

TIME, EXPOSURE AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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This study examines how the duration of study abroad is associated with perceived changes in national identity. The aim was to address a gap in understanding whether time spent abroad may be linked to specific attitudinal shifts. The study uses a retrospective pre-post design with 308 international students in Hungary, grouped by time abroad, and analyzes perceived changes across four identity dimensions: national sentiment, patriotism, nationalism, and collective narcissism. While no significant between-group differences emerged, the within-group results suggested that perceived changes were concentrated in the more defensive and superiority-based dimensions of identity. Specifically, a significant decrease in nationalism and a marginal decrease in collective narcissism were observed in the three-or-more-years subgroup, while affective and pride-based dimensions remained stable or showed slight increases. This research contributes by identifying duration as a potentially relevant factor and by distinguishing between different dimensions of national identity in the study abroad context.

DOI

[https://doi.org/
10.18690/um.epf.7.2026.27](https://doi.org/10.18690/um.epf.7.2026.27)

ISBN

978-961-299-166-1

Keywords:

study abroad,
national identity,
identity change,
international students,
social sustainability,
duration of exposure



University of Maribor Press

1 Introduction

The relationship between studying abroad and the transformation of national identity is an increasingly important concern in international education research. As global student mobility accelerates, understanding how prolonged exposure to a foreign society shapes attachment to one's home country becomes more relevant. While existing research shows that international students often experience identity development, acculturation, and increased intercultural competence, these changes are neither uniform nor linear. Instead, they depend on multiple factors, including individual motivation, the host environment, and, critically, the duration of time spent abroad.

Among these, duration is emerging as a potentially relevant yet underexplored variable. Recent evidence suggests that only extended immersion, typically three or more years, may be sufficient to reshape more deeply rooted national attitudes. Such exposure has been linked to reductions in nationalism and marginal decreases in collective narcissism, whereas shorter stays appear insufficient to alter these more rigid dimensions (Szigeti et al., 2025).

Importantly, national identity is unlikely to change uniformly across its components. More affective and secure forms of attachment, such as national sentiment and patriotism, tend to be relatively stable, whereas defensive and superiority-based dimensions, such as nationalism and collective narcissism, may be more responsive to contextual influences. Accordingly, this study adopts a multidimensional approach, allowing us to distinguish between general identity change and more selective shifts in its rigid components.

This distinction is also relevant from a broader societal perspective. Although multicultural exposure is often associated with concerns about the erosion of national identity, theory suggests that constructive forms of attachment, particularly patriotism, are not necessarily weakened. Instead, intercultural experiences may primarily reshape more defensive and exclusionary elements.

1.1 Research gap and hypotheses

This focus on duration reveals two key gaps in the literature. First, while developmental and migration research examines identity over time, it rarely isolates voluntary, extended residence abroad as a primary explanatory factor. In contrast, study-abroad research typically emphasizes short-term outcomes and overlooks potential threshold-like patterns, where deeper changes emerge only after prolonged immersion.

Second, the most entrenched dimensions of national identity, particularly nationalism and collective narcissism, are usually treated as predictors rather than outcomes. Although widely linked to political behavior, prejudice, and conspiracy beliefs (Golec de Zavala, 2024; Cichoka & Cislak, 2020; Cislak & Cichoka, 2023; Marchlewska et al., 2022; Guerra et al., 2020), their potential to be reshaped through lived intercultural experience remains largely unexplored.

The present study addresses these gaps by (a) grouping international students based on duration of stay, including long-term residence, and (b) examining multiple dimensions of national identity simultaneously. This approach enables testing whether prolonged immersion is associated with selective changes in defensive forms of identity rather than a uniform transformation.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: International students report significant changes in national identity dimensions after studying abroad in Hungary.
- H2: Perceived changes in national identity differ across dimensions, such that affective attachment (national sentiment) shows a different trajectory than superiority- and defensiveness-based dimensions (nationalism and collective narcissism).
- H3: The duration of stay abroad is associated with the magnitude of perceived change in national identity dimensions.
- H4: Students with longer exposure (3+ years) exhibit greater decreases in superiority- and entitlement-based identity dimensions (nationalism and collective narcissism) compared to students with shorter stays.

2 Dimensions of national identity: national sentiment, patriotism, nationalism, and collective narcissism

Research distinguishes between various dimensions of national identity. Nationalism and collective narcissism are more resistant to change and may require prolonged immersion to shift, whereas other facets, such as intercultural competence and hybrid identity, may develop more rapidly. The literature also highlights the importance of distinguishing between these constructs in both measurement and intervention design.

The present study focuses on four distinct but related dimensions of national identity that are rarely examined together in the study abroad context.

National sentiment (or national attachment) is a broad, affective attachment to the nation: feelings of closeness, warmth, and satisfaction with the national ingroup, without implying hostility or superiority (Bakó & Szeberényi). Work differentiating national ingroup satisfaction from more defensive national attachments shows that mere satisfaction is psychologically distinct from nationalism and collective narcissism and is less strongly tied to prejudice. (Gustavsson, 2019; Zakirova, 2025; Szeberényi, 2025) The term is sparingly used in academic research, it was chosen to serve as a positive, general term for positive feelings towards one's own nation.

Patriotism is typically defined as a positive, value-laden commitment to the nation, compatible with critical reflection and not inherently exclusionary. Recent work distinguishes open patriotism from closed, ethnocentric nationalism and emphasizes its potential to support democratic, outward-looking forms of belonging. (Huddy & Khatib, 2007) At the same time, conceptual critiques warn that empirical scales often blur patriotism and nationalism and underplay contextual variation. (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; Nedzinskaitė-Mitkė & Stasiulis, 2022; Bitschnau & Mußotter, 2022)

Nationalism denotes a stronger belief in national superiority and a desire for the nation to dominate or be prioritized over others, often accompanied by exclusionary attitudes and support for invidious comparisons with other countries. Psychologically, nationalism is strongly associated with status competition and negative intergroup outcomes and can be empirically separated from benign national attachment. (Mayall, 2023; Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; Fűrész et al, 2025)

National narcissism (collective narcissism) captures a defensive belief that the nation is exceptional yet insufficiently recognized by others, combining grandiosity with chronic sensitivity to disrespect. National narcissism predicts nationalism and support for populist, anti-democratic, or aggressive policies above and beyond secure national identification. It is linked to conspiracy beliefs, prejudice, and hostility, and is consistently distinguished from secure, non-narcissistic national identification. (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Golec De Zavala, 2023; Cichoka & Cislak, 2020; Cislak & Cichoka, 2023; Marchlewska et al., 2022)

By differentiating these four dimensions, the study moves beyond global “national identity” measures toward a more fine-grained view of how emotionally warm, critical, superiority-oriented, and defensive forms of national attachment may respond differently to extended residence abroad.

3 Time abroad and identity change

Growing cross-border student mobility has intensified interest in how study abroad experiences reshape national identity. Existing work shows that international experiences can foster intercultural competence, challenge stereotypes, and stimulate reflection on one’s own cultural background, but also that contact is often shallow and immersion incomplete. (Sobkowiak, 2019) Time abroad is usually treated as a control or linear predictor rather than a theoretically central variable, so the conditions under which extended immersion transforms core national attitudes remain poorly specified.

This gap in the study abroad literature is somewhat surprising, given that time has been central in developmental research on ethnic, national, and personal identity among migrant and minority youth, where longitudinal models track changes across several years in relation to school context, perceived fit, or acculturation experiences. (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2021; Gharaei et al., 2024) These studies highlight that national identity is dynamic and can evolve in response to social environments, but they typically focus on early adolescence in the receiving country rather than on voluntary student sojourners choosing to live abroad.

Work on study abroad and international education mostly investigates intercultural competence, contact patterns, and self-reflection, sometimes noting that sojourns can prompt reconsideration of home-country norms and identity. However, time abroad is usually operationalized in relatively short windows (e.g., one semester or one academic year) and linked to outcomes such as language gains, intercultural sensitivity, or stereotype change (Sobkowiak, 2019) rather than to differentiated forms of national attachment, nationalism, or national narcissism. Longer residence abroad, or comparisons across substantially different durations, are rarely theorized as potential threshold-like patterns for deeper shifts in entrenched national beliefs.

There is also a growing body of cross-sectional and longitudinal research on national identity and national narcissism that treats these constructs as relatively stable correlates of political attitudes, prejudice, or conspiracy beliefs, rather than as potential outcomes of international mobility. (Guerra et al., 2020; Cichoka et al., 2022; Cichoka & Cislak, 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2022; Guerra et al., 2020) Large, multi-country studies show that national narcissism varies systematically across national contexts (for example, being lower in more globalized societies), (Cichoka et al., 2022) suggesting that features of cross-national exposure matter. Yet, such work typically operates at the level of macro-indices of globalization, not at the level of individuals' accumulated time living abroad.

4 Methodology

4.1 Participants and Procedure

An online survey was distributed among international students studying in Hungary to collect data. The analysis included a total of 308 valid responses. Participants came from 56 different countries and were in different disciplines, study programs and levels, which made sure that their academic backgrounds and national origins were different for a more varied picture. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

For the purposes of this study, we asked students how long they had lived and studied in Hungary, and we used that information to make three exposure groups: less than one year, one to two years, and three or more years. We designed these

categories to capture short-, medium-, and long-term immersion in the host country (Hungary).

4.2 Measures

Twelve statements that represented four theoretically different dimensions (national sentiment, patriotism, nationalism, and collective narcissism) were used to measure national identity. There were three items in each dimension.

National sentiment encompassed expressions of emotional attachment and constructive loyalty (e.g., profound attachment to one's country, endorsing the nation while remaining open to critique). Patriotism encompassed pride-associated sentiments, such as pride in historical context, progress, and national accomplishments. Nationalism evaluated comparative and superiority-oriented convictions (e.g., the conviction that one's nation is superior to the majority). Collective narcissism assessed defensive and entitlement-driven national sentiments (e.g., the conviction that the nation merits preferential treatment or is inadequately esteemed).

A retrospective pre-post format was used to measure perceived changes over time. Each participant rated each item twice: first, they recalled how they felt before they went abroad ("before") and then they reported how they feel now ("after"). We used a Likert-type scale to rate all of the items.

To get a composite score for each dimension, we took the average of the three items. Change scores were calculated by subtracting pre-mobility scores from post-mobility scores, with positive values signifying an increase and negative values signifying a decrease in the corresponding identity dimension.

4.3 Analysis

There were two steps in the data analysis. First, paired-sample t-tests were performed on the entire sample to evaluate the overall differences between pre- and post-mobility scores across the four identity dimensions. Cohen's *d* was used to figure out the size of the perceived change by calculating effect sizes.

Second, to investigate the relationship between exposure duration and variations in perceived identity change, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed on the calculated change scores among the three time-abroad groups. Post hoc comparisons were used to look at differences between groups when it made sense to do so. Before comparing groups, we checked to see if the variances were the same. IBM SPSS Statistics 27 software was used for the analyses.

We used standard statistical methods for all of the analyses, and we looked at statistical significance at conventional thresholds.

While the study does not directly measure social sustainability as a separate construct, it approaches it as an interpretative framework. Specifically, shifts in national identity dimensions are examined in terms of their potential implications for socially sustainable attitudes, such as openness, reduced defensiveness, and compatibility with intercultural coexistence.

5 Results

5.1 Overall perceived pre–post change in national identity dimensions

Across the full sample of international students in Hungary ($N = 308$), the retrospective pre–post comparisons suggest that national identity does not shift uniformly. Instead, the observed pattern is characterized by broad stability with small, directionally meaningful movements in selected dimensions (Table 1). On average, national sentiment increased slightly from pre to post, patriotism remained essentially unchanged, nationalism remained stable, and collective narcissism decreased slightly. These descriptive trends already signal that studying abroad may affect different components of national identity in distinct ways rather than producing a single general “increase” or “decrease” in national identification.

Paired-sample tests (Table 2) confirm this overall profile. National sentiment showed a marginally significant change, indicating a small increase in emotional attachment and constructive loyalty ($p = .053$). Importantly, this effect was small in magnitude (Cohen’s $d = -0.111$ based on the pre–post difference direction), suggesting that the shift is subtle rather than transformative. Patriotism did not change significantly ($p = .677$), indicating that pride in national history, national

development, and national achievements remained stable across time. Nationalism also did not change ($p = .974$), showing that attitudes related to national superiority or unconditional support toward one’s country were not generally affected in the overall sample. Finally, collective narcissism showed a marginal decrease ($p = .089$) with a small effect size ($d = 0.097$), suggesting a weak but directionally consistent reduction in defensive entitlement-based national attitudes.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and mean change for national identity dimensions (N=308)

Identity dimensions	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	Change (Post-Pre)
National Sentiment	3.56 (0.70)	3.62 (0.77)	+0.06
Patriotism	3.81 (0.89)	3.82 (0.90)	+0.02
Nationalism	2.77 (0.98)	2.77 (1.01)	+0.00
Collective narcissism	3.07 (0.86)	3.02(0.95)	-0.05

Source: own editing with SPSS software

Table 2: Paired-samples t-tests for pre-post change (N=308)

Identity dimensions	Mean diff (Pre-Post)	95% CI (Pre – Post)	t(df)	p	Cohen’s d
National Sentiment	-0.060	[-0.120, 0.001]	-1.942 (307)	.053	-0.111
Patriotism	-0.015	[-0.087, 0.056]	-0.417 (307)	.677	-0.024
Nationalism	-0.001	[-0.066, 0.064]	-0.033 (307)	.974	-0.002
Collective narcissism	0.052	[-0.008, 0.112]	1.707 (307)	.089	0.097

Source: own editing with SPSS software

Taken together, the full-sample analysis suggests that study abroad in Hungary is not associated with widespread shifts in national identity across all dimensions. Instead, it is associated with modest movement at the level of national sentiment and collective narcissism, while patriotism and nationalism remain stable in the aggregate. This multidimensional outcome is theoretically meaningful: it implies that affective attachment and defensive group entitlement can move independently of pride-based patriotism and superiority-based nationalism, and that the “national identity” construct may be too heterogeneous to interpret as a single trajectory.

5.2 Duration of stay and between-group comparisons

A central aim of this study was to examine whether time spent abroad differentiates perceived identity change, under the assumption that longer exposure may be necessary for shifts in deeper and more resistant attitudes. To test this, change scores were compared across three time-abroad groups: less than one year, one to two years, and three or more years. The between-group analyses using ANOVA found no statistically significant differences for any of the four identity dimensions (Table 3). In other words, when the question is asked directly as “Do longer-stay students change more than shorter-stay students?”, the answer is not supported by between-group significance testing in this sample.

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA on change scores by time abroad (N=308)

Identity dimensions change score	F (2,305)	p
National Sentiment change	0.391	0.677
Patriotism change	0.067	0.935
Nationalism change	0.522	0.594
Collective narcissism change	0.355	0.702

Source: own editing with SPSS software

This finding is important because it suggests that any duration effect is not strong enough to emerge as a clear group-level separation. The lack of significant ANOVA results may reflect several realities: 1) large individual variability in identity trajectories, 2) subtle effect sizes that require more statistical power or more sensitive measures, and 3) the possibility that duration does not operate as a linear driver of identity change. It also suggests that conclusions about “time abroad” should not be framed as deterministic. The data do not support a simple dose-response model in which each additional time category yields progressively stronger change across all dimensions.

However, the absence of between-group significance does not imply that duration is irrelevant. It implies that duration does not generate clean, strong, and consistent differences in mean change across groups under conventional significance thresholds. For interpreting identity change, this distinction matters: identity processes can display meaningful patterns that do not appear as strong between-group effects, especially when subgroup sizes are modest and changes are small.

5.3 The within-group pattern by time abroad

Although ANOVA did not reveal statistically significant group differences, the descriptive change scores by time group reveal a coherent within-group pattern that helps explain why the full-sample results look mixed (Table 4). In particular, the 3+ years group shows negative change scores in nationalism and collective narcissism (indicating decreases), whereas the shorter-duration groups show either minimal change or slight increases. The pattern is modest, but it is consistent with the conceptual expectation that the most resistant dimensions of national identity may require prolonged immersion to soften.

Table 4: Descriptive change scores by time abroad group (N=308)

Identity dimensions change score	<1 year (n=105) M (SD)	1–2 years (n=120) M (SD)	3+ years (n=83) M (SD)
National Sentiment change	0.025 (0.544)	0.089 (0.571)	0.064 (0.481)
Patriotism change	0.013 (0.567)	0.003 (0.643)	0.036 (0.717)
Nationalism change	0.013 (0.529)	0.025 (0.540)	-0.056 (0.694)
Collective narcissism change	0.010 (0.727)	-0.003 (0.663)	-0.068 (0.591)

Source: own editing with SPSS software

This is clarified further by within-group paired comparisons (Table 5). For nationalism, only the 3+ years group shows a statistically significant pre-post change ($p = .035$), reflecting a decrease in nationalism within that group. The effect size is small-to-moderate by the standards of social identity change research ($d = 0.234$), and the direction is theoretically meaningful: the longest-exposure group becomes less likely to endorse superiority-based or unconditional national claims. The shorter groups show no significant changes, although the 1–2 years group trends toward an increase in nationalism ($p = .097$), which may reflect a transitional period of identity defensiveness for some students, or simply random variability.

For collective narcissism, the 3+ years group shows a marginal decrease ($p = .057$), again aligning with the idea that defensive entitlement-based beliefs may soften after prolonged exposure. The shorter groups do not show meaningful movement in this dimension, with p -values far from conventional thresholds. This provides a plausible explanation for the weak full-sample trend: the overall marginal decrease appears to be driven largely by the long-duration subgroup.

Table 5: Within-group paired t-tests highlighting the long-term group pattern (N=308)

Identity dimensions	Time group	Pre M	Post M	Mean diff (Pre – Post)	t(df)	p	Cohen’s d
National Sentiment	<1 year	3.616	3.683	-0.067	-1.439 (104)	.153	-0.140
National Sentiment	1–2 years	3.542	3.558	-0.017	-0.321 (119)	.749	-0.029
National Sentiment	3+ years	3.520	3.635	-0.115	-1.865 (83)	.066	-0.203
Patriotism	<1 year	3.829	3.918	-0.089	-1.761 (104)	.081	-0.172
Patriotism	1–2 years	3.769	3.817	-0.047	-0.857 (119)	.393	-0.078
Patriotism	3+ years	3.837	3.714	0.123	1.431 (83)	.156	0.156
Nationalism	<1 year	2.813	2.844	-0.032	-0.663 (104)	.509	-0.065
Nationalism	1–2 years	2.808	2.892	-0.083	-1.674 (119)	.097	-0.153
Nationalism	3+ years	2.671	2.508	0.163	2.145 (83)	.035	0.234
Collective narcissism	<1 year	3.146	3.137	0.010	0.222 (104)	.825	0.022
Collective narcissism	1–2 years	3.064	3.003	0.061	1.031 (119)	.305	0.094
Collective narcissism	3+ years	2.984	2.889	0.095	1.928 (83)	.057	0.210

Source: own editing with SPSS software

For national sentiment, the 3+ years group again shows the strongest upward trend ($p = .066$), while shorter groups show minimal or non-significant change. This suggests that prolonged study abroad may coincide with a slight increase in constructive attachment to one’s home country rather than erosion of belonging. Importantly, this rise in sentiment coexists with reductions in defensive and superiority-oriented dimensions, supporting the interpretation that identity change is not “less national” overall, but “less defensive and more reflective” in the long term.

Patriotism behaves differently. The pattern across groups is not consistent and does not support a clear duration-based mechanism. The less-than-one-year group shows a marginal increase ($p = .081$), while the 3+ years group shows a non-significant decrease ($p = .156$). Combined with the null full-sample effect (Table 2), this suggests that pride in national history and achievements may be relatively stable, and potentially shaped more by stable socialization and cultural narratives than by the study abroad experience itself.

5.4 Integrating the findings across dimensions

The most informative aspect of these results is the divergence between identity dimensions. National sentiment trends upward, nationalism trends downward only in the longest-duration group, and collective narcissism shows a marginal decrease in that same group, while patriotism remains largely stable. This pattern offers a nuanced account of identity change that is more nuanced than general accounts that frame study abroad mainly as increasing global citizenship.

Rather than replacing national identity with cosmopolitan identity, the data suggest the possibility of a selective restructuring of national identity content. Affective attachment and constructive loyalty can slightly strengthen over time abroad, potentially through mechanisms such as nostalgia, reflective comparison, or renewed appreciation of one's home culture. At the same time, prolonged intercultural exposure may reduce defensiveness and superiority-based beliefs, which are conceptually closer to nationalism and collective narcissism.

This distinction matters because it speaks to social sustainability implications without forcing them. In multicultural environments, socially sustainable outcomes are not necessarily about weakening national identity. They are about whether national identity becomes compatible with pluralism and intercultural coexistence. A small reduction in rigid and entitlement-based attitudes among long-term sojourners can be interpreted as movement toward more socially compatible identity orientations, while the preservation or slight strengthening of sentiment suggests that this does not require detachment from one's national belonging.

Importantly, these within-group patterns should be interpreted as descriptive rather than as statistically confirmed differences between duration groups. While the observed trends are theoretically consistent, the absence of significant between-group effects in the ANOVA analysis means that conclusions regarding duration as a determining factor should be treated with caution.

6 Conclusions

This study set out to examine whether studying abroad in Hungary is associated with changes in national identity among international students, and whether the duration of exposure plays a role in shaping these changes. Importantly, the results indicate that national identity is not a monolithic construct and does not change uniformly across its dimensions.

Regarding H1, the hypothesis that studying abroad would be associated with significant perceived changes in national identity dimensions received only partial support. In the full sample, national sentiment showed a marginal increase, while collective narcissism showed a marginal decrease. Patriotism and nationalism remained statistically stable. Thus, while movement was observable in certain components, there was no evidence of broad or dramatic transformation across all dimensions. National identity appears largely stable, with only subtle adjustments emerging over time.

H2, proposing that different identity dimensions would follow different trajectories, was supported. The findings clearly demonstrate divergence across components. Affective attachment to the nation (national sentiment) tended to increase slightly, whereas defensive and superiority-based dimensions (particularly collective narcissism and, in specific subgroups, nationalism) showed decreasing tendencies. Patriotism remained comparatively stable. This multidimensional pattern suggests that study abroad may influence the qualitative structure of national identity rather than its overall strength. Emotional attachment can coexist with reduced defensiveness, supporting the argument that national belonging and openness are not mutually exclusive.

H3, which predicted that duration of stay would be associated with magnitude of perceived change, was not supported at the between-group level. One-way ANOVA analyses revealed no statistically significant differences in change scores across the three duration groups. Time abroad alone does not function as a strong or deterministic predictor of identity change. This finding cautions against simple “exposure equals transformation” models and highlights the complexity of identity development in intercultural settings.

However, H4 received partial support in within-group analyses. Students who had spent three or more years abroad exhibited a significant decrease in nationalism and a marginal decrease in collective narcissism. These effects were not present in shorter-duration groups. Although the between-group differences did not reach statistical significance, the within-group pattern suggests that prolonged immersion may be associated with gradual softening of superiority-based and entitlement-based national attitudes. Importantly, this reduction occurred without a corresponding erosion of national sentiment. In fact, national sentiment showed its strongest upward trend in the longest-duration group.

Taken together, the findings suggest that long-term study abroad may be associated with subtle shifts in the composition of national identity rather than its overall weakening. Specifically, defensive and superiority-based elements may diminish, while affective attachment remains stable or even strengthens slightly. This distinction is theoretically significant. It implies that intercultural exposure may reduce rigid or exclusionary components of national identity without undermining belonging or loyalty.

These patterns should be interpreted with caution. The observed effects are small in magnitude, and most between-group differences are not statistically significant. Accordingly, the findings are best understood as indicative of subtle, dimension-specific tendencies rather than strong or generalizable transformations.

These findings have implications for social sustainability. While social sustainability is not directly measured in this study, the observed pattern, characterized by stable or slightly increasing affective attachment alongside reductions in defensive and superiority-based dimensions, may reflect identity configurations that are more compatible with pluralism and intercultural coexistence.

7 Summary

This study contributes to the literature by showing that perceived national identity change during study abroad appears to be dimension-specific, subtle, and non-uniform. Across the full sample, national identity remained broadly stable, with only marginal shifts observed in national sentiment and collective narcissism. Duration

of stay did not produce statistically significant between-group differences, indicating that time abroad alone is insufficient to explain identity transformation.

Nevertheless, an interesting within-group pattern emerged among long-term sojourners. Students who had spent three or more years abroad showed evidence of decreasing nationalism and marginal reductions in collective narcissism, alongside slight increases in national sentiment. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously, as the study does not provide statistically significant between-group evidence for a strong duration effect. Rather, the results point to subtle, exploratory patterns that require further confirmation.

Rather than depicting study abroad as a process of identity loss or replacement, the results suggest the possibility of selective perceived shifts in identity content. National belonging can remain intact while becoming less superiority-oriented and less entitlement-driven. Since social sustainability was not directly measured, this interpretation should be understood as an implication rather than a central empirical finding. Still, the observed patterns may be relevant for understanding how multicultural experiences can support forms of national identity that are more compatible with pluralism and coexistence, without requiring detachment from national roots.

This study has several limitations. Most importantly, the retrospective pre-post design means that the research captures perceived or reconstructed change rather than directly measured longitudinal change. Participants were asked to recall their pre-mobility attitudes, which may introduce recall bias, post-hoc rationalization, or the influence of current identity states on past self-assessments. In addition, the study relies on self-reported measures, which may be affected by social desirability bias, especially in relation to sensitive constructs such as nationalism and collective narcissism. Future longitudinal research using repeated measurements would be needed to confirm whether the observed tendencies reflect actual attitudinal change over time.

Overall, this study provides exploratory empirical support for a multidimensional understanding of national identity change and lays the foundation for further investigation into the psychological and contextual mechanisms that may explain who changes, how, and under what conditions.

Acknowledgment

This study was supported by the S.M.A.R.T. International Research Group.

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