

The SAREP Project, ‘Study Abroad Research in European Perspective’

A research note on COST Action 15130

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This research note presents a short synopsis of the recently established project ‘Study Abroad Research in European Perspective’ (SAREP), funded in 2016–2020 by the European agency COST (Cooperation in Science and Technology). The report outlines the aims and objectives of SAREP and gives details of the Working Groups. It also presents an overview of the first event held in Vilnius, Lithuania on 13–14 October 2016 followed by a further event held in Lund, Sweden on 6–7 April 2017, and gives further information on SAREP’s activities.

Keywords: study and residence abroad, second language acquisition, interculturality, mobility

This research note presents a short overview of the recently established COST Action entitled ‘Study Abroad Research in European Perspective’ (SAREP). Funded by the European agency COST (Cooperation in Science and Technology) supporting transnational cooperation between researchers, SAREP has over 100 members, including both established and early career researchers from across Europe as well as from so-called ‘International Partner’ and ‘Near-Neighbour’ countries. The Action, which will run until 2020, is chaired by Martin Howard (University College Cork) and the Vice-Chair is Carmen Pérez-Vidal (Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona), while the Management Committee includes members from 30 countries across Europe.

In keeping with the COST programme objectives, the specific aims of SAREP are in the areas of research coordination and capacity building, specifically looking to:

- enhance understanding of the role of study and residence abroad in foreign language learning
- assess the role of study and residence abroad across a range of areas of development

- facilitate the dissemination of research findings
- coordinate the organization of events
- facilitate the exchange of ideas
- create synergies between researchers
- develop a broader and more defined research agenda

More details can be found at: <http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/ca/CA15130>.

The Action includes five Working Groups which allow the different members to focus on a particular theme or methodology and to work more closely with colleagues. They provide a backdrop for the Action in terms of its overall aims and objectives. The Working Groups are as follows:

- Working Group 1: Methods and measures of input and second language development, chaired by Jonas Granfeldt and Marianne Gullberg (Lund University)
- Working Group 2: Linguistic and cognitive factors impacting language development, chaired by Maria Juan-Garau (University of the Balearic Islands) and Carmen Pérez-Vidal (Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona)
- Working Group 3: Integration and social networks in residence abroad, chaired by Henry Tyne (University of Perpignan)
- Working Group 4: Individual differences in study abroad outcomes, chaired by Rosamond Mitchell (Southampton University)
- Working Group 5: Interculturality and diversities in stays abroad, chaired by Fred Dervin (Helsinki University).

The project held its first joint Working Group meeting on 13–14 October 2016 at Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius, Lithuania, hosted by Irene Žemaitaitytė and Inga Gaižauskaitė. The key to this first event was 'understanding'. That is understanding the remit of each Working Group; understanding the agenda of SAREP and the issues to be addressed over the course of the Action; and also understanding just how to benefit from its inherent richness, both in terms of the participants themselves (from 30 different countries) and their disciplinary backgrounds. And in a sense, we might say that SAREP was giving itself a dose of its own medicine, as for the most part the people involved were in a foreign environment (in Lithuania) and were interacting in a foreign language (English). And certainly a lot of understanding did happen, enabling those present to engage more fully with a range of issues arising from the various presentations and discussions.

During the meeting in Vilnius, specialists other than those already involved in running the Action (Kata Csizér, Fanny Forsberg Lundell, Adrian Holliday, Jan Hulstijn, Noriko Iwasaki, Celeste Kinginger, Àngels Llanes, Imma Miralpeix, Tiina Räisänen, Rebekah Rast, Victoria Zaytseva) were invited to set the scene for each of the Working Group themes, giving an overview of existing research

questions (and findings) and suggesting new ways forward and new questions to be addressed through the Action. Of particular interest was the scope for overlap and shared concerns between Working Groups. However, there were also specific discussions within each of the Working Groups and these were followed up by a mapping session during which members were invited to contribute to redefining the outcomes in the light of the presentations, looking at how their Working Group could in turn contribute to the wider community by offering an agenda supportive of ensuing research relating to key areas of investigation (whether in terms of language acquisition and intercultural awareness, or methodology and tools, or in terms of language policy and educational issues, etc.).

Another important topic emerging from the Vilnius meeting was the extent to which study abroad research should (or should not) remain within the confines of its perceived boundaries. To put it differently, what other areas or angles of research (whether into second language acquisition, sociology of migration or whatever) can impact upon our understanding of what it means to acquire and use language in a study or residence abroad context (in every sense of the term)? For example, if we take the third Working Group, focusing on integration and social networks, by extending our scope of enquiry to include research on migration and transnational practices more generally, we may find new and interesting questions, methods and results that are not typically associated with study abroad research despite the obvious links. Similar issues apply to the other Working Groups.

In Vilnius, many useful discussions were set in motion and together these will fuel the Action's multi-thematic and transdisciplinary contribution to study abroad research. By drawing on the collective concerns of actors in different settings, whose primary concerns may not be related directly to areas traditionally covered by existing study abroad research, the Action aims to contribute to our overall understanding of language acquisition and language use in an ever-expanding context of mobility and multilingualism. To quote the COST initiative's stated intentions, through extensive collaborative work, the SAREP Action aspires to contribute to "closing the gap between science, policy makers and society throughout Europe and beyond" <http://www.cost.eu/about_cost>.

The Action's next event was a workshop organized by Working Group 1 in Lund, Sweden on 6–7 April 2017 around the theme of 'Exploring and contrasting measures of linguistic development'. Keynote lectures were given by Emma Marsden on 'Opening up the science in second language acquisition research' and Joost van der Weijer on 'Statistical analysis in the language sciences'. The workshop included a number of training events on tools and instruments available at the Humanities Lab at Lund University which were of particular interest to PhD students and early career researchers. The training sessions focused on 'Designing, using and analysing corpora' (Frida Splendido); 'Experimental design'

(Victoria Johansson); 'Keystroke logging' (Johan Frid); and 'Video and audio' (Peter Roslund).

A number of events are planned in the second year of the Action: a meeting of Working Group 3 in Perpignan, France; and conferences on the themes of 'Criticality, interculturality and study abroad' (Turku, Finland, 29 August 2017), 'Promoting success in study abroad: responding to individual differences' (Split, Croatia, 21–22 September 2017), and 'Study abroad: moving forward on the linguistic and cognitive fronts' (Palma de Mallorca, Spain, 26–27 September 2018). Other SAREP activities include Short-term Scientific Missions (STSMs) which allow researchers at all levels to spend time at a host institution of their choosing, in order to benefit from expertise in specific areas. Applications for STSMs are welcome from all colleagues.

If you are interested in finding out more about the SAREP COST Action, visit the website at: <<http://sarepcost.eu/>>. You can also follow SAREP on Twitter: @COSTStudyAbroad.

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