

Costs and Benefits

Kieran Holm

What can you learn by living in another country or having someone from another country live in yours? The most obvious things are experiencing foreign languages, cultures and customs. There are probably more important things that come about as a result of the experience than just those however. People who go through the ups and downs associated with this experience are usually better off in the long run.

The first skill that one develops is the ability to adapt to different situations. The process is probably not noticeable initially because the person is caught up in the newness of it all. The language barrier needs to be overcome but that is only done with time so the first few weeks are spent learning how to communicate through gestures and then basic phrases. The other culture can be completely foreign and therefore seemingly simple events take on a new complexity. One must make the effort to observe and refrain from acting in undue haste or risk committing a cultural faux pas. Similarly customs are different and it takes time to learn the acceptable behavior patterns for daily interactions for which most people simply take as automatic. Even after living in a foreign country or around people from other countries for a lengthy period of time there are always more customs to be learned.

The second skill that people develop is perseverance. While the process of adapting to new situations is ongoing there are numerous occasions when one might doubt their ability to continue. The frustration felt from not being able to communicate for the first time since early childhood, is usually the most difficult to overcome. There is only so much information that can be exchanged through simple phrases and gestures. Eventually one of the parties involved must make the effort to communicate more fluently in the other's language. Culturally speaking the complete foreignness of the events taking place can cause people to withdraw rather than risk exclusion based on being different.

Both sides need to expect and accept periodic culture clashes as one of the costs associated with reaping the rewards of the experience. It is only through mutual perseverance that everyone can overcome the difficulties. It is only through mutual understanding that both can benefit.