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The Role of the Erasmus Programme in Enhancing Intercultural Dialogue. Presentation of the Results from the Erasmus Student Network Survey 2007

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Abstract

Mobility of people and resources in higher education of today has a distinct role to develop intercultural dialog within academia, to discuss cultural values and confront the worldviews. These processes take place mostly at the level of individuals and has a huge impact on one's value system.

The aim of the paper is to evaluate the role of the Erasmus Programme in enhancing intercultural dialogue. The Erasmus Programme, celebrating in 2007 twenty years of its existence, is currently the flagship of European integration. The programme is open to the 27 Member States of the European Union, the three EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and to Turkey (as candidate country). Its main objective is to improve the quality and increase the volume of student and

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teaching staff mobility throughout Europe. Already more than 1.500.000 of Erasmus Students have experienced “being an Erasmus”.

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is a student organisation founded for supporting and developing student exchange. Every year ESN monitors the development of international exchange programmes through the European-wide scale research. In the year 2007, the third study took place and it was entitled “Generation Mobility”. From June 2007 to September 2007, 8 000 mobile students from all over the Europe replied to the online questionnaire. The main part of the questionnaire concerned the issues such as the value system, world views, political opinions, activism, international social network, multilingualism, mobility.

The presentations will also draw from two previous editions of the survey. Findings from ESN Survey 2005 showed that student mobility across Europe still differs notably. There is big gap between students from Eastern and Central Europe and the Westerners, as far as family status, financial issues and even motivations are concerned. Altogether, almost 80% of respondents would consider moving to a foreign country and almost 60% would consider having serious relationship with a person from another country. Exchange students articulated their opinion that their life and perspectives on the world changed after having had this experience. Students said as a result of a stay abroad they become more open-minded, mobile and developed wide social networks abroad. Conducting the 2006 edition we have discovered that learning different cultures, meeting new people and living in the foreign country belong to the most important reasons for going abroad.

Overall, we might suspect that the development of academic mobility as well as any other form of international exchange could lead the world to be a better place: a space of a mobile citizens and in turn a space for an open intercultural dialog. Does this change indeed take place? Is this change unique to the European mobile students? How mobile students differ according to specific characteristics? Can this change lead to any positive action from the side of mobile students? That were the questions we wanted to answer conducting ESN Survey 2007.

Using advanced quantitative techniques like latent class analysis and cluster analysis the study explored students’ opinions. Comparing the results to studies of all

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Europeans (e.g. European Social Survey) provided the broader picture for the interpretation.

The analysis of students' values and world views will be a crucial part of presentation. We will check if the mobile students also should be treated as a group, or is there is very big difference between students of various nationalities in their statements. We will also analyze other variables such as gender, place of living, major studied. Also we are very much interested in the social network developed abroad, and to what extent these networks can be sustain after having returned to the home country. During the presentation we will also show the results of an in-depth analysis on the level of nationality.

The results of the study will be illustrated by the students comments and stories collected by another ESN's project "Share your experience". As the following quote shows, they describe the "Erasmus experience". The statement was shared by Stela, who studied in 2006 in Bergen:

It was the best thing that happened to me in m entire life. Nothing can compare to it. It meant a lot more than just studying in another country and meeting new friends. It was also learning about different nations' habits and breaking stereotypes. Anyway, I think everyone should have the opportunity to experience this. But warning: you can get out of this completely changed ? .

Students, who went abroad state, that they are better prepared for the intercultural dialogue. They are said to be the future European leaders enhancing intercultural dialogue. However, the studies also showed that there are still some challenges. The ESN Survey 2006 showed that nearly 20% of students felt discriminated during their stay – mostly because of their being foreigners (8% of all respondents) and their poor language skills (6,5%). The survey also indicated that 2% of the students worked illegally during their stay abroad.

Introduction

Mobility of people and resources in higher education of today has a distinct role to develop intercultural dialog within academia, to discuss cultural values and to confront

our worldviews. These processes take place mostly at the level of individuals and have a huge impact on one's value system.

Intercultural dialog is already being enhanced by the contemporary trends such as globalization or an international media broadcast, but it cannot really take place without a stable human interaction between people of different backgrounds. This can be surely enhanced if individuals possess a certain set of skills (e.g. open-mindedness, multilingualism, ease to travel). By allowing people to travel, meet and network, by giving them a chance to gain non-formal intercultural skills, teaching them languages we could enhance intercultural dialog.

Consequently, the aim of the paper is to evaluate the role of the Erasmus Programme in enhancing intercultural dialogue. Firstly, the article discusses briefly students' personal characteristics and their motivation to go abroad. Then, we argue the prevalence of the social dimension of the stay. In the main part of the article, the effects of the exchange are presented. As shown above, first, we want to see if the students gain new non-formal intercultural skills, become more open-minded and develop global identity. Secondly, we want to analyze if Erasmus Programme allows people to network and meet. Third if Erasmus has impact on their mobility patterns, are they more mobile than they counterparts who never studied abroad? If those tools are allowed we could argue that the Erasmus programme is a way to strengthen intercultural dialogue between European students.

Background information

The Erasmus Programme, which in 2007 celebrated twenty years of its existence, is the flagship programme of the European Union. It went into the agenda in the 1970s and, then, from the Joint Study Program, which was established in 1976, the Erasmus Programme developed in 1987 as an independent scheme (Teichler, 2002). The programme is open to the 27 Member States of the European Union, the three EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and to Turkey (as a candidate country)¹. The programme's main objective is to improve the quality and increase the volume of student and teaching staff mobility throughout Europe. It also aims at strengthening the

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/index_en.html

European Education Area by passage of knowledge and the European Integration by the personal meeting of citizens from different countries. In the time the programme grew in size and scope, nowadays it embraces around 150,000 students every year and it is perceived as a mass programme. Already more than 1.700.000 of Erasmus Students have experienced “being an Erasmus”².

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is a student organisation founded for supporting and developing student exchange. Every year ESN monitors the development of international exchange programmes through the European-wide research called ESNSurvey. In the year 2007, the third study entitled “Generation Mobility” took place. From June 2007 to September 2007, 8 500 mobile students from all over the Europe replied to the online questionnaire (non random sampling). The main part of the questionnaire concerned the issues such as the value system, worldview, political opinions, activism, international social network, multilingualism and mobility. Most of the respondents went abroad on Erasmus Programme.

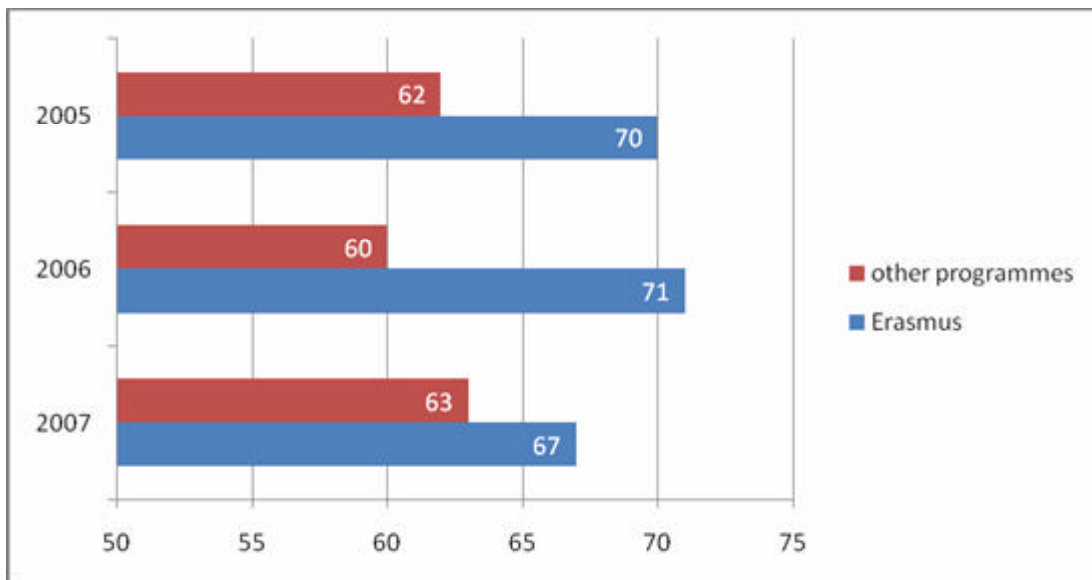
This article will use the data from the aforementioned survey as well as from two previous editions of the survey: ESNSurvey 2005 (Krzaklewska, Krupnik 2006) and ESNSurvey 2006 (Krzaklewska, Krupnik 2007). The results of the study will be illustrated by the students comments and stories collected by another ESN’s project “*Share your experience*” available at www.20erasmus.eu.

Inclusiveness: students’ characteristics and motivation

Erasmus Programme has in time become one of the most inclusive exchange programmes for students. Erasmus students more often than students from other exchange programmes come from social groups of average or lower standing. Taking financial status as an example, within all ESNSurveys Erasmus students were less likely to declare that their family’s income was above country’s average. The study of ECOTEC (Otero, McCoshan 2006) showed that 62% of students declared their income as average or below average.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/statisti/table1.pdf>

Figure 1. Ratio of students with country's average family income or below within Erasmus students and students going on exchange on other programmes.



Our studies also showed that disabled students and those having parents with no higher educational attainment were more likely to go abroad through Erasmus Programme than through another exchange programme.

Social background has also a strong impact on students' motivations. Using Principal Components Analysis we were able to differentiate two student groups: those career-oriented and those experience-oriented. As we may notice, career-oriented students more often came from disadvantaged groups (e.g. students with lower family income, females, Eastern Europe; see table 1)

Table 1. Career-oriented and experience-oriented students (Krzaklewska, Krupnik 2007).

	Career - oriented	Experience - oriented
Reasons for going abroad indicated as important in survey	To improve academic knowledge To enhance future employment prospects To practice foreign language	To have new experiences To learn about different cultures To have fun To meet new people To be independent To live in a foreign country
Student groups who were more likely to belong to specific category	Non Erasmus students Females with lower family income coming from South (e.g. Spain) Central and East European Countries (e.g. Poland) ³ Older	Erasmus students Males with higher family income coming from West and North European countries Younger
Quote	<i>With my Erasmus Program I had the opportunity to start an international work career</i> (Bruno Fernandes)	<i>I always wanted to smell freedom and independence</i> (Katerina Markova)

Importantly to say also in the context of the topic of this paper is the fact that the cultural motivation (“to learn about different cultures) was the third highest motivation for Erasmus students. On the scale 1 to 5, where 5 meant very important motivation for going abroad, this motivation received mean of 4,5.

³ Results show two groups of countries: students from new EU Member States and South European Countries.

Thus, Erasmus Programme is inclusive for both career-oriented and experience-oriented students. It is also quite inclusive for students from the lower socio-economic background. Still those who went on Erasmus were still from the families with the higher educational attainment than the rest of the European society (Otero, McCoshan 2006).

The importance of social dimension

Erasmus students most of their stay abroad valued its social dimension. This can be seen through the analysis of the satisfaction from their stay. In all ESNSurveys we asked students to evaluate their stay and declare their satisfaction with a stay abroad, a studies abroad and twelve specific aspects of their period abroad.

In general, students were more satisfied with their stay than with their studies. Secondly, basing on their answers about the twelve aspects of stay three dimensions of stay were differentiated⁴: social (e.g. contact with local students, social life), academic (e.g. courses, professors) and problem-solving (e.g. information, finances) (Krzaklewska, Krupnik 2006). **Erasmus students were the most satisfied with social dimension** and the least satisfied with problem solving-dimension of their stay⁵. Non-Erasmus exchange students were more satisfied than Erasmus students with problem-solving dimension.

At the same time, for Erasmus students **social dimension had the strongest influence on overall satisfaction with stay.** What it means is that even though they may be more often exposed to financial problems and be under-informed, the social dimension of their stay counterbalanced these difficulties.

The results show interesting correlation between motivation and satisfaction with dimensions of the stay. Students who were more career-oriented said that they were more satisfied with academic dimension with their stay and students who were more experience-oriented were declaring higher satisfaction with social dimension.

⁴ Three dimensions were differentiated by the use of Principal Component Analysis. The three components accounted for 56% of the total variance.

⁵ As one of the students, introducing oneself as Dj Nash, said: Erasmus and little money goes hand by hand. (Krzaklewska, Krupnik 2006). 55% of students reported said the Erasmus grant as a financial contribution was insufficient (Otero, McCoshan 2006).

Summing up, results clearly show **the highest importance of social dimension for those going on Erasmus Programme**. We could also suspect that indeed this choice of Erasmus students will lead to the strongest development of intercultural skills through informal and social contacts and experiences. In the next chapter we will analyze the effects of the stay abroad and see if this indeed happens.

Effects of stay abroad

As said in the introduction, three dimensions of students' behaviors and opinions could show as the impact of the Erasmus programme in enhancing intercultural dialog. Let us see how each of the aspect is developed while on exchange and just after it. We will discuss skills they learned abroad, identity, students' networks and mobility.

Intercultural skills

In the ESNSurvey 2005 (Krzaklewska, Krupnik 2006: 20-22) students were asked an open question: *What is the most important thing you learned as an exchange student?* Their answers were classified into 5 categories, which are presented in the table below.

Table 2. Non-formal learning dimension of Erasmus students. Categories of the most important things Erasmus students learned while being on exchange.

acquiring cultural skills and knowledge	communication and work in international environment knowledge about host country how to survive in the foreign country open-mindedness, tolerance language	<i>I learned to work in a group with people of different skills and culture. that the French live in a totally other rhythm, they work different, and it was sometimes hard to accept I learn to be able to study in a foreign country in a foreign language and to do everything on my own different countries; different costumes! but respect is the key word. that aiming to understand different cultures and habits helps you understand and develop yourself.</i>
	being independent	<i>to be independent and take responsibility for my own</i>

maturity and self development	determination in solving problems self confidence flexibility personal growth	<i>learning to overcome all obstacles no matter the circumstances and to be patient to take decisions and stay firm in all situations the importance of being flexible and being open-minded to new systems to test my limits as a human being when I am alone in some difficult situation in a foreign country</i>
social networks	creation of friendships communication skills	build a network around the world to integrate in a group of international of foreign students with different backgrounds to speak with all people more easily
academic enrichment	adaptation to different academic system planning career path due to exchange “	a view into a very different educational system what I'd like to be my main field of activity in the future
value of discovery and exploring new possibilities	openness to new grabbing opportunities	to live your life at the moment & not worry to much about the future because the people in Spain don't care to much about their cars; houses but live. To try everything new; and not to be afraid about new experiences. to avail oneself of the opportunity.

We can see that the first dimension was acquiring cultural skills and knowledge. Similar results were obtained by Otero, McCoshan (2006) who reported that between most of the students reported large changes or changes to some extent in their

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understanding of people from another cultural or ethnic background. Similar opinions were shared by students e.g. by Stela who studied in 2006 in Bergen:

It was the best thing that happened to me in my entire life. (...) It meant a lot more than just studying in another country and meeting new friends. It was also learning about different nations' habits and breaking stereotypes.

A very interesting aspect of stay effect is a maturation effect. Students described their stay from one side as a time of exploration, availing to new opportunities, exploration and space for experimentation. On the other hand they described it as a time to grow, and mature, in other words become a grown up, an adult (compare Krzaklewska 2006). Most striking is though the fact that their definition of an adult contain in itself not only features as independence, responsibility for one's actions and personal growth, but Erasmus students included in a definition of an adult of today a set of intercultural competences and skills. As Krzaklewska writes (2007) this will be "an adult that will be able to act freely in the globalized world. S/he should be equipped with the skills to interact smoothly with people of various cultures as well as to "survive" in any intercultural environment."

Global identity

While asked about their identity students were asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree with following statements:

I see myself as a world citizen.

I see myself as a part of my local community.

I see myself as a part of my nation.

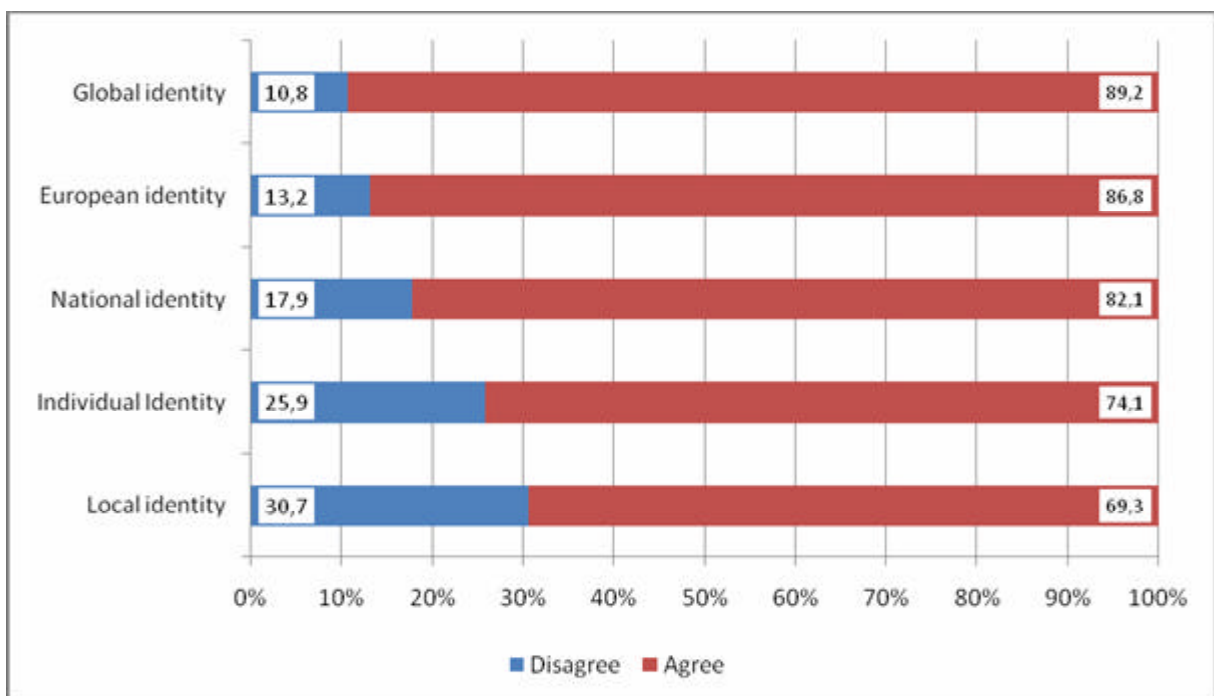
I see myself as part of the European community.

I see myself as an autonomous individual⁶.

As we can see students declare their identity most of all as global (89,2%) or European (86,8%). National identity is less important for them. Individual and local identities were rare choices (Boomans et al. 2008).

⁶ The researchers used the question from the World Value Survey.

Figure 2. Erasmus students' identity.



With the exploratory use of Latent Class Analysis the closer look into the data was possible. Using the four dimensions (Global, European, National, Local) of identity the three group of countries were differentiated, those students coming from which:

- would identify themselves with all four dimensions (further referred to as students with **diverse identity**);
- would identify themselves only as world and European citizens (**global identity**);
- would identify themselves with all dimensions but European (**non-European identity**).

The table below shows students characteristics which make them more likely to belong to specific groups.

Identity	diverse	global	non-European
Coming from	Lithuania, Poland and Romania (Central and East European Countries)	Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain	France, Finland, Netherlands or Turkey
Gender	female	male	male
Family income in comparison with country average	average	lower	higher

Keeping in mind that the Survey is not representative in the statistical sense, we should not pay too much attention to the national differences. However, what the results show is a) the high importance of both global and European identities and b) inclusiveness of global identity – students coming from the lower social classes see themselves as world citizens nor rarer than they richer counterparts.

Networks

Interestingly, the second effect of stay abroad was the creation of the networks, which was also described in the chapter below. As we can see the networks described by students reveal their international dimension and imply also learning skills in communicating in the group with people of different backgrounds.

The importance of meeting new friends was revealed in all the studies. In the EsnSurvey 2005, creation of friendships and acquiring communication skills was shown as the outcome of the stay. Meeting new people was also indicated as the forth most important motivation (Krzaklewska, Krupnik 2007).



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In the ESNSurvey2007 we asked questions about actual contact with foreign students and we also wanted to know if friendships from exchange lasted longer than the period abroad. And in fact **91% of the students stayed in touch with their friends** from exchange. Their network was quite large as more than half of them they stayed in touch with **5 or more friends**. One third of respondents have visited their friends after the exchange period finished. Students who have been on exchange also call internationally more often than those who have not. Possibly, they call to their friends from abroad.

Erasmus Alumni describe their friends from Erasmus as a family, e.g. as Ilenia who studied in 2006 in France:

"I'll never stop to thank Erasmus for giving me this opportunity:I don't think I'll ever have (...) my beautiful ErasmusFamily...Iago, Sabela, Cinthia, Ciara, Kate, Steffi, Ruairi... and the others...Daniel, Romina, Simone, Eduardo, Helene..as Romain Duris dans L'Auberge Espagnole,"maintenant je suis espagnole, irlandaise, française, allemande...un vrai bordel!"!:")

Ines in her experience entitled "We made friendships for the lifetime" tells us that the friendships they made did not die:

I met a few friends for my whole life and now we visit each other all over the world!

Mobility

John Urry (2002) distinguishes five mobilities: corporeal (travel of persons), physical (travel of objects), imaginative (via television or images), virtual (via internet), communicative (via email, phone). We want to concentrate here on two of them: physical and virtual, but also prospective mobility, so the willingness to move to the foreign country in the future.

As ESNSurvey 2007 results reveal (Boomans et al. 2008) the respondents in the last two years **visited on average 5 countries** compared those who never went abroad to study who visited 4 countries. Those who visited the lowest number of

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countries, were students with lower income, women and students from a new EU country Romania as well those from Turkey.

In the ESNSurvey 2005, we have also observed that those who went abroad, even for shorter time, before their studies, were more inclined to go studying abroad.

That would mean we need to encourage even younger students to take chance for a mobility at the younger age in order not to be afraid of the longer period such as studying semester. Among the respondents of the ESNSurvey 2007, **77% of them were studying abroad for the first time**, meaning that 23% had already studied abroad beforehand. Not surprisingly the most preferred mean of transportation for exchange students was the **plane** (45% of respondents chose it).

The respondents were also virtually mobile and many of them **used internet everyday (88%)** Similarly, they are familiar with different **chat machines** and **Skype** – an Internet phone used for cheap international calling. In contrast, non-mobile students were more often members of **online communities** (43%) in comparison with 36% of mobile students.

In the ESNSurvey 2005 two indicators measured students' **prospective mobility**. Willingness to move to a foreign country (destination and period of stay) and considering serious relationship with a person from a foreign country.

While asked whether they would consider moving to another country 78% of Erasmus students answered positively and only 7% negatively (15% was undecided). Most of the students as desired period of staying abroad indicated *Long but not permanently* (69%) what also shows that they do not see a problem in changing the place of residence many times within their lifetime.

As a desired place of living abroad students declared mostly Europe (66%), much rarer all over the world (12%) or other places (11%) – 10% was undecided. The results allow for drawing the conclusion, that Erasmus students mobility is mostly associated with Europe.

69% of students would consider having serious relationship with a person from another country and only 13 would not. Students coming from Western countries were more likely than they counterparts from CEE to state that they would consider serious relationship with a person from another country.

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Noteworthy, the future mobility indicators were influenced by students' satisfaction with their stay. Students who were more satisfied were more likely to declare that they would consider moving abroad and that they would consider serious relationship with a person from a foreign country.

Conclusions

Overall, we might suspect that the development of academic mobility as well as any other form of international exchange could lead the world to be a better place: a space of a mobile citizens and in turn a space for an open intercultural dialog. We could notice that students who went abroad believed they have acquired skills that will allow them to function in the globalised world and many of them developed so called global identity. They are also travelling and visiting new countries, also in order to warm up their friendships from the exchange period.

Still, we need to say that still those opportunities are more easily available to those with higher income. What is more, the studies also showed that there are still some challenges. The ESNSurvey 2006 showed that nearly 20% of students felt discriminated during their stay – mostly because of their being foreigners (8% of all respondents) and their poor language skills (6,5%). Foreign students also evaluated their satisfaction with contact with local students relatively lower than the satisfaction with contact with other exchange students.

What we noticed in our research was the fact that the students who define themselves as global citizens, more often keep in contact with their foreign counterparts, as well as those who want to work in the future abroad. Possibly, those continue to invest in the international network in order to feel “citizen of world” or what we have called it a representative of Generation Mobility. This was also well expressed by Francisco, a Spanish student, who went in 2005 to study in England:

This ERASMUS thing is not about an education programme that'll help you improve your language skills and enhance your CV(...) If there is 1 thing the ERASMUS is about, that thing is doubtless the process of self-discovery and self-development that all is participants experience. It is education in a greater



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sense education to create better and more prepared human beings. This new "race" of people will eventually lead to a more tolerant and open society. The "sons of the Erasmus society".



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