are one thing, different business mentalities another.

perceive to any degree the world society dimension of globalisation. Young people from Rwanda, who come from an environment in which the contractual nature of a society is absent but where family structures and values constitute the dominant pattern, often only notice differences in close personal proximity, such as food, clothes and people's houses. Monique, a high school pupil from Rwanda, mainly noticed the differences in building styles: "Buildings in Germany are different from those in Rwanda, because we use small bricks and the Germans use large bricks." This pattern is less frequently and less markedly observed in participants from Germany and Bolivia.

Only once an individual understands that a social order is based on a set of rules created by people will he or she be interested in the way these rules are organised in other countries. Pablo, a Bolivian teenager who belongs to a youth organisation, says: "I really think I have learned something very important about what a new concept of order is: order in society, order in behaviour, order in a whole society that works to make a society what it is." Here we see evidence of abstract ideas being perceived and reflected on in an international context.

The research findings provide an important foundation for further research in political education. For example, the contractual nature of society, mentioned above, has scarcely been touched on in international comparative studies on political education. Our study provides encouragement to those who for some time have been calling for differentiation in this area. The results may also be of use in the design of funding programmes for international trips of this kind. Finally, they suggest a wide range of preparatory didactic measures that could be used prior to a trip, including exercises for changing perspectives, management games relating to the contractual nature of societies, and others. This too could help young people travelling to and from the global South to better perceive development challenges – and gradually, it may be hoped, to better understand them.

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