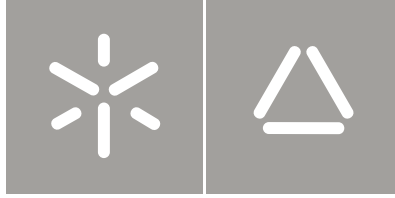Universidade do Minho
Instituto de Ciências Sociais

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Adaptation to new spaces:
Erasmus students in Braga and Prague

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Adaptation to new spaces:
Erasmus students in Braga and Prague

Tese de Mestrado
Área de Especialização em
Planeamento e Gestão do Território / Geografia

Trabalho efetuado sob a orientação do
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Professor Auxiliar do Departamento de Geografia da Universidade
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e co-orientação do
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É AUTORIZADA A REPRODUÇÃO PARCIAL DESTA DISERTAÇÃO APENAS PARA EFEITOS DE INVESTIGAÇÃO, MEDIANTE DECLARAÇÃO ESCRITA DO INTERESSADO, QUE A TAL SE COMPROMETE.

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_____

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to approach the theme of internationalization of students in an European context. With the establishment of the Erasmus Programme in 1987, attending other European universities became simpler; this programme has been and continues to be a facilitator for those interested in completing their studies or part of them outside their country. Primarily aiming students, teachers are also targeted by this programme and they may participate but in different molds.

This dissertation sought to address not only the Erasmus programme but also how it influences the people participating in it. This process starts at the moment the students decide to undertake the program of mobility even in their country. Since then the process begins only ending when these students return.

In order to understand how this process takes place the experience of twenty students who participated in the Erasmus programme was followed. Of these twenty students, ten were studying in Braga, Portugal, and ten in Prague, Czech Republic. These were approached so that during one semester interviews could be conducted with a qualitative nature to essentially understand how these students would adapt to a city that was not their own, what changes would appear during their stay and to see if the city had influenced their experience. Later, a comparison was made between the experiences and testimonies from these students who performed their studies in Prague and in Braga.

Keywords: Erasmus, Space, Place, Adaptation, Culture, Experience.

Resumo

Esta dissertação visa abordar a temática da internacionalização dos estudantes num contexto Europeu. Com a criação do programa Erasmus em 1987, frequentar outras universidades europeias ficou mais simples, este programa foi e continua a ser um facilitador para quem procura realizar os seus estudos ou parte destes fora do seu país. Tendo como alvo principal os estudantes, docentes também são visados por este programa podendo estes participar mas em moldes diferentes.

Nesta dissertação é procurado abordar não só o programa Erasmus mas também como este influencia as pessoas que nele participam. Este processo é iniciado desde o momento em que os estudantes decidem realizar o programa de mobilidade ainda nos seus países. Desde então o processo é desenrolado só acabando quando estes estudantes voltarem.

Com o intuito de entender como este processo se desenrola foi acompanhado a experiência de vinte estudantes que participaram no programa Erasmus. Destes vinte estudantes, dez estavam a estudar em Braga, Portugal, e dez em Praga, República Checa. Estes foram abordados para que ao longo do seu semestre fossem feitas entrevistas com cariz qualitativo para tentar compreender principalmente como estes se adaptavam a uma cidade que não a sua, que mudanças existiram durante a sua permanência e se a cidade influenciou a sua experiência. Mais tarde e já com este propósito foi feita uma comparação entre as experiências e os testemunhos destes estudantes que realizaram os seus estudos em Braga e em Praga.

Palavras-chave: Erasmus, Espaço, Lugar, Adaptação, Cultura, Experiência.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BC- Before Christ

CV- Curriculum Vitae

CSÚ- Czech Statistical Institute

ESN – Exchange Student Network

EU- European Union

INE- Instituto Nacional de Estatistica

PDM- Plano Director Municipal

SRI- Serviço de Relações Internacionais

UMINHO- Universidade do Minho

UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

1. Introduction and Aims

With the increasing life expectancy and the new social standards, the passage between childhood and adulthood of individuals has become quite extended. Due to the emergency of this step, this has made these individuals consistently as objects of consumption, both for recreational and cultural practices. As Abreu says "The leisure that is offered to young people are essential to the autonomous constitution of their individual and collective identities" (Abreu,1995,70). Youth Tourism allows them an escape from their daily routine as "the temporary suspension of the forms of surveillance and social control is particularly important as these are subject to intense socialization processes through which are intended to internalize a system of habits indispensable to its integration in a heavily regulated society " (Abreu ,1995,72). It is at this stage of life that every young person is forming their ideals and shaping up as a person in order to become an adult, and it is due to this that every moment in a young person´s life is very important.

With the increasing life expectancy the new generation ended up also to have a longer study carrier than earlier. Every year today's generation is seeking for higher studies' levels because in an occidental culture the more studies an individual has, the higher are the opportunities to have a better life and with that, it is noticeable the increment of people attending Master degrees and PHD´s. Mainly in south European context entering into the labour market is around the age of 30, having more skills and studies than ever before.

Combined with the factor of people studying more, the fact of living in a more globalized world being the mobility within at least inside Europe something simpler than a few decades ago can influence these individuals to travel more and start to open new horizons in an earlier phase of their lives. Mainly due to the low prices and offers companies adopt, people changed how they face the idea of travelling, starting this to be something easier and cheaper to be done. Obtaining information is also something that is easier everyday causing less fear to travel.

The proximity of the countries and the ease to obtain information can be important factors for the stimulation of one of the main topics discussed in this dissertation: the Erasmus programme. Like Ulreich states "The proportion of European students studying abroad increased and the world´s largest support programme for international student mobility – the Erasmus programme (...) has clearly contributed to

the fact that studying in another country is no longer viewed as exceptional for the students of the participating countries" (Ulrich,2004,397). It is possible to verify the importance of the Erasmus programme concerning the youth mobility inside Europe in the last decade.

This dissertation is structured in three distinctive parts: the first part consists of the discussion of important concepts for a better understanding of the content including the analysis of the cities where the study has taken place, the second part are the interviews analysis and the third the final analysis in which a comparison of the two study cases is made.

With this issue the theme of this dissertation is about how foreigner students adapt themselves to a different reality they weren't used to. Like Bauman said "(...) the arrival of a stranger has the impact of an earthquake... The Stranger shatters the rock on which the security of daily life rests." (Bauman in Dervin and Dirba,2008,1). To be able to verify this concept, this study was made to try to understand how this experience of going abroad for a short period of time (5/6 months) will affect these students with all the adversities that it contains. Adversities that are various and can contain different perspectives. In this dissertation it will be possible to find different and several topics related to the internationalization of the students. Because when students decide to go abroad and leave their hometown this will symbolize the combination of processes that they will pass through.

This dissertation has as spatial references the cities of Braga and Prague, two very different cities located in countries with different perspectives and geographical particularities.

The experience itself while doing this mobility programme will be closely followed connecting with how they adapted to a different city, a place that they weren't use to being in or even live in. Being a tourist is different from being an abroad student, the challenges are different, being the adversities something very specific for these cases. Ward in 1976 affirmed the existence of a "foreign-student syndrome" (Furnham, 2004). Some more concrete aspects are going to be followed, such as how they faced the main difficulties for example, the language, the adversity of being abroad, to know how to deal with a new culture and their relation with the locals and other aspects related to a possible cultural shock. Also something that was followed with particular attention was how these students developed their new friendship network and with it the creation of a comfort zone, which can also be called their ontological security.

Besides their experience and the process of adaption, more topics were analysed like the importance of the student's internationalization and how this can influence their behaviour knowing what their thoughts were before going and before leaving Erasmus. What changed during this period of life for these students is a question that will hopefully find it´s answer here. Since the implementation of the Erasmus programme in 1987, the number of students going abroad hasn't stopped increasing and here the role of geography is essential to understand how it can influence the behaviour of the next generations regarding space and mobility, because if now the new generations start to get used to travelling and are not afraid to go abroad this will probably influence how the next generations will behave inside this European mentality that is trying to be implemented. The reasons for the students to go abroad was also considered important because later it will be possible to see if space can influence their experience abroad, while comparing the experience in both cities, Braga and Prague.

Quoting Bauman, "the rocks" where their security settles will be affected, creating emotions and obligating these individuals to interact with the space as if it were a blank piece of paper and they would begin to write on it, a new experience that symbolizes a new chapter in their lives.

Already in the ancient Greece, in chapter XIV of Plato's laws, the topic of travellers was discussed and he proposed four different types of strangers: "birds of passage'' (tourists in the summer), ''spectators'', ''he who comes on some public business from another land'' and ''he who comes from another land to look at ours'' (Plato in Dervin and Dirba,2008,2). Another example are Marco Polo's travels, in the early fourteenth century, with only seventeen years of age he went with his father and uncle to travel around twenty-four thousand kilometres only returning to his homeland twenty-four years later. Also, in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance era, the age of discoveries had changed the way the world was hitherto known.

Now in the XXI century, travelling became easier than ever with different solutions to reach different destinations. This way the Erasmus programme was chosen to analyse how this affects this new reality, the idea of sharing cultures and ideas. With this, the Erasmus programme was also discussed and analysed taking into account the new goals that this programme has defined for the next years. An Erasmus student will also be a young traveller, because the Erasmus reality can't be split from the idea of travelling, and this topic will also be discussed within this dissertation.

While discussing this theme in a dissertation, there are several goals, some were pre-defined and during the elaboration of this study, new ideas appeared with more information. This happens because when entering this world that represents the international students´ life it is possible to have a different point of view concerning their life or their thoughts and feelings. That's why during the elaboration of this dissertation new realizations were surged and new goals were added to the previous defined.

Between 64 BC and 20 AD in Strabo's travels he wrote 17 volume series called "Geographia" in which he suggested a definition for the human geography: "describe the known parts of the inhabited world ... to write the assessment of the countries of the world [and] to treat the differences between countries" (physicalgeography.net). Today human geographers are still working in this subject, writing about differences between cultures and how space influences them. And with this I introduce my main goal that is verifying how foreign students adapted themselves in a different country they weren't used to. Inside this general topic it is possible to point out more specific ones:

- The Knowledge that students had before coming to the host country.
- Creating a new ontological zone.
- How the place they live in influences, regarding their experience in the city.
- The perception of the student towards the city.
- Friendship network.
- Relation with the host culture and people.
- To understand the main purposes to do this mobility programme.

To deal with these main goals it was necessary to deal with other things, which were directly related with the purposes above. These were:

- Require and provide some perspectives related to European mentality.
- Analyze some issues about the Erasmus programme and the new purposes for the next years.
- To contextualize experiences and different cultures.

Tuan in Topophilia said a very interesting thing about the judgment of the visitor when arriving to a new place, being this quote related directly with the main goals of this dissertation. "Humans are exceptionally adaptable. Beauty or ugliness - each tends

to disappear in the subconscious as he [sic.] learns to live in this world. The visitor is often able to perceive the merits and defects, in an environment, which are not visible to the resident." (Tuan,1974,75). This new perception is what I want to verify, because like Tuan said, the perception of a foreigner is different from the one that is used to live in that specific place. And more foreigners perception will be compared in the beginning, middle and end of their stay, in order to understand what changed their perception or if maintained the same.

1.1 Methodology

To understand how students from another country adapt themselves to a different culture and city, the method of interviews in an qualitative approach was selected, and with this approach I was able to work with more depth while conducting the interviews and having the goals intended in mind. For this dissertation I followed the experience of twenty international students doing Erasmus at Minho University located in Braga, Portugal and at the Charles University located in Prague, Czech Republic. These students weren't chosen in a random way for this work and I knew that this sample wouldn't be considered representative because of the number of students being too small, but I wanted to conduct a serious and deep investigation about their experience. First I needed to know which the best way to approach these students was, because knowing that they were a closed group I needed a way to be able to enter their world to follow closely their stay. My bigger concern was in Braga because I was an outsider and I wasn't an Erasmus student. My first thought was to be a buddy, this means I would receive an Erasmus student and help him/her with his/her integration in Portugal, and this student would become a bridge to reach the others but the programme in Braga wasn't working so I needed to discover another way to reach these students. The solution was the ESN (Erasmus Student Network), the student union created by the European Union in 1989 with the purpose to help these international students. When I found out that an ESN was recently created in Braga I contacted them to wilfully participate and to be able to have a door to enter the Erasmus world. After belonging to the ESN I started to participate in some activities related to these international students and in these events I had the opportunity to talk with them and decide who would be the best ones to work with me during this semester. I intended to choose students with different nationalities to be able to see different perspectives inside an European context. In addition I also tried to choose students that weren't all living in the same place, students that were living in flats or residences because this can also influence their experience and how they interact with the place they live in. I also tried to interview students of both genders and they also had to be studying in Braga. The same thing was done in Prague but, there the things were a bit different. This time I was already inside the world of the Erasmus students, I was one of them. Being one of them I wouldn't say it was easier but I didn't need to do specific things to reach these students, I was able to talk and also choose wisely the students with whom I would work with having the same concerns as in Braga when the time to choose the students

arrived. These interviews were made during the winter semester that began in September 2012, in Braga, and then in Prague, in February 2013, ending in July of the same year. The location where the interviews were made were in different places, almost in every situation I gave the student the option to choose the place for the interview. In Braga they were mainly conducted in coffees or restaurants, in Prague they also chose to meet in coffees but some were done in the faculty. Each interview normally had the duration of approximately one hour. The interviews were conducted mainly in English, in Braga there were some cases where the students developed their Portuguese skills and in the end some interviews were able to be done in Portuguese. In Prague they were almost all in English but there I was working with two Portuguese students so with them the interviews were made in Portuguese. After writing the interviews, the analysis of each city was done, to be able to do a comparison between these two cities. The same questions were applied both in Braga and in Prague. These interviews were divided in four different phases: the pre-Erasmus, this is when the students are still in their hometowns preparing for their Erasmus, this is the phase when the first thoughts arrive, when the reasons to participate in Erasmus surge. I considered this one a very important phase in order to understand what happens before the arrival, since this phase is not only about their thoughts but also about the information they had before going. Then it is possible to observe the difference between what they had imagined and the reality.

The second phase is during the first weeks in the city, when the first contact with the host culture occurs, a very important phase that can influence their future behaviour concerning how the adaptation goes. The first impacts with the language, food or even with the weather were analysed. The third phase is the settlement (establishment of routines) when they are already familiarized with the place where they live, the adaptation phase is completed and they start to develop their routines, creating preferences and starting to know which street may be better to reach their destination, not being afraid anymore to get lost because if that happens they already know somehow to handle with that situation with the knowledge acquired in the second phase. The last phase that I considered are the last weeks in the city, it is when emotions are really strong among the students, when time to leave approaches. This is a very particular situation because the feelings are very specific and with this perspective I wanted to know the critical differences between the beginning of their experience and

the end of it, to be able to understand what changed and what their thoughts were about this period of their life living abroad.

As referred before, this group of students were not chosen randomly. I tried to create a sample that was as big as possible choosing students from different cultures, nationalities, religions and different living locations inside the city. Even knowing that it wouldn't be a representative sample, I intended to gather different experiences and ways of adaptation through many different perspectives.

During the year I worked directly with students from Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Turkey, Finland, Estonia, Belgium and Iceland.

A total of around 660 questions were made to these students during the last year, in order to reach the closest point of view possible about their experience. Besides the interaction with these students I was also having conversations with other international students and observing the behaviour of the ones I hadn't interviewed. In addition to those interviews, I wrote about the cities where the interviews took place and explained how they function because this may or may not influence the experience of the students. I also treated the statistical data provided very kindly by the international relations of both universities, being able to see the progress of the programme in these two cities.

Therefore, both in Braga and Prague, I had the opportunity to get to know different people from different countries. I tried to not mix my Erasmus experience with the others but sometimes it was complicated, and because of that my point of view can be found in some specific topics within the dissertation.

Naturally, this dissertation, like all others, was supported by numerous authors that have explored the ideas of place, space, experience, culture, and so on, as analysed in chapter two.

2. Culture, experience and place

When a topic like internationalization is discussed it is important to make a reflection about some important concepts for a better understanding of the main topic. Discussing space and the interaction of the Human with it has many ways that could be directed. In this particular case this chapter will deal with concepts that are strongly connected with the topic about having new perceptions and to deal with new cultures. Subjects like adaptation or cultural shock will be discussed like others that can be with these ones directly or not related.

For centuries humanity was curious about space. The first thinker creating a conceptualization of space was in approx 360/280 BC. It was the mathematician and geometrician Euclid and in the present this is still the basis of spatial perception. After that, big names of science, like Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler and René Descartes in the XVI century continued with that research. After those came Isaac Newton (1643-1727) who helped to concept the absolute space and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Other important names who helped developing the concept of space were Gottfried Leibnitz, Henri Poincaré, Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, Henri Lefebvre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, all in different periods of history but all having a big role to help to understand this concept (Siwek,2011,145).

The variety of concepts of space in geography is wide, and this topic can divide geographers. Between the modern geographers connecting space to the concept environment is more common. Others see it like a geometric space and there are those who see space as a place of spatial relations (Siwek,2011). Space and place can be often misunderstood because they can be considered very similar words, but instead of that, they have a very specific meaning. When we think in space we can think in something that it is spacious or represent freedom. Place is something different, here we can associate an identity or even a special aura. Humans aren't the only ones that have a sense of place, nonhuman animals also mark places inside the space. As Tuan says "Places are centres of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied." (Tuan,2001,4) "Space and Place are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted" (Tuan,2001,3). So when we talk about this subject we can understand that space is more abstract than place. But when someone starts to understand the space that surrounds him, it will start to become place. Place can symbolize security or stability, but space can be the idea of openness or freedom. Space gives us the image that allows us to move. Under this perspective place

will be the pause in that movement. If we stop during the movement probably it will create the possibility to convert a random location to a place.

Experience is a mixture of feeling and thoughts. The word experience can have a lot of meanings and people see it usually in different ways. Experience can be connected to the ability to learn, "To experience is to learn (...) acting on the given and creating out of the given" (Tuan,2001,9). Another example is the use of the five senses to experience and connect later memories to places. Like odours, when we recognize a determinate smell that we know, that can be a way to connect to objects and places, making that place a distinctive place that later by smelling that odour again we will connect it directly to that place where we once were. "Taste, smell, skin sensitivity, and hearing cannot individually make us aware of a spacious external world inhabited by objects" (Tuan,2001,12). We can think about a place like a geometric shape such as a triangle. That´s why when we arrive to a place that we aren´t aware of, it will be a "blurred image" (Tuan,2001,17) because it's the unknown, and that it's called space. In this way when we arrive at the first time to the triangle it will be space for us, but later with the recognizing of the space, the corners will be places for us. Because experience allows us to recognize places and be familiarized with places where we already had been. That´s why memory and experience are so much close connected.

Experience can differ from person to person even doing similar things in the same place, this happens because "every person is at the centre of his world" (Tuan, 2001,41). For example like Tuan said, people can work in the same building but they experience different things. Inside the work it's possible to have different worlds, like the maintenance men and janitors don't mix up with executives or their secretaries.

Normally spaciousness can be associated to the felling to be free, "Freedom implies space" (Tuan,2001,52). Tuan refers that the meaning of to be free can have a lot of meanings, but the ability to have the power to move will give us the sense that this kind of act is connected to the felling of being free. When people get old they gladly remember their childhood, the time when they could move fast and freely. "When I was a kid", he [sic.] recalled, "to really move was my delight. I felt released because I could move around anybody. I was free" (Tuan, 2001,52).

The terminology freedom can also have a negative side, because if we associate it with space and openness, that can be related to threat, if we are inside a place that is the representation of freedom that can reflect on us feelings such as to be exposed or vulnerable. That's why humans need space and place to live, because the place

represents "established values" (Tuan,2001,54) and space can signify a "blank sheet" (Tuan,2001,54). When we think like this, Tuan assumes that Humans live between shelter and adventure or attachment and freedom.

When Tuan talks about spatial ability, knowledge and Place, he made a very pertinent question: "How do human beings acquire the ability to thread their way through a strange environment, such as unfamiliar city streets?" (Tuan,2001,70). In the beginning the objective is to reach the desired place but its location is unknown, and to discover it several attempts are needed. Later the subject after several tries has the knowledge how to go, let's say from the location A to the location B. "With further trials he learns to identify more and more 'landmarks'" (Tuan,2001,71). With these trials and with his past errors he can recognize the mistakes he made in the past and learn through them, adding new places into an unknown space. This can lead to an emotional experience, because "the subject will often express satisfaction, for the landmark suggests him that he is on the right track" (Tuan,2001,72).

If the subject continues with the movements between the location A and B, he will increase his knowledge about it and will integrate this "intermediate localities" (Tuan, 2001,72) and expand even more until the information to transform is acquired, something that was a path between two points turning into a well known place. "what begins as undifferentiated space end as a single object-situation or place" (Tuan, 2001,72)

Quoting Siwek "People´s perception of their surrounding space is influenced by their age, physical condition, individual needs and values, social status and other factors" (Siwek,2011,139). The interaction with the space that surrounds us can be different from person to person, but this connection is very important to define how people develop. For example "The life experiences of an individual are connected with specific places on Earth. Everybody was born somewhere, worked somewhere, experienced illness somewhere (...) sometimes all of these experiences occur in a single place, while for other people personal space is scattered and extensive." (Siwek,2011,139)

Until now in the literature twelve fundamental spatial elements are indentified (Siwek,2011), they are : near, far, next to, in the neighbourhood, right, left, inside, outside, higher, lower, above and below. When the subject concerns about spatial perception it's necessary to understand what direction and distance it is, because these are very important concepts when the topic space surges. Concerning direction there

exist six possible directions: forwards, backwards, right, left, up and down. The other is the notion of distance, everybody has it, the ability to observe if the object it's near or far (Siwek,2011). But regarding orientation in space some directions are more important than others. For example, the horizontal is more important for human movement than the vertical, as people can cover great horizontal distance, but only limited vertical distances (...) the forward direction is more important for people than backward direction, as it the natural direction of movement" (Siwek,2011,142 and 143). About distance the most usual thing is people giving more importance to things that are more close to them, "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things" (Tobler in Siwek,2011,143).

Figure 1 Process of Adaptation**.** (Adapted from Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001 in Zhou *et al*., 2008,69)

Society of origin

Social factors

Political factors

Economic factors

Cultural factos

Society of settlement

Social factors

Political factors

Economic factors

Cultural factors

Societal level variables

Cross-cultural transition

Life changes

Intercultural contact

Stress

Skills deficits

stress coping strategies

Culture-specific

skills **acquisition**

Responses

Affective

Behavioural

Cognitive

Outcomes

Psychological

Sociocultural

Individual level variables

Characteristics of the person

personality

language fluency

training and experience

cultural identity

adaptation strategies

Values

Reasons for migration

Characteristics of the situation

Length of cultural contact

Amount of intra-and inter-group contact

quality of intra- and inter-group cultural

distance

amount of life changes

social support

This model includes several variables which are on a macro and micro scale. At the micro level, the relationship between the person and the situation and some of the variables such as personality, language skills and cultural identity are evaluated. In what concerns the characterization of the situation, time of cultural contact, cultural distance, and the support they receive are all very important. On a macro scale there are society of origin and the host society which are integrated factors such as social, political, economic and cultural.

What can also influence the adaptation and how it is made, are the stereotypes that each has idealized. According to Lippman, as we approach the reality, "we don´t see first, we first define and then see." There's the stereotype: they are "the types accepted, the current standards, the standardized versions" (Baccega, 1998, 8).

In Zhou, Y, *et al*. (2008) the topic adaption is discussed pointing variables that can influence the adaptation process: general knowledge about the new culture; length of residence in the host culture (Ward et al. 1998 in Zhou, Y, *et al*. 2008); language of communication competence; quantity and quality of contact with host nationals; friendship networks; previous experience abroad; cultural distance; cultural identity; acculturation modes; temporary versus permanent residence in a new country.

When the process knowing the local culture starts, this can happen in two ways. On the one hand they might be interested in which represents the culture of the country concerned artefacts such as art, literature and cinema but also information about the country namely of its geography, history and institutions. On the other hand they may be interested in the culture as anthropological or sociological. This is related to the way of life which might lead sociological comparisons between two different countries (Dirba and Dervin, 2008). These are two different approaches how the foreign students can interact with the host culture and with the students, having different opinions about what is local culture for each of them. As referred for some students knowing the host culture will be to know museums, different places like squares or other places in the city. Besides this, it can also be hiking or travelling and to be more familiarized with the place where they are living. In another hand for some it can be to know the locals, especially more about the people than places located in space. It can happen that for some students having a good connection with the host people is important once they avoid staying inside the bubble that Erasmus students tend to create.

When someone arrives to a foreign country there is another problem that can be found, namely the segregation created by the local population. This can be sensed in different ways, for example in the local culture or language. In these cases, the tendency of students who are undertaking the mobility plan is to move around in groups, this is because in most cases they are in the same situation, sharing the same residence, where there are halls exclusively for Erasmus students or other programmes that involves the exchange of students. Due to these factors the interaction with the local population may become more complicated.

According to Bochner in Zhou *et al.* (2008), students who establish temporary residence create three separate networks of friends during their stay. The first network is associated to long-distance connections, contacts with friends who are in their homeland through long-distance communications such as social networks like Facebook, Skype, E- mail or Windows Live Messenger. The second network are the interactions with the local population, such as local students and teachers. Through them they can learn how to deal with cultural differences and reach the best academic performance possible. Finally the third network with other students is established, these also temporary residents and not from the same country. It is through this network they will have better support because of being in the same situation and sharing the same activities. These three are classified as mono - cultural, bi - cultural and multi - cultural (Furnham ,2004 in Zhou *et al.,*2008) . However it is important to point out that the greater the social support is, the lower is the feeling of homesickness. (Hannigan,1997,in Zhou *et al.,* 2008).

2.1 Ontological Security

"Interrogatus cujas esset, Mundi civis, ait" (Laertii in Zanella, 2009, 2), this means "When he was asked who he was, a citizen of the world, he said". The manner how people think is changing because the world is changing, a globalized world is a reality and thanks to this, people had started to think differently. The cosmopolitan man is appearing more in our society but for this to happen some barriers need to be broken like the ontological security that each one of us has. First to understand the meaning of ontological security I will quote some authors for a better comprehension. For Giddens it is: "Ordinary day-to-day life – in greater or less degree according to the context and vagaries of individual personality – involves an ontological security expressing an autonomy of bodily control within predictable routines" (Giddens in Dziebel, 1997, 3). Besides this definition I intend to add one more with some examples that can help even more understanding the concept. "This is a psychological state that is equivalent to feeling 'at home' with oneself and the world, and is associated with the experience of low or manageable levels of anxiety... Actors will draw on rules and mobilise resources to re-enact practices that are found comforting: waking at the same time each day; putting on clothes in a particular order; eating familiar breakfast; catching the train at the same time each day so on. Disruptions of the routine will typically be experienced as unsettling and care will be taken to ensure that events unfold predictably" (Cassell in Dziebel, 1997, 4).

Giddens in Marandola (2006) refers that there are three elements that are central to the sense of security of an individual, these are: basic trust, protective cocoon and the Umwelt. These three elements can be determining factors in making decisions regardless of the person. Basic trust is born with us and we depend on it in the various relationships we have in our lifetime. It is because of this concept that we have and develop confidence and it allows the relationship between people or identities.

The protective cocoon is closely associated to the self-confidence that each one of us has. This is the social space created and generated by the individual that ensures their safety, where the sense of risk is reduced and we live with the feeling that if we stay inside this "cocoon" we will be more protected from any threat. This relates to the *Umwelt*, which is the materialization of the protective cocoon (Marandola JR,2006) because *Umwelt* includes more than the immediate physical surroundings. It spans

portions of indeterminate time and space (...) is a world of normality ' in motion ', which carries the individual situation to situation " (Giddens in Marandola JR , 1996 3)

The place has a very significant role in the life of the individual, it is around the place that the subject grows and will create his identity shaping up around it. It's necessary for him to grow and with it the creation of bonds is an almost obligatory consequence, "No place without self and no self without place" (Casey in Marandola JR ,1996.6). Quoting Casey has allowed us to observe how important the connection between man and place can be. As one grows assigning meanings to places is something common, allowing the creation of special memories and meanings (Marandola JR, 1996.6). This creates a protective cocoon and *Umwelt*, these are places where each can feel safe, with the sense of risk out of this imaginary circle.

This concept has direct relation to the thematic of this thesis, because when students go abroad they will leave their comfort zone, this ontological security that they have in their homeland, and this is how I could observe how they managed to create a new comfort zone, a place in which they could say they would feel safe and well.

2.2 Cultural shock

"Culture is not delimited, it is not homogeneous and it is continually being produced by individuals (...) Characterizing a culture is itself a political act, and the notion of cultures as pre-existing things, waiting to be explained, has become increasingly implausible"

(Philips in Dervin, 2009a, 119)

Regarding cultural shock, adaptation can be even more difficult if the students before travelling don't know the differences between their society and the one they are going. The shock may be quite large. The concept of cultural shock still don't have a true definition but in 1960 the anthropologist Oberg started to use some terms associated to culture shock: "strain due to the effort required to make necessary psychological adaptations a sense of loss and feelings of deprivation in regard to friends, status, professions and possessions being rejected by, or rejecting, members of the new culture. Confusion in role, role expectations, values, surprise, anxiety, even disgust and indignation after becoming aware of cultural differences feelings of impotence due not being able to cope with the new environment" (Oberg in Furnham, 2004,17). Also in Zhou *et al.* it is possible to find a different and shorter definition, "shock is understood as the stimulus for acquisition of culture-specific skills that required to engage in new social interactions" (Zhou *et al.,* 2008, 65). It is understood that the shock is to face the difficulties and find ways to overcome it.

Foreign students are normally described being young, well educated, highly motivated and suitable to adapt themselves more easily. Despite this, some of them will have problems to adapt themselves because they are a minority and they need rapidly to adapt to the new culture and sometimes they are not able to do it (Furnham, 2004). In the decade of 1990 Sandhu and Asrabadi divided the cause of the problems in two main categories:

- "Intrapersonal factors: A profound sense of loss (family and friends); a sense of inferiority (particularly in America); a sense of uncertainty (about the future)."
- "Interpersonal factors: Communication (language and social skills); cultural shock (differences in expectations and social norms); loss of social support systems (particularly from family); miscellaneous factors such as education and

immigration difficulties; making friends and establishing social support networks." (Furnham,2004,17).

In 1986 Fumham and Bochner claimed that some of the difficulties the foreign students face are exclusive to them. It is possible to find common difficulties among all students even if they are abroad or not, such as becoming emotionally independent, self supporting or a responsible society member. Besides these ones there is also the academic stress. The expectation to work hard is present. Despite being serious difficulties these ones aren't specific for foreign students but they exist. Difficulties such as racial discrimination, language problems, accommodation problems, financial stress, misunderstandings and loneliness can be considered difficulties that the sojourners are often going to find. (Furnham,2004).

Oberg in 1960 had defined four main stages dealing with going abroad and more specifically with the cultural shock. The first stage he identified is the "honeymoon" stage in which the foreigners are fascinated in the first weeks with what is new for them. This stage can last for a few days or until six months depending on the circumstances. Normally this lasts when living in the hotel, with less contact to the locals not needing to make an effort to understand the native language and having more contact with people who speak their own language. The second stage is when the foreign visitor stays in the country and need to deal with the host culture. This stage will be characterized with a hostile and aggressive attitude against the country that he/she is living. This hostility will grow by the need to deal with situations that he/she is not adjusted for, like those "maid trouble, school trouble, language trouble, shopping trouble, house trouble and the fact that people in the host country are largely indifferent to all these troubles" (Oberg in Curare,2006,143). But this doesn't mean they don't help, they just don't understand well what difficulties they have to face. Because of this the traveller will get closer and handle more with people of his country starting to criticize the host country. The foreigner will "take refuge in the colony of your country-men and its cocktail circuit which often becomes the fountain-head of emotionally charged labels known as stereotypes" (Oberg in Curare,2006,143). It is possible to resume the second stage saying that "this second stage of culture shock is in a sense a crisis in the disease. If you overcome it, you stay; if not, you leave before you reach the stage of a nervous breakdown" (Oberg in Curare, 2006, 143).

The third stage occurs when the visitor is more comfortable with the host nation and starts knowing how the culture works and starts having some knowledge about the language. The difficulties are not gone but a different attitude and the effort for having a good connection to the locals increases the local culture. Being more confident and starting to make friends from the country they had criticized before. The fourth and last stage is when he accepts the costumes of the country as a normal thing, living the normal daily life without anxiety. He gets used to the drinks or food, enjoys it and when it is time to leave the country he "generally miss the country and the people to whom you have become accustomed" (Oberg in Curare, 2006, 143).

After discussing what culture shock is and how this can affect an individual, Oberg also refers how it is possible to recover from it. The solution is to meet people from the host country but to be able to do this, knowing the host language is necessary because the "language is the principal symbol system of communication" (Oberg in Curare, 2006,145). Trying to learn the language can be frustrating but starting to have some knowledge about it increases the individual´s confidence and starts creating dialogs in the supermarkets or with the neighbours. Another good solution is participating even like an observer participant in some local activities like carnival or religious rites.

The term cultural shock can be seen in different ways being the concept idealized by Oberg and later by Ward or Furnham one example inside others. Another point of view possible to be analysed is the concept of culture confusion by Hottola.

The theoretical discussion about cultural shock has in literature a very known idealized process as the U-Curve. This graphic in the last decades has been used by many authors to explain an emotional curve going trough different phases (euphoria, disillusionment, hostility, adaptation, assimilation) (Hottola, 2004).

Figure 2 The U-Curve of Cultural Shock
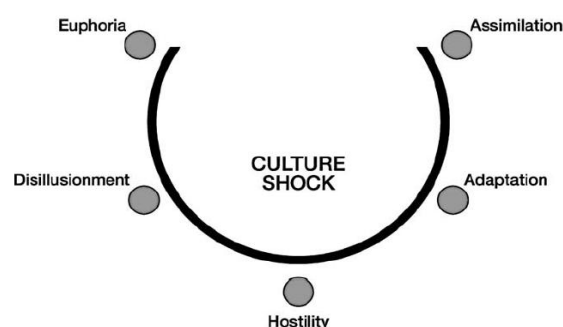
Source: Hottola, 2004, 448

Another known graphic is the W-Curve model of Gullahorn and Gullahorn. In this one there is the addition of a new curve to the U- Curve graphic. This addition has the purpose when the student goes back home to his home having a negative emotional process, needs to have a re-integration process.

Figure 3 The W-Curve of Cultural Shock
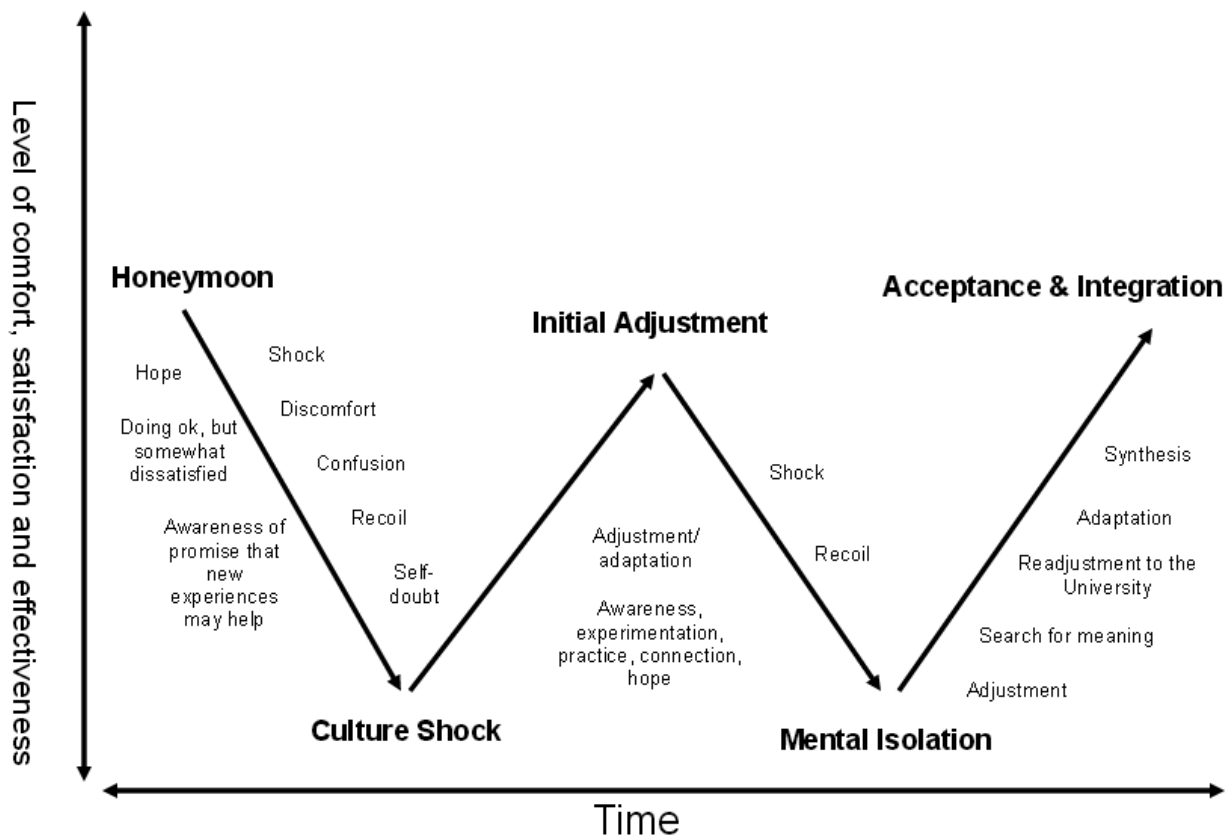
Here it is possible to see the extension of the U-Curve having an extra phase in what concerns the return of the sojourners to their homeland.

Hottola claims that the U-Curve is inconclusive, not identifying this chain of emotions phases as the most common ones. He affirms that if it is a real description of the reality we can see that "There are many who do not adapt and a large number of individual and situational courses of adaptation which do not agree with the hypothesis" (Hottola, 2004,450). When the term shock is discussed it is normally associated to depression like already ascertained. Like Kealey, Ward and Keneedy pointed out in Hottola (2004) this

feeling of shock or depression is not the more accurate one. They state that " (...) there often is neither shock nor depression, but they usually get stressed and confused while learning new things or facing unexpected difficulties, even after repeated visits to the same destination" (Hottola, 2004,450). For Hottola using the concept of cultural shock is more common because it can end to be more exciting by attracting more attention to it but normally it is more accurate to affirm confusion than shock. " Unlike cultural shock, culture confusion focuses both on the problematic part of the adaptation process and on the frequently simultaneous presence of enjoyment, success, and learning (...) Confusion may not be so exciting a word as shock, but certainly more accurate in the vast majority of cases in the context of intercultural adaptation" (Hottola, 2004, 453).

In that way it is possible to make a confrontation between the concept of cultural shock and cultural confusion being one more connected with the state of depression (cultural shock) and the other with the confusion to be in a new place more associated to stress situations (cultural confusion). This concept can be seen like an "alternative theoretical framework" (Hottola, 2004, 461).

3. The Erasmus experience

The EU as it exists today was founded in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty with three main institutions: the European Parliament, the EU Council and the European Commission. It currently has 27 member states , which makes a total of 500 million people and 23 official languages : German, French, English , Italian, Spanish , Polish, Romanian , Dutch, Greek , Hungarian , Portuguese , Czech , Swedish , Bulgarian , Finnish, Danish, Lithuanian, Irish , Latvian , Slovenian, Estonian and Maltese. If EU was a country it would be the third most populous in the world, having the highest GDP, surpassing United States and China.

In the '80s the EU aimed to "strengthen the spirit of European citizenship" (Rúa, 2003 2), with the aim that the countries begin sharing culture and identity among themselves. For this the Erasmus programme was created in 1987, which allowed the mobility of students within Europe to be easier. However this programme not only includes countries belonging to the EU. It is also possible to make study plans in Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Norway and Turkey.

The name Erasmus comes from the Dutch philosopher Erasmo of Rotterdam. This was a humanist philosopher born in 1465 and died in 1536. He lived and worked in several countries in Europe and sought wisdom and knowledge through his travels. His ideas on how to teach and educate revolutionized the teaching mode implemented. With the book *"Early and liberal education of children"* published in 1529, Erasmo wrote his visions which had an impact at the beginning of the Modern World. Because of this, the EU decided to honour this philosopher giving his name to Erasmus, the most important Europe programme for mobility. In addition to the tribute, this is also an abbreviation for **E**uropean community **A**ction **S**heme for **M**obility of **U**niversity **S**tudents.

This programme despite having only officially started in 1987, (1981-1986) it was the target of pilot tests during six years. However, this was formalized in a very fast way and in its first year based on data from the EU, 3244 students from 11 countries participated and carried out the campaign Erasmus mobility. According to the EU data, in 2009 the number of 2 million students who have participated so far in this European programme was achieved, this represents well the success of the programme since its implementation.

Since the year of its implementation until 2004 the programme had about one million four hundred thousand students participating with about 2,199 institutions having protocols, ready to receive students from other countries. From 2004 until the

year 2009, 600,000 students took part in a mobility programme. Reinforcing the idea that the number of students participating continues increasing.

For the period of 2014-2020 the new programme with the name Erasmus + was approved and with this new key challenges were targeted. They are the fields of education, training, youth and sport. These fields are considered key elements for the strategy of Europe to overcome socio-economic crisis that actually exists, aiming to boost growth, jobs and to promote social inclusion (EU, 2014).

For the success of this programme, it would need to be associated to a strong brand name and so because of this the name Erasmus was chosen for the programme even if this includes all kind of mobility programmes. During the period 2007-2013 the European commission implemented different programmes and now these ones will be integrate the Erasmus + programme. The programmes were:

- The Lifelong Learning Programme
- The Youth in Action Programme
- The Erasmus Mundus Programme
- Tempus
- Alfa
- Edulink
- Programmes of cooperation with industrialised countries in the field of higher education

With this Erasmus + all kind of mobility programmes are included, a strong well known brand. To help the participants to choose the best mobility programme for them they were divided by a specific sector as follows:

- "Erasmus+: Comenius", in relation to the activities of the Programme exclusively related to the field of school education;

- "Erasmus+: Erasmus", in relation to the activities of the Programme exclusively related to the field of higher education and targeting Programme Countries;

- "Erasmus+: Erasmus Mundus", in relation to the Joint Masters Degrees;

- "Erasmus+: Leonardo da Vinci", in relation to the activities of the Programme exclusively related to the field of vocational education and training;

- "Erasmus+: Grundtvig", in relation to the activities of the Programme exclusively related to the field of adult learning;

- "Erasmus+: Youth in Action", in relation to the activities of the Programme exclusively related to the field of youth non-formal and informal learning;

- "Erasmus+: Jean Monnet", in relation to the activities of the Programme exclusively associated with the field of European Union studies;

- "Erasmus+: Sports", in relation to the activities of the Programme exclusively related to the field of sport;

(EU, 2014)

Erasmus can be more than a simple mobility programme. For some students it is a goal since they entered the university. To study abroad will end to be something more than just a study programme. That is what Erasmus can offer to the students, a package of experiences further than an exchange to study. And the students searching for doing Erasmus now may have the example of friends who already have done it and they can influence them to do the same because normally the feedback after a student doing Erasmus ends up to be positive even with all the difficulties that can be found while studying abroad.

One factor that can be a serious enclave to students going abroad is still the economic situation. Going abroad implies extra costs that many families cannot afford. Even with the help of scholarships, these ones will end up to be not enough for their needs, obligating them to have some extra money.

Actually there are stereotypes about the programme Erasmus that involves more things than studying, like parties, drinking or even travelling. Erasmus is mostly directed to young students, being natural when these are the ones going abroad willing to have fun and enjoy the time the best way possible while being there.

Besides the moment that involves leisure, Erasmus is also a vehicle that is seen as a way to improve their curriculum. Students think that this can be a possibility to acquire skills, skills that couldn't be obtained with regular classes in their home country. These competences are like to work under stress, be able to manage difficulties in a foreign country or to learn or improve another language. With this pluses Erasmus ends up to be besides a study plan an addition to gain new competences or develop the ones

they already have with the purpose to include them in their CV expecting that companies will give value to these experience abroad.

Before going to Erasmus, Erasmus students know stories, going with an idea of what they will find there or has idealized how the experience will be.

With Erasmus some specific companies gain some benefits from foreign students, like for example travel or real estate agencies or other places specific for them such as bars or restaurants.

To sum up it is possible to affirm that Erasmus is more than a simple exchange experience, it ends up involving much more things not only concerning the students that are going abroad but also affecting the economy of the host culture.

3.1 The cities of Braga (Portugal) and Prague (Czech Republic) - Analysis

The chosen places to conduct the interviews for the master thesis were the cities of Braga (Portugal) and Prague (Czech Republic). These ones were chosen due to some factors further explained below.

Braga is located in the North of Portugal in the Minho region, not far from the second largest city of the country, Porto (Oporto). The connection between these two cities is good, supported by modern railway and highway systems. Besides that, Braga is located at a distance of 50km from the international airport (Sá Carneiro), with a direct bus connection. Braga is also located near the coast despite not having direct contact with the ocean, being located 30 km from it. Concerning the census of 2011 the Municipality of Braga (183,4 km2) has 181,494 inhabitants (INE) and the city itself is actually considered to be the 3rd largest city of Portugal.

Figure 4 Map of Braga
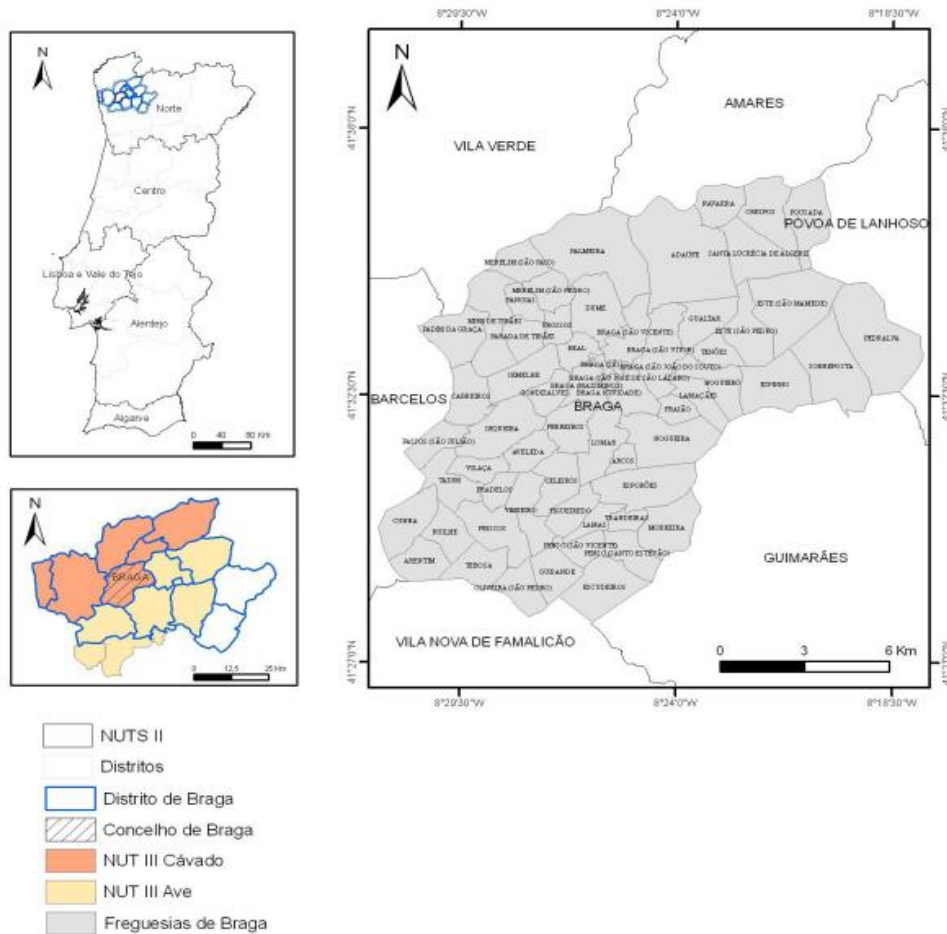
Source: Teles, 2010, 97

Climatically Braga has an Atlantic influence, having rainy winters and warm summers. In the following tables are stated the average temperatures and precipitation in the city of Braga in the years 1951-1980.

Table 1 Average Temperatures in Braga (1951-1980)

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
T. máx. (°C)	12.8	13.5	15.6	17.8	20.7	24.4	27.2	27.0	24.9	21.0	16.0	13.3
T. mín. (°C)	4.5	4.8	6.2	7.0	9.6	12.0	13.2	12.6	11.8	9.6	6.3	4.6

Source: Adapted from Teles, 2010

Figure 5 Average Precipitations in Braga (1951-1980)
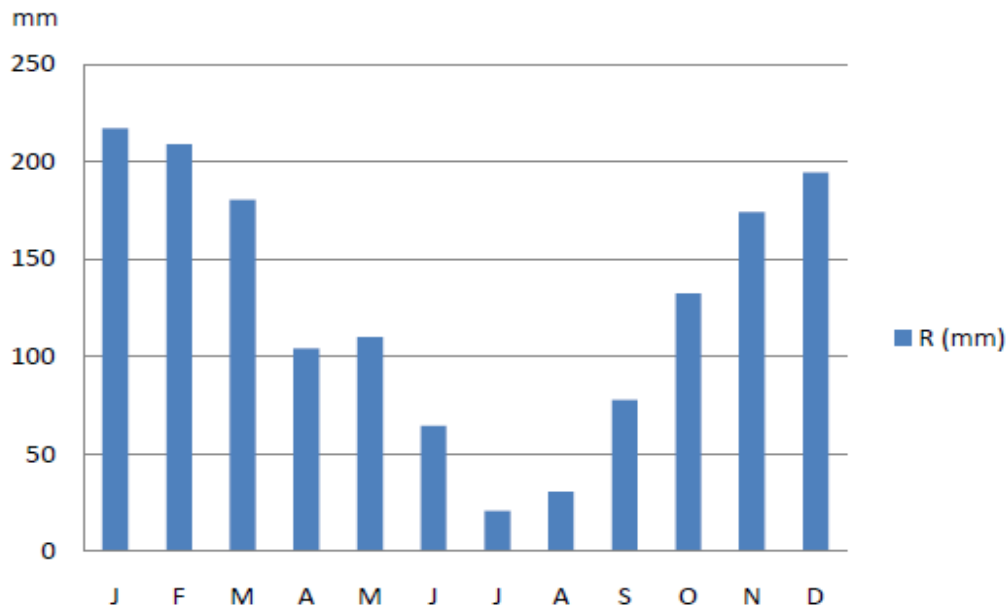
Source: Adapted from Teles, 2010

Braga is an historical city and it is possible to find information since the Celtic times. During the Roman Empire it had the name of Bracara Augusta, dedicated to their Emperor at the time. During the following centuries the city had different influences, Romans, Suevians, Visigoths and Arabs, in 411 after the roman domain the city was under the Suevian domain until the VI century when the Visigoths arrived to the power, in the year 585. After that in 715, Braga suffered invasions and the occupation of the Muslims, after several attacks these could be the reasons for the destruction of the city. Besides the Muslims, the city also suffered destruction by the attacks from the

Christians for the reconquest of the city in 753 and 754 commanded by Afonso 1 (Martins, 1992). In the years 1070-1093 the city was rebuilt by Bishop Pedro and became one of the most important religious centres of the Iberian Peninsula.

In the years 1981-1991 the population growth of Braga was of 12,6% , and between 1991-2001 it was 16,2% and from 2001 until 2006 the population was still increasing but at a more slower pace, 5,9%. (PDM, Braga, 2008). Braga kept the historical centre but it began increasing around in what concerns services, industry and commerce. The city centre has a considerable pedestrian area with the existence of a strong traditional commerce, where tourism tends to concentrate. With the following figure it is possible to see how Braga is organized concerning the economy and the services there represented.

Figure 6 Economic sectors in Braga
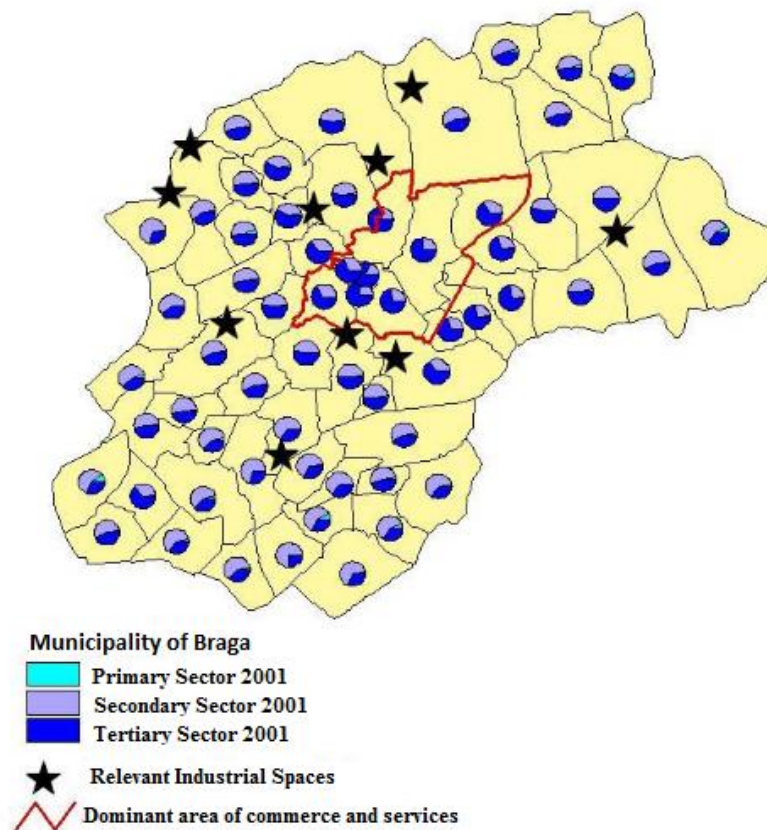
Source: Relatório da avaliação da execução do PDMB (2008)

Outside the centre of the city it is possible to find a large number of buildings/apartments that were constructed without a proper planning. The

transportation system is precarious, not being the best solution for those who want to move inside the city mainly during night hours when this service just doesn't exist. Because of this, the dependency of the private car is high. Despite Braga being an old city it doesn't mean that the people living there are old. Braga is known to be one of the youngest cities of Europe, in 1989 it was considered the youngest city of Europe (uminho.pt) and in 2012 the European capital of youth. It is possible to see in the following table that comparing it with other main cities of Portugal in the last three decades Braga has the lower age average, being even bellow the average of the country.

Table 2 Average population's age

Residence Place	Average Age of the Population		
	1991	2001	2011
Portugal	36,35	39,01	41,83
Continent	36,52	39,19	42,01
Braga	31,70	34,89	38,62
Porto	37,86	41,67	44,96
Coimbra	36,75	39,95	43,40
Lisbon	41,40	44,11	44,44
Évora	37,94	40,24	42,51
Faro	36,98	39,45	41,65

Source: INE

Regarding Minho University, this is a recent University founded in the year of 1973.The campus is located 3 km from the city centre. Thus, new services have developed near this campus, such as restaurants, bars, block of apartments etc. Despite this campus not being far from the city centre, this location influences the ways in which the students behave and the places where they normally go. The university has some services functioning in the centre, such as the rectory or some degrees like nursing or music. In Braga there are two different student's residences, Lloyd with the capacity for 304 students and Santa Tecla with the capacity for 521 students (http://www.sas.uminho.pt). They are far from each other. While Lloyd residence is closer to the University, Santa Tecla residence is closer to the city centre. Today the University has an important role in regional development. Besides Braga, the university

has also a campus in the city of Guimarães. Minho University has approximately 19.000 students. The university has defined for the year 2020 some targets: to reach 25.000 students, 45% being post graduation students and 20% international students (Plano Estratégico UMINHO 2020).

The university has an important role in what concerns the regional development, the existence of an university will open conditions to receive money from private and public institutions (Cadima, n.d). In addition to the money, the presence of an university will be an important factor to have greater knowledge about technological affairs and the development of the academic discussion that will result in the acquirement of scientific knowledge (Cadima, n.d).

The number of international students (Erasmus students) in the last years has been growing. In 2007/2008 the number of students was of 232 and in the year 2011/2012 there were 285 students (SRI). In the next graphic it is possible to see that the number of students has been growing in the last years and where they come from.

Figure 7 Erasmus students (2007-2012)
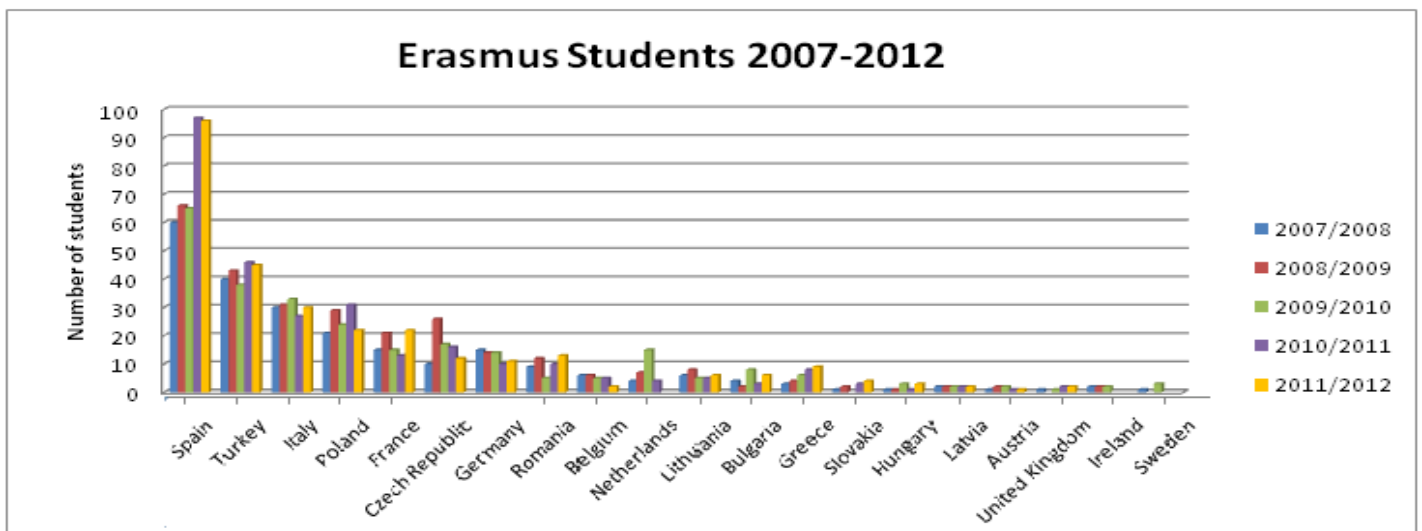
Source: SRI (2012)

The city of Prague is located in the centre of Europe and it is the capital of the Czech Republic. This city is located in the Bohemian region surrounded by a ring of mountains. Through the city runs the river Vltava, which is the biggest river of the country (prague.com). Concerning the preliminary data from the census 2011, Prague has 1,272,690 inhabitants having a demographic growth since the last census (2001) (praguemonitor.com).

Figure 8 Map of Prague

Prague in the Central Bohemia Region

Legend:
- significant regional centres
- other regional centres
- significant lower level centres
- territory of Prague
- sphere of influence
- Prague Central Bohemia Conurbation
- boundary of the Central Bohemia Region
- boundary of district
- fast communications

main development areas
1. Hostivice
2. Rudná
3. dolní Poberouní
4. Dolní Břežany – Zvole
5. Jesenice
6. Průhonice – Modletice
7. Jirny – Šestajovice
8. Zdiby – Klecany
9. Úžice
10. Tuchoměřice – Kněževes
11. Unhošť

Source: The role of Prague and city´s economy (ND)

Prague has 496 km², and is provided with a good railway system with daily connections to other important European cities. There are over 7000 trains per day passing in Prague and the train station is located in the city centre. Prague has an important international airport, with 12 million passengers a year flying over there. This airport (Václav Havel Airport, formerly Prague Ruzyně International Airport) is located 20 km west from the city centre, taking approximately 30 minutes to travel from the airport to the city (facultydevelopment2013.com).

Due to the location of the country, seasons are quite precise. During the winter the temperatures can be bellow 0ºC and in the summer the temperatures range between 20-22ºC but can reach 35ºC with the humidity dropping around 20%.

Like Braga, Prague is also an historical city. Prague became a city in the end of the 12th century, the old town appeared in 1220 joining the Lesser Town at the end of the 13th century. At the beginning of the 14th century was the emergence of the Hradčany (Castle Quarter) (czech.cz). When King Charles IV ruled (1346-78) Prague emerged and became one of the most important places in the centre of Europe and, after Rome the second Christian metropolis of Europe and with this king, the Charles

University was founded in 1348. Until the present, Prague has had different architectonic influences: Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Romantic, Neo-Renaissance and Cubism. Today the historical city centre of Prague is part of the UNESCO list of world Heritage.

Prague is a developed city, being divided in municipal districts, Prague 1 located in the city centre, and the lower the number of the municipal district is, the closer to the centre this district will be. The bases of the city economy are the services, followed by business activities, hotels/restaurants and business/repairs. It is possible to see that since 1980 the employment in the services has been growing until today, with the industrial sector decreasing.

Figure 9 Economic sectors in Prague   Figure 10 Employment in Prague
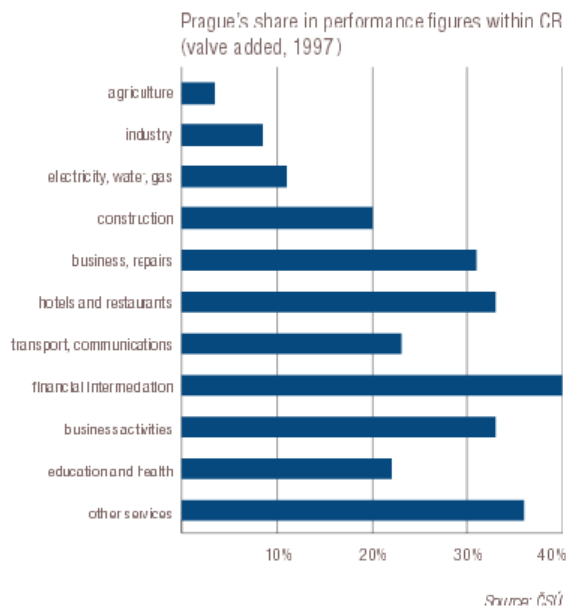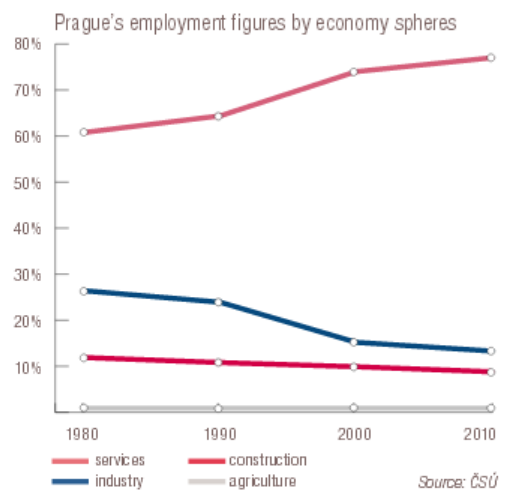
Source: The role of Prague and city´s economy (ND)

In what concerns the mobility inside the city, Prague has one of the best public transportation systems of Europe. In Prague there are three main transportation systems: Trams, Buses and Metro. The tram network per year is used approximately by 300 million passengers and has over 500 km tracks, consisting in 26 lines that function during the day and 9 lines during the night. Between 4:30a.m and midnight the trams are provided from 2 minutes to 20 minutes depending on the location. The bus service is used to cover the places the tram or the metro can't reach, having 182 lines during the day and 13 during the night. During peak hours they have buses every 6-8 minutes. And

other than, they have an interval from 10 to 20 minutes. The metro opened in 1978 has now three lines, identified with three different letters and different colours, being the line A (Green line) the oldest (facultydevelopment2013.com).

For the years 2009-2015 a programme for the implementation of Prague's strategic plan has been created. The following topics are the main objectives for the next years:

- Secure the role of Prague as a respected capital city and good neighbour.
- Develop Prague as an important part of the new Europe.
- Utilize the city´s potential to secure its competitive economy and prosperity.
- Secure economic activity according to the needs and potential of the city; support Prague´s distinctive character and principle of sustainability.
- Search sufficient financial resources to secure the realization of these strategic aims.

Concerning tourism, Prague is one of the most visited cities in Europe, and during all year it is possible to find a lot of tourists in the city. The most common are the Germans followed by the Russian and the Italian tourists. The tourism in Prague has a big role as stated in the following tables according the Czech Statistical Institute (CSÚ) stated in Vanicek, 2006.

Table 3 Tourism in Prague

City	Number of tourists per year	Estimated number of tourists and one day visitors per year	Total amount of money spent by tourists per year in billions of CZK
Prague	3,863,989	5,926,363	28.2

Source: Vanicek (2006)

Besides the number of tourists it is also visible that the economic activity is getting more important every year in Prague. Analysing the tables with the number of Hotels and Beds it is possible to see the growth of the tourism market in Prague and the impact that it has in its economy.

Table 4 Employment in Prague's Hotels, Boarding houses & Restaurant

Employment in Prague's Hotels, Boarding houses & Restaurants for the selected years				
1980	1991	1999	2005	2007
4,107	9,200	16,000	31,900	29-32,000

Source: Hoffman and Musil, 2009, 11

Table 5 Evolution of the hotels   Table 6 Evolution of the number of beds

Hotels in Prague			
1955	1975	1990	1996
56	64	75	189

Beds in Prague		
1990	1996	2000
15,000	38,699	48,000

Source: Hoffman and Musil, 2009, 13

The Charles University founded in 1348 is one of the oldest universities of Europe, now it has 17 faculties and not all of them are located in Prague, two of them are in Hradec Králové and the other one is in Plzeň. Charles University has a large number of students, 53,000 with 7900 employees, of which 4500 are academic and research staff. They have 20,000 students taking Bachelor's degrees, almost 25,000 in Master´s programmes and 8000 PhD´s. The University also refers that it has over 7000 students from other countries (cuni.cz). In what concerns Erasmus students, it's possible to see that the number of the outgoing and incoming of foreign students has been growing in the last years. In the year of 2001- 2002 the number of outgoing students was 632 and incoming was 242 but in the year of 2010-2011 the number of outgoing students was 1056 and incoming students was 1100 (European Office Data). Charles university provides several residences in Prague for the students, in total they are 12 and they are : Kolej Arnošta z Pardubic, Kolej Petrská, Kolej Jednota, Kolej Švehlova, Kolej Budeč, Kolej Otava, Kolej Na Větrníku, Kolej Hvězda, Kolej Kajetánka, Kolej Komenského, Kolej 17. Listopadu, Kolej Hostivař (cezchcampus.com). In addition to these ones there are others that have partnership with the other universities located in Prague.

Apart from the Charles University in Prague there are also the following universities: Czech Technical University in Prague, Czech University of Life Science Prague and VSE- University of Economics.

After describing these two cities I will explain why I chose Braga and Prague to apply my work. Perhaps a comparison between Prague and Porto would be more appropriate due to the size of the cities and the number of Erasmus students but Braga is the city where I live in and it is one of the cities where my university is located in. I chose Braga because it also receives Erasmus students and I realized that the interviews would be easier to do in the city where I live. Also since Braga has a recent university in contrast to Prague's University, I wanted to see some aspects concerning this point, to work with a new and an old university. In the last years, Braga had a big development and I was curious to see how the city deals with these foreign students and also the other way around, how the students deal and live in a small city in a European context. So living in Braga I would have the background information needed to proceed my work knowing the city well and knowing what the best way to approach these students would be.

The reasons for choosing Prague were first because of its geographical location. Being in the centre of Europe would allow me to be able to make interviews with students from even more different places, better said, I could have more options to choose with whom I would like to work with. Having more international students would create the possibility to have more students to work with. Besides that, Prague was one of the options I had to do Erasmus and since I had friends who had done Erasmus there before me maybe influenced my choices as well. The work in Prague would give me also the opportunity to compare different realities between an European capital located in the centre of Europe and another city, Braga located in the southwest of Europe and compared with Prague a small city with less students.

4. Interviews made in Braga (Portugal) (winter semester) - Analysis

Here are introduced the interviews made in Braga, carried out between September 2012 and February 2013. As already mentioned in the methodology, these interviews were divided into four different phases, each one regarding a specific scenario inside their experience. In the following table it is possible to find the information about the students that worked with me during this period.

Table 7 Information about the interviewed students in Braga

Name	Age	Studies	Country	City studying
Laura	23	Psychology	Belgium	Leuven
Walter	23	English Language	Turkey	Izmir
Thomas B.	22	International culture and Business	Germany	Passau
Bridget	21	English Language	Turkey	Izmir
Liana	20	Psychology	Belgium	Lueven
Giannis	20	Journalism	Greece	Athens
Izabel	21	Education	Lithuania	Vilnius
Mario	22	Oriental Language	Italian	Bologna
Serena	23	Education	Italian	Cologne
Kate	21	international culture and Business	Germany	Passau

4.1 1ˢᵗ Phase

The first phase, pre-Erasmus, is when students are in their homeland and need to prepare for their arrival. It's the moment when the first thoughts occur, when they need to choose a destination, find a place to live and deal with all their thoughts and feelings.

When asked about their opinions about Braga or Portugal before coming here, different results emerged. The most common response among them was the use of the internet to get information about the city, and also the website of the Minho University to collect more information. Some of the information collected was about the importance of religion in the city. Some saw this as an opportunity to visit churches; others were afraid it would not be a good city to have fun in because it is an old city.

Other than that they tried to get more information asking friends for advices about Portugal or Braga.

In some cases they didn't know anything about the city, because they just wanted a different place to do Erasmus or just wanted to know the city when they got there. For example Giannis from Greece chose Braga because she wanted some independence by living alone and she had already a lot of friends in Porto and in Lisbon, and she didn't try to gather information about Braga. Others like Bridget from Turkey had curiosity about the Latin culture so she intended to know more about it. As an history lover she wanted to go to a city/country with a lot of history, like her own country, Turkey, but about Braga she didn't have much information. The information she had about Braga was through the football team *Sporting Clube de Braga*. Other reasons and thoughts they had before coming to Braga are related to the expectation of good weather and that it would be a cheap place to live.

When asked if they came to Erasmus alone only two of them came with friends. Some had people from the same university coming to the same city so they had decided to travel together and others had only met in Braga.

The expectations they had are very common, they thought it would be nice and fun, a time to enjoy life and open new horizons, travel a lot and have some good weather, do hiking trips and learn Portuguese. But not all had created so many expectations, for example Walter from Turkey didn't want to create big expectations because if he wouldn't like it, the disappointment would be bigger. They also expected difficulties, the most common ones were the language and their study plans for the semester. But also other worries were expected such as to be afraid to gain weight, the different kind of food, the search for a house or the cultural shock, this last one said by Bridget from Turkey. Another thing that worried Thomas B. from Germany was the Erasmus "trap". He didn't want to be all the time with people from other countries, he wanted to know the Portuguese and their life style. For this goal he did couch surfing, having the opportunity to know Portuguese students.

Regarding the knowledge that they had about Portugal's geography before coming, the answers were very similar. They knew Lisbon and Porto and some also knew Algarve and Coimbra because of tourism publicity or through friends who had already been in those places. Only one located Portugal near Marrocos. Information of smaller cities is rare or doesn't exist. Concerning the weather they thought it was a country with good weather.

4.2 2nd Phase

The second phase defined is the moment of their arrival and the first weeks in the city. This represents the moment of the first contact with the place that will be their home for 5/6 months. In this particular phase different questions were made: their main objectives for this semester, the place where they live taking into account the location in the city, the first thoughts when they arrived to the airport, questions concerning people, food, weather and transports and if they were interested in learning the native language to see their progress later.

The first question was about the place where they were living and its location. This point is very important because it can show the different behaviours between those who live in a residence or those who live in a flat. Also the location of these places is important because this can represent if they live near the city centre or if they prefer to live near the university.

At the beginning of the winter semester six of these ten students were living in a flat and four at the university residences. So I asked them why they made these choices.

The main reasons for them to choose to live in the residences were:

- Low Price
- Opportunity to meet more people
- To not have worries to search for a place to live

These were the main reasons described concerning living in a flat:

- Not comfortable sharing a room
- More privacy
- Impossibility to cook in the residences

For Laura living in a residence was not an option, she didn't want to share a room with another person, the need of her own privacy was an important factor. The search for a flat was not so easy for her, because she arrived on a Friday and the university was closed, so only on Monday she would have help to find a flat. Now she is living in a flat between the city centre and the university campus and she says that it is the perfect location to live. She is sharing her flat with another Belgium girl and a Brazilian boy.

Walter is a different case, he wanted to live at the university residence, he made this choice because he had already lived for 3 years in Canada and he knows the trouble

it is to look for a flat so he decided to live in the residence. In addition to that the low price and the opportunity to meet more people made him stay in the university residence. The main problem that he points out about the residence, until now, is the impossibility to cook there.

Thomas B. opted for a flat as well, did couch surfing in Braga when he was looking for one. He stayed five days in a house, and he lived with other Portuguese making his first contact with inhabitants from Portugal and not other Erasmus. After that he was still searching for a flat but he moved to an Erasmus friend´s flat and slept there on the couch. He was searching for a house near the shopping mall (Braga Parque), because it's very well located and it is between the university campus and the city centre. He bought a phone and tried to call the owners of the flats but the linguistic barrier was too big, he says that was really hard to find a flat, but he could find one with the help of the Portuguese with whom he had met through couch surfing.

Another person that stayed at the university residence was Bridget. She confesses that she didn't have much information about the place where she would live in. It was going to be a blind experience at the beginning. When she arrived she kept asking herself what place that was. Yet she wanted to live there because she would have more opportunities to meet a lot of new people, besides that living in a residence is cheaper. And staying a bit far from the university is not a problem for her. Until now she is enjoying her room, but she says that the residence location is like a "war zone", because it's in the middle of other buildings that are not so well preserved and with some social problems.

The most common thing among these students that live in a flat is the need of privacy, they were not so comfortable with the idea of sharing the room with another person. Almost all of them preferred to stay near the university campus than in the city centre or another place, only Serena stayed at the beginning in the city centre but she rapidly regretted that decision and she moved into a flat near the university. At the beginning she thought that if she lived in the city centre it would be better because she would be in the middle of everything. But she quickly realised that that was not the reality and she decided to move, and she didn't want to live in the residence because she saw pictures of it and when she realised the impossibility to cook and make her own meals it influenced her choice. For twenty Euros more it's possible to get a flat and live with other conditions, better ones than at an university residence.

The experience of Izabel was not so good at the beginning, she didn't know that there were so many flats to rent so she asked to stay at the university residence and the first impression was not good at all. She hated the location of the Santa Tecla residence and she asked to move to the other university residence that exists in Braga. One thing that she couldn´t understand was how it was possible at an university residence to not have conditions to cook and prepare meals, only a microwave was provided. Also she says that in Lithuania the residences are very cheap and she expected the same in Braga, but after all that's not true and it´s possible to get a flat spending a little more money than on the university residence.

Another question was related to their objectives for their Erasmus in Braga, the more common were:

- To know a different culture
- To know a different education system
- The need for independence
- To live without monotony
- To learn Portuguese
- To get to know the Portuguese culture
- To leave their comfort zone
- To know how to live with more responsibilities
- To be independent

For these students, Erasmus is a vehicle that can give the possibility to reach these objectives. For many, this is the first time that they will live completely alone which increases responsibilities. Like Laura, she needed to move out from her comfort zone and the chance was now and she took it. Others just wanted to have more time for themselves or just live without monotony that normally exists back home and Erasmus creates the opportunity to live something new. The word independence is spoken very often during the interviews. But other objectives exist, Thomas B. wanted to learn Portuguese and get to know our culture, he didn't choose to do Erasmus to travel. Walter wanted to improve his Curriculum Vitae and he thinks that doing Erasmus is good way to do it, because he can show that he is fit to work under pressure and he is competent and responsible.

When asked what their thoughts were when landed in Portugal, different answers were given, for example the students from Turkey were so tired, that they

wanted to arrive in Braga as fast as they could. Liana from Belgium made reference to the different temperature felt in Belgium and Portugal, because it was cold in her country and when she arrived it was really good weather. Mario from Italy said that saying goodbye was hard but when he arrived he had a good impression. Serena also from Italy but student in Colone (Germany) said, she felt the smell of the sea and oil of the airport, she likes to feel the different odours when she arrives to a new place. For Fransiska, from Germany, the sensation of liberty was immediate.

Climate can be sometimes a very important factor to choose a place to go and even more if you go to live there. For example for Izabel from Lithuania, the weather was a very important factor to choose Portugal, she wanted to live somewhere with good weather conditions. But for Giannis and Serena, it was not a factor to choose Braga. Serena wanted to see how it was to live in a country in southern Europe.

About their contact with Portuguese people, opinions can diverge. Laura didn't expect to find so many people speaking English in Braga, but otherwise Walter thinks differently, in his opinion it's hard to find people who speak English, but when that happens they are friendly and helpful. Thomas B. also shares the same opinion that they are friendly but he thinks that students at the university behave differently with Erasmus students than with other students. The Portuguese students are also considered noisy people, says Bridget. Liana thinks that people in Braga are more close-minded than people from northern Europe and Izabel thinks the citizens don't make an effort to help those who don't speak their native language, but she also affirms that the locals smile a lot and seem happier than people from her country and she likes that a lot. Mario has a different opinion, he thinks that people in Braga help a lot, even the older ones try to help. Serena shares the same feeling and she says that this happens maybe because Braga is a small city and the necessity to help is increased by that factor.

The food is also a very important factor for the adaptation process, because it's part of the culture of the country, so I asked what they thought about the food and how the first contact with it was. Laura was surprised to see that we usually mix rice and potatoes in the same meal. In her country (Belgium) that´s not ordinary. For Bridget, Turkish food and Portuguese food have some similarities, and she likes Port vine for example. When Liana arrived at Braga her first meal was at MacDonald's, because normally when a person arrives to an unknown place, the search for brands that are familiar it's almost automatic. That is why she chose MacDonald's to eat when she arrived in Braga. Something that is more common among them is the surprise regarding

the prices of the food, they say it's cheap and they can eat well for a low price. Mario says he misses the Italian food a lot, but he loves fish and in Portugal it's very easy to find good and cheap fish, also he says that the variety of the meat is also big. For Serena the food is ok, but she expected more variety, with more flavours.

The mobility of the students is important apart from the place of living, it will influence how they will reside in the place that they live, which behaviours they will have and what kind of routines they will establish. Movement is and was in all history of mankind important to explain behaviours and different habits of living. This is why questions about the transportation and about their mobility were made. The opinions related to transports are far from being equal, here we can see three different types of people: students who don't use transports in their daily life, because Braga is not so big and if you are well located then you don't need to; others use the public transportation system and others are students who use it but don't like it because they consider them not punctual or too expensive. For the students from Belgium, they referred that they were surprised that the use of the bicycle was not an ordinary thing. And at the university the places to park a bicycle didn't exist or were too small, in comparison to their country. The opinions about the punctuality and efficiency of the buses are very different. Some students like Mario said that they are very good because in Italy it's worse than in Braga so he likes the transports. For Izabel the buses drive too fast and are dangerous sometimes, she says it's very different from her homeland. Also she refers that it is really difficult to understand the schedule of the buses, once she tried to get help because she had difficulties to understand the bus schedule which are at each bus stop. Now in a larger scale she also points out that the train's connections are very bad, and don't go to many cites.

4.3 3rd Phase

With this question the second phase ended. I tried to see if the Erasmus trap is a reality or not, asking them to tell me. Having this information there is the chance to see the friendship network that exist and make connections among them. Besides that, I asked them if they travelled during this period of time and if they did where and why those places. It was asked them to describe in a few words their stay until now, to describe the city and a Portuguese citizen. Continuing with the idea to see how the connection with the Portuguese is, I questioned about it trying to see if they had contact and understand if how or why not. Also related with this last one, I asked about their

the prices of the food, they say it's cheap and they can eat well for a low price. Mario says he misses the Italian food a lot, but he loves fish and in Portugal it's very easy to find good and cheap fish, also he says that the variety of the meat is also big. For Serena the food is ok, but she expected more variety, with more flavours.

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interest in knowing what is happening in Portugal if they try to know more about our politics or about our news. The last questions were about the money they spend in average per month and how often they make contact with their family or friends and how it is made. The final question was a practical one, where they needed to paint their daily life in a map showing where they usually go every day or only once a week. I also asked them to point out in that map places they consider social places where they meet, places they consider difficult to reach inside the city and at last places they try to avoid because they do not like them or are even afraid of going there alone.

With the purpose to see whom they have more relation with, international students or with Portuguese students, I asked them to tell me ten people they have more contact with until now. The results are visible in table 8; six of those ten students said that they have Portuguese friends but from ten names given only two were Portuguese. Moreover it is possible to see the presence of a lot of students from Brazil. Only Bridget and Mario did not say people from Brazil.

Table 8 Friendship network in Braga

Laura	Walter	Thomas B.	Bridget	Liana	Giannis	Izabel	Mario	Serena	Fransiska
Liana, Belgium	Deniz, Turkey	Serena, Italy	Giannis, Grecce	Henrique, Brazil	Nayara, Brazil	Amanda, Brazil	Carlos, Portugal	Vivi, Germany	Vera,Germany
Henrique, Brazil	Bridget, Turkey	Vivi, Germany	Memht, Turkey	Serena, Italy	Matues, Brazil	Deoclecio, Brazil	Atillo, Italy	Thomas B., Germany	Theresa,Germany
Victor, Brazil	Victor, Brazil	Janis, Germany	Pedro,Portugal	Thomas B., Germany	Fausto, brazil	Marlene, Germany	Rafa, Spain	Janis, Germany	Laura, Belgium
Kate, Germany	Giovanna, Brazil	Gabriel, Brazil	Katarina, Poland	Charlotte, France	Orfeas, grecce	Bernardo, Brazil	Marcos, Spain	Liana, Belgium	Thomas B., Germany
Gabriel, Brasil	Raissa, Brazil	Paulo, Brazil	Walter, Turkey	Victor, Brazil	Sania, Bulgaria	Rodrigo, Mexico	Enzio,Italy	Dagon, Brazil	Adriana, Portugal
Charlotte, France	Andre, France	Rafa, Portugal	Julian, Portugal	Giannis, Grecce	Daniel, Spain	Eugeniys, Lithuania	Thomas B., Germany	Eliza, Brazil	Adriano, Portugal
July, France	Nury, Turkey	Adriana, Portugal	Olah, Poland	Gabriel, Brazil	Amalia, Grecce	Fransika, Germany	Victor, Spain	Gisela, Portugal	Vinicus, Brazil
Serena, Italy	Guilherme, Brazil	Kate, Germany	Simu, Poland	Laura, Belgium	Sotiris, Grecce	Gabriel, Brazil	Daniel, Italy	Mario, Italy	Liana, Belgium
Juliana, Brazil	Burcu,Turkey	Charlotte, France	Alev, Turkey	Diogo,Portugal	Maria, Grecce	Lúcio, Brazil	Anji, Grecce	Laura, Belgium	Gabriel, Brazil
Nayara, Brazil	Doga, Turkey	José, Spain	Deniz, Turkey	July, France	Juliana, Brazil	In, Ásia	Chiora, Italy	Diva, Brazil	Chiora, Italy

▭ Friends from the host country

Related to trips they had being doing until now, it is possible to find in the answers given a lot of common points of interests. Lisbon and Porto are the cities that all ten students answered they have visited. Yet among them there are two different kind of travellers, those who are more interested in travelling inside Portugal and those who travel all around, it doesn't matter if it is inside Portugal or not. Thomas B. had no interest to travel outside Portugal, until now he visited Viana do Castelo, Gerês and Guimarães. He chose those destinations because they are close to Braga and his Erasmus friends recommended it. He travelled with family, friends or alone. Another Student who wanted to know more about Portugal was Izabel, she said that from her county (Lithuania) Portugal is one of the farthest countries in Europe that she could visit. She intended to enjoy this opportunity to know Portugal well. Until now she went to Leiria, Faro, Albufeira, Peniche, Caldas da Rainha, Batalha, Nazaré, S. Pedro de Moel and Óbidos. She travelled mainly by bus and in the beginning it was hard to buy the tickets because the machines weren´t in English, but even the people that didn't know English tried to help her. She went to Algarve because her teachers from the Portuguese language course recommended it. But other students like Giannis, didn't travel only in Portugal, she went to Madrid, Granada, Toledo, Cordoba, Valencia, Sevilha, Niguelas, Murcia in Spain, she also went to Morocco, her dream destination, and one of the reasons why she chose to do Erasmus in Portugal was because it is near Morocco. Liana also visited many cities in Portugal, but she preferred to do it by car. She received a friend from Belgium, and they rented a car and just drove around. She went to Ericeira, Tomar, Sintra, Gerês, Coimbra, Viana do Castelo. In order to choose the places to visit she asked a Portuguese friend for help, after that she had a list with places to go but she chose the ones mentioned. She intended to go to places that had a mix of culture and nature in it. Mario, a surf lover had in mind to surf at the beaches in Portugal which influenced his destinations. Until now he went to Aveiro, Esposende, Ofir, Santiago de Compostela, Braga, Valença, Coimbra, Matosinhos, Espinho and Guimarães.

The next questions made were aiming to get short and very direct answers, trying this way to see what was in their minds giving the answer to the following questions in the fastest way possible. They needed to tell me three words to describe their stay until now, three words to describe the city, three words to describe a Portuguese citizen and the answers given were the following:

Table 9 The stay in Braga

Name	Three words to describe your stay until now		
Laura	Little study	Travel	English
Walter	Independency	Stress	Free-Time
Thomas B.	Party	Study	Future Reflection
Ídil	Holidays	Barrier	Disturbing
Liana	Fantastic	New Friends	Opportunities
Giannis	Time	Peace	Rest
Izabel	Travel	Different cultures	Experiences
Mario	Diversion	Water	Classes
Serena	Concerts	International People	Miss
Kate	Fashion	Dream	Enjoy

Table 10 The city of Braga

Name	Three words to describe the city		
Laura	Clean	Cosy	Fast Cars
Walter	Dead	Small	Simple Transports
Thomas B.	No Water	Students	No Discos
Ídil	Old	Closed	Glumie
Liana	Religious	Welcoming	Secure
Giannis	Small	Pacific	
Izabel	Small	Dark	Not nice
Mario	Water	Drugs	Stephane
Serena	Old	Alive	Cared
Kate	Block Houses	Catholic	Romantic

Table 11 The Portuguese citizen

Name	Three words to describe a Portuguese citizen		
Laura	Warm	Friendly	Helpful
Walter	No English	Helpful	Noisy
Thomas B.	Helpful	Like to Argue	Closed with foreign
Ídil	Stupid	Innocent	
Liana	Closed	Friendly	Frighten
Giannis	Helpful	Smiling	Speak a lot
Izabel	Helpful	Relaxed	Happy
Mario	Warm	Helpful	Friendly
Serena	Sexist	Open	Immature
Kate	Open	Friendly	Speak a lot

▇ Positive aspects

▇ Negative aspects

▢ Neutral opinion

4.3.1 Interaction with the locals

The interaction between the locals and the Erasmus students is a point of interest, because it can be interesting to see how they live, if these two different worlds can interact with each other and also see what Erasmus students think about this matter.

Inside this group two of them replied saying that their relation with the locals was good, these students were Thomas B. and Mario. Since the beginning Thomas B. didn't want to spend much time with Erasmus students only he referred like an "Erasmus Trap" when you are inside it's hard to get out of it. For that reason he joined a cultural group of the university and he met Portuguese students and was able to be with them. In general he says that the connection is good, and he already had dinner with some Portuguese friends. He only hadn´t gone to eat with a Portuguese family because he couldn't go at that time. Mario is similar to Thomas B., he says his connection to Portuguese people is very good and he knew a lot of people in his classes, he refers that his first two weeks here were spent with Portuguese students and not with foreigners.

The other students that said that their connection wasn't so good with the locals gave these main reasons:

- Not going to the classes
- Few Portuguese people in the residence
- Not open to foreigner students

- Portuguese students don't have the courage to talk
- Language barrier was too big

Student Laura said that in the beginning she tried to interact with Portuguese people, but she gave up and now she only spends time with Erasmus students. She says that maybe that happens because she doesn't go so often to classes, so her connection with Portuguese students isn't the best. Also for Walter his connection was small, he says that in his residence, there are not so many Portuguese students and that doesn't help. In his opinion another thing about the local students is that they aren't as open with the foreign students as with others and when that happens it is hard to try to speak to them. Liana says that Portuguese students don't have the courage to talk with them (Erasmus students) she thinks they are very closed people. She says that maybe they don't have much experience with foreign students and she only talks with some local students at parties. Outside the party atmosphere, the behaviour is different. Giannis shares a flat with two Portuguese students but the relation with them is not the best, mainly because of the language barrier as they have some difficulties speaking in English. She refers also that she doesn't go out as often and so she doesn't know many locals. She wanted to do Erasmus to rest and have some peace because to party she does it a lot in Greece. She can talk with some Portuguese but she doesn't feel so comfortable to go out with them. Like the others Izabel also said she doesn´t go out with Portuguese because of the language barrier Another kind of relation that can happen between Erasmus student and locals is with people you need to have contact with as the cleaning ladies, doorman and teachers..

The next question made is related to this bubble in which the Erasmus students live. It was intended to know if they have interest in knowing what is happening in the country or if they try at least to see the covers of the newspapers. The majority of them said they don´t follow the news and the reasons were very common: the language is the main barrier for not understanding and they don't care what is happening because they don't have interest in it. On the other hand, when asked about the news in their home country the answers are different. Almost all of them try to be informed about what is happening in their city or in their own country. The internet is the main tool to stay informed but also friends can tell them what is going on. Here it's possible to find some exceptions; the girls from Belgium or Izabel don't have interest about the news from

their homeland. Izabel says that the news are always about negative stuff so she prefers not to know about it.

4.3.2 Contacting Home

During the mobility period the connection with family, friends etc... exists, and with the purpose to understand how and how often students outside their country speak to them, it was a subject spoken with this group of students.

The most common among them is to speak every week with somebody in their homeland. No one said that they would pass more than a week without speaking with the family. Almost every day it is possible to have conversations with the preferential use of the internet using applications like Skype or the social network, the Facebook. Only one person said she speaks more with her friends than with her family. Giannis speaks to her family three times a week, but with her friends she speaks everyday. Liana doesn't use Skype, she confesses that until now she used it maybe twice. She´d rather use Facebook to speak with her father and sister and also the email to tell what is going on to her friends. Another application used a lot among the students is the whatsapp application. Walter also said that in the beginning he spoke more with his family than now, he thinks that with the time the calls and conversations turn in something not so often if you compare with the beginning of the stay. For Izabel sometimes these conversations can last 2 hours but it can also be to only say hello and that everything is fine with her.

4.4 4th Phase

After the third phase of questions the fourth and last one came and these were made during the last weeks of their stay in Braga and in Portugal. This is a culmination of several questions and interviews, giving me the possibility to compare and see how the idea that they had changed or what changed in their lives during these months.

In the beginning questions about the knowledge that they had about the geography of Portugal were made and now the same question were repeated to see if they improved their sense about the geography of Portugal. Laura confessed that now she knows a lot more, she didn't know it could snow in Portugal and she had the opportunity to know not only the bigger cities but also the smaller ones. She said that travelling around was important to get to know better Portugal, but she also learned from other Erasmus students who shared their experiences and recommended new

places to visit. It also happens that these students need to write a paper related with the subjects about Portugal and they learned a lot by doing that. Thomas B. had one paper related with a course of Geography and with that he says that he learned a lot about this country. He talked about the polarization of Porto and Lisbon, and the region of Algarve in the summer. Also he spoke about the strong litoralisation that we have. In his case, the difference between his arrival and now can be considered very big but influenced by the paper that he needed to do. Izabel also improved her knowledge a lot since her arrival; she said that she knows the principal cities, that Braga is the third biggest city of Portugal, Serra da Estrela is the biggest mountain and that Portugal was born in Guimarães. She also said that Portugal has one of the most beautiful beaches of Europe in Algarve and that we are a big producer of olive oil. She learned this because of her travels, but also with her teachers and using the internet. But not everyone has improved his knowledge, Bridget said that during her stay she didn't learn that much, but she liked our views. Giannis says her knowledge is a bit better than when she arrived but she intends to know more before she leaves. Another option is also to know the region where the university is, and Serena said that she knew better the Minho region, but she still has one week to visit Portugal before leaving the country.

After asking and being able to compare their thoughts and knowledge about the geography of Portugal the next question was about the city of Braga, if they could change anything in the city what would they change and the same question about the university.

The list is organized from the most common answers to the less ones. Regarding the University:

- Classes should be hold in English
- Evaluation System.
- More green spaces inside the campus.
- Class material should be in English.
- Equal evaluation system in the different courses.
- Better heating system.
- One week of orientation, one day is not enough.
- General rules for the Erasmus students. They change a lot according to each teacher.
- Be able to do the course by doing a project work.

- Punctuality of the teachers (always late).
- System of renting books in the library.
- No response to emails by some teachers.
- Language course should start earlier.
- Some teachers don't use the e-learning platform, forcing them to run after them all the time.

Regarding the city:

- It's necessary to create a place that promotes the contact with water and more green zones.
- More alternative places are needed
- Signs for pedestrians, to facilitate the mobility inside the city.
- The fountains should work more time.
- The heating system of the houses should be better.
- The shops close early and at a certain time of the day it seems a desert.
- Not focus only in the city centre, there is the need of changes out of it because everything is concentrated only in one place.
- No bus schedules on the bus stops.
- The closing time of the restaurants should be different, more time open
- Santa Tecla – "Gangster Paradise"
- The students are away from the city centre
- Improve the music on the streets
- Creation of a zoo
- More police on the streets
- Stop mixing architecture, the old buildings should be preserved and avoid constructing horrible block houses, Braga will lose identity because of that.
- Improve the connection between the university and the bus station.
- Bad transportation system, it takes too long to get to the city centre
- More cultural activities near the university
- In the winter the city can be a bit more boring, more activities should be created during this time of the year.

These questions were about the changes they would make in the city and in the university concerning their experience, the Erasmus experience.

4.4.1 The Concept Erasmus

After this I wanted to know more about what they think "doing Erasmus" is. In the beginning it´s possible to have an idea what Erasmus is, but after living it maybe the opinions change. Concerning their answers the following topics were the most common among them.

4.4.1.1 Contact with other Cultures/ Stereotypes

When the Erasmus topic appears this is a very common answer. Laura referred during this period she could be more open and her friendship network was huge, and now she is much less superficial. The contact with other cultures is something natural in Erasmus.

Thomas B. also spoke about this saying that Erasmus is the opportunity to meet a huge amount of people, not only from Europe but also from countries around the world such as Brazil. This opportunity gave the possibility to learn about other cultures, another country and another education system in a cheap way. He thinks the meaning is to know another culture but sometimes it's tricky because you know a lot of people but it is often difficult to know someone from Portugal. At the beginning he didn't want to be stuck inside the Erasmus "bubble" and wanted to know more about the Portuguese culture. The Erasmus community is a family because everyone is in the same situation and they pass a lot of time together, maybe that´s why for some it's quite hard to say goodbye. Erasmus was also for him to see how people see the Germans, and when he returns he will have another consciousness about his own culture.

Izabel relates Erasmus to an opportunity to meet new people and new cultures; she says that she knows as much about Brazil as Portugal, because of the quantity of Brazilian students in Braga. Now seeing how people live and their lifestyle, she says that it doesn't look like how people of Lithuania live their day-to-day. People here are very relaxed and she will really miss it. She is a bit afraid to go home, knowing that there will be bad weather and dark sky and everyone is in a bad mood. She likes how people enjoy life in Portugal and she believes that we are more optimistic. This was also an unforgettable moment in her life since it was the first time she saw someone surfing, olive, orange and palm trees.

Mario said that this is an experience of community with the other Erasmus. The city of Braga is small and there are not many Erasmus, but it is also possible to know

people of the city. It is not only about Erasmus parties but also the other parties of the local students.

Like the others Serena also spoke about this subject saying that this is an opportunity to know a new European reality, another culture and another education system. It is also spending time with people from other cultures diminishing prejudices. In the beginning, for example, she thought French people were close and would not mix. The stereotype is normal but Erasmus can change this reality. Erasmus is also about trying new types of food and it is a perfect time to try new things

4.4.1.2 Growth Phase/ Leave comfort zone

Another common point that often appears during the interviews is how Erasmus can be a growing process connected with them leaving their comfort zone.
Laura said that these months were used to think about themselves and their attitudes, she thinks it's a growth phase and she has seen many differences in many people who grew up a lot during her stay. Now she has a different view on things and she doesn't consider Erasmus stressful and she thinks the opposite, considering it quite relaxing, depending on how they face their stay. She gives more value to things, maybe because this experience allows them to highlight what is most important to us. Erasmus is a time of learning and to grow.

For Liana this was an important period for her concerning this subject she said that this was her first experience to be alone and to be independent, it is about opening new possibilities in life, things do not happen if you keep the same routine. Society in general has things predefined but Erasmus is a way to be free but not totally. This freedom can be controlled, for many people Erasmus is fun, but she wanted to do it because she wanted a new challenge in her life and she knew that later she would regret it if she wouldn't do it. When she was at home she felt the need to step out of her comfort zone. She wanted to explore but at the same time feel safe. She knew that it this experience didn't go well she could always leave the country. She says it's an opportunity of a lifetime and it is worth it without a doubt. She feels as one of the youngest doing Erasmus in Braga and she feels very happy to accomplish this Erasmus and feels fine. Here she could be spontaneous and one of the things she enjoys the most was never feeling lonely and having always lots of people around her. The need to make decisions it is bigger than in Belgium. We should not think that Erasmus is stressful and

she is more relaxed than at home and feels freer. To find her home in Braga was the creation of her first "safe zone", a place where she could feel safe.

Izabel shares the idea of Liana saying that during this period she became a more open minded person and this created the opportunity to grow, Erasmus can be a booster for change in lifestyles.

For Serena Erasmus was good also because of the different routines she evolved, she said that this change of routine is good because when she return to her homeland she will be able to compare these two routines. The issue of language is also important because it is a way to learn or improve a language in which you are not fluent.

4.4.1.3 Erasmus and Travelling

Erasmus is strongly connected with the concept of travelling and that is possible to see after reading what this group of students said about it.

For example Liana said that for her travelling is a part of Erasmus and she encourage everyone to do this and she didn't want to wait to be 40 years old to travel because she believes that now is the right time to do it. Izabel also says that Erasmus is an opportunity to travel and in the beginning she was too afraid to travel and thought it was very expensive, but now she thinks differently.

4.4.1.4 The coming Back

When asked about what Erasmus was for them some of them talked about the situation of the coming back, how they felt about it. Laura said that this experience is different and in the beginning, when she arrived she thought that Erasmus was completely overrated and that people exaggerated when they said that this was the time of their lives. Suddenly her state of mind changed and she really thought that this is a new chapter in her life. She is happy not only needing to focus on her academic life. And when the time to return home comes, you return a different person and she believes that people when they go back, they go happier and able to enjoy life.

For Bridget this was an unique experience and that she had learned a lot about other experiences and different lives. She also learned to be more patient, but misses everything, misses the sun, the rain, to speak her native language. And in the beginning it was quite difficult.

4.4.1.5 More opinions

For Izabel regarding the university she is not sure if it was very profitable for her degree, because everything was related to Portuguese and it was much more difficult. This is also an opportunity to know a city not like a tourist. In this way she can see how people live, their habits and perhaps later learn and keep the best of what she saw.

Mario also said doing Erasmus is to have a strong desire to do many things. Erasmus is not freedom because they do not have complete autonomy because they always dependent on the parents. It is an unique experience that can only be done once in a lifetime. It also means to study more and attempt to reconcile the study with the parties and girls. It is also about surfing and speaking another language, which was the reason for choosing Portugal and to learn Portuguese. He feels very well and says it is very different living in an apartment or in a residence, the experience is completely different.

4.4.1.6 Adaptation Process

Regarding the adaptation process, I tried to verify now that their Erasmus period is almost over if they feel adapted and what they have done to feel that way.
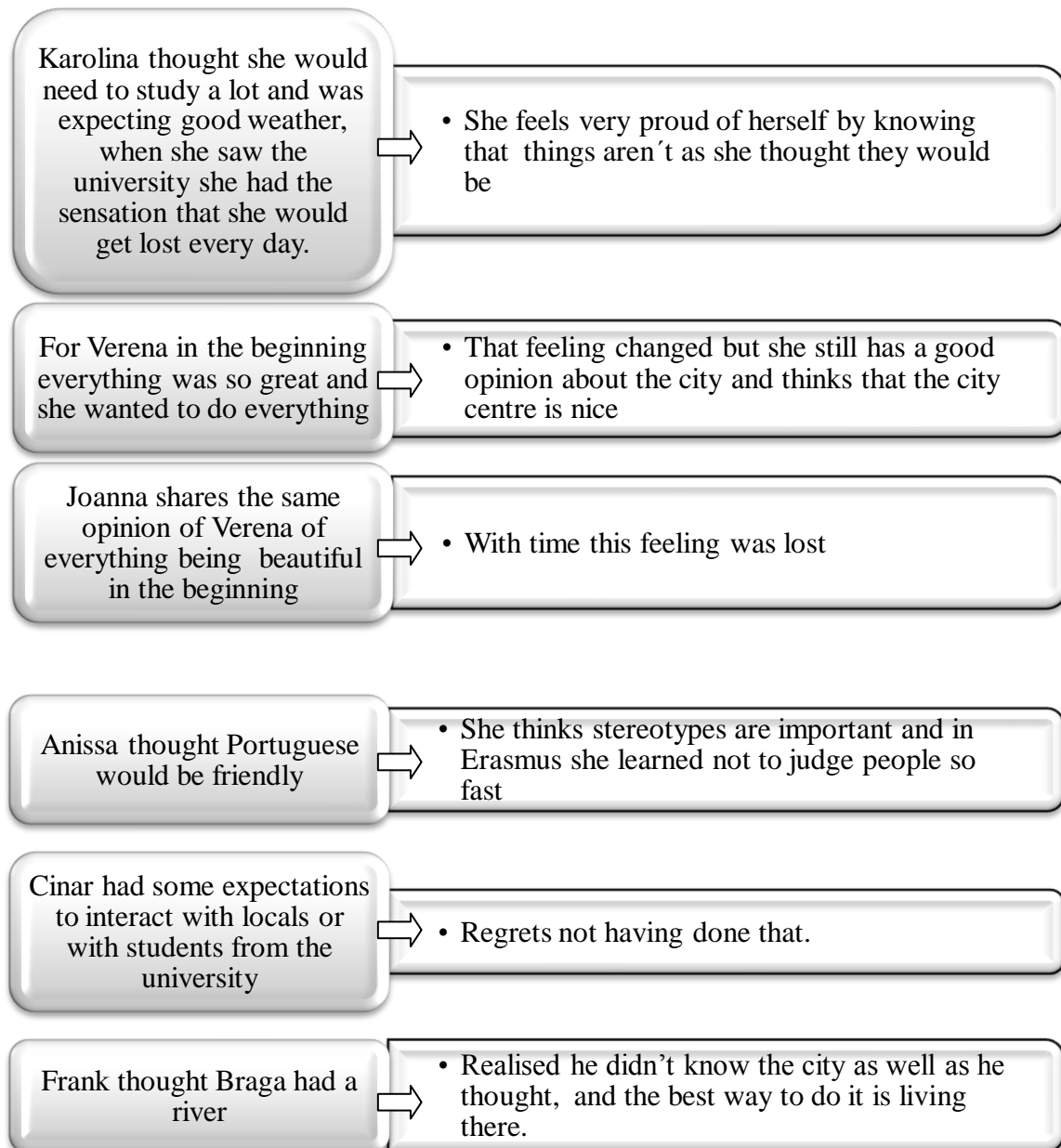
In general all said that they feel adapted, some gave examples saying that they got used to eating late, to partying late and don't care about the rain. Others said that they now know where the cheapest stores are and places to go where they can find people that speak English, for example some restaurants. For Giannis when she goes out she doesn't do at herself anymore as a tourist but like a resident, a person that lives in this country. Mario feels so good here that he is thinking about staying in Braga to do his master's degree. He says that he has fully adapted to the city. Serena thinks that it wasn't so hard to adapt, probably it would be harder if she went to a country in Asia or something similar. Maybe her adaptation wasn't so hard because she lives with Portuguese and maybe that helped her. In spite of they saying that they feel adapted, they point some difficulties during this process. One of the main problems is the language barrier, Liana said that to feel really adapted it's necessary to learn the language and with that enter into the Portuguese network. When you are in Erasmus it is harder because you are almost all the time with other Erasmus students. Also Izabel spoke about this problem, it is difficult for her to not understand what others are saying and she doesn't like this barrier. With this sometimes she feels adapted and other times not. In her opinion this is a fantasy world, she is more relaxed, because in her country

she works and studies at the same time and here it is different and she can enjoy it more. Probably when she returns to Lithuania she will cry. Another thing that was pointed out was the emotional feelings that can influence the adaption of the students. Bridget said that in the beginning it was really hard, she could be one day really good and on another day she could be crying all day long. Now she feels better. Also for Liana in the beginning was complicated but time is needed to get used to the city and to feel better and now she is loving it. Connected with this question is also what they did to feel better with the space where they lived, so I asked what they have done to adapt themselves to the place that they live now.

The majority replied saying that going to classes and trying to speak with people from Portugal can be important to get an idea about the culture and habits that exist. One thing that is important is where these students are from, for example the Turkish people said that it was hard for them at the beginning. They tried to observe and then tried to do the same. Bridget tried to keep her old habits to feel good here, she created a kind of a space for herself, a safe-zone where she could feel good and without worries. Others tried to join cultural groups that belong to the university, and in this way try to know people and interact with more Portuguese students like Thomas B. and Serena. Serena said that she didn´t try to do anything special to feel more adapted. She thinks that with time, she gets used to the city and starts feeling comfortable in it. She added that it is better not to try anything special, just to let the things flow and what happens, happens. For Izabel it was important to walk a lot around the city, to know the stores, were the post office is and so on. Getting lost in a city teaches you more about it.

When foreign students are preparing to go abroad they start to create an opinion about the place where they will live, and now that they are leaving I asked if their had changed opinion. Almost everyone came with big expectations, some stereotypes and almost everyone changed their idea about Braga. (Figure 10).

Figure 10 Expectations vs Result in Braga

Karolina thought she would need to study a lot and was expecting good weather, when she saw the university she had the sensation that she would get lost every day.	• She feels very proud of herself by knowing that things aren´t as she thought they would be
For Verena in the beginning everything was so great and she wanted to do everything	• That feeling changed but she still has a good opinion about the city and thinks that the city centre is nice
Joanna shares the same opinion of Verena of everything being beautiful in the beginning	• With time this feeling was lost
Anissa thought Portuguese would be friendly	• She thinks stereotypes are important and in Erasmus she learned not to judge people so fast
Cinar had some expectations to interact with locals or with students from the university	• Regrets not having done that.
Frank thought Braga had a river	• Realised he didn't know the city as well as he thought, and the best way to do it is living there.

4.4.1.7 Accomplished goals

Before coming a lot of students write a list of things they want to do during the mobility period. In order to verify that, they were asked if they succeeded in accomplishing everything they wanted to do. Laura said she didn't have many goals but considers that this life is a fantasy life in which everyone does everything they want. Walter is not satisfied because he thinks that his final average got worse here in Braga but he liked the trips he made and want to return in 5/10 years to compare the differences. Thomas B. is happy with what he did here, he learned the language which

was his first goal, he regrets not surfing and also thinks that he could have interacted even more with Portuguese people. In general all are happy with what they accomplished, all agreed that it was a good time in spite of one or two exceptions.

4.4.1.8 Language Skills/Stay longer?

After this experience of 5/6 months, they were asked if they wanted to stay more time and how their Portuguese was. Laura says she wouldn´t mind staying more time but in order to stay, their friends needed to stay as well. Regarding her Portuguese, in spite of not enjoying the classes she did learn something. Walter would stay more time to travel more, and concerning his language skills he got the level A1. Thomas B. shares the same opinion of Laura to do that the others had to stay too. He is happy about returning because he admits he already misses his country and he is very happy also with what he learned, he understands and talks well, having a good knowledge of Portuguese. Bridget misses her country she would only stay if she needed to, she is homesick and thinks it is time to go back. She learned some words but doesn't regret about not having learned more. Liana also shares the same opinion of Laura, she would stay here, she knows how everything works and feels bad for going back, she feels very good here and that's why she wanted to stay more time here. She has got an A1+ in the Portuguese language course. Izabel changed her opinion when she went celebrating Christmas home, she said if she wouldn't have gone home during Christmas probably now she would want to go home. If she could she would stay more time and travel more. Related to her language skills she completed the language course and her Brazilian roommate helped studying the language and she made a big effort to improve. Mario says he wants to stay more time and maybe apply for a master's degree here. And also he is very happy because he had never studied Portuguese before and got the level B1. Serena didn't want to stay more time, because she thinks that this stay wasn't so good concerning her university courses, to stay she needed to do courses that helped her with her CV and not only to spend some time, however her Portuguese improved a lot and she got a level B. Finally Giannis thinks that one year is too long. If she had the chance to stay here, she would use the time to travel. Concerning her Portuguese she got a level A+.

4.4.1.9. Summary

During this semester it was possible to see different opinions, following the experience of students with different characteristics. Being these ones so different it was possible to have a larger variety of opinions. This gave me the opportunity to see and analyse how they developed in a personal way. How they developed their social skills becoming a person that acquired a new set of competences that is possible to gain in mobility programmes. Besides the human development of each student, it was possible to see how their connection with the city was, in this case how they adapted to Braga. In the end, it was possible to see what really changed concerning their first thoughts and expectations when they arrived to Portugal.

As already explained there are differences between their first expectations and the changes that happened during their stay. They pointed out issues like changes in their stereotypes, the connection between the Erasmus students and the hosts students, the knowledge they had before arriving that sometimes can be not that accurate, the importance of the weather and the fear to feel lost and the common honeymoon stage in the beginning that ends up to change during their stay changing their perception about the place they are living in.

Another important topic that can be highlighted is the friendship network that they have created, more with foreign students than Portuguese students and among these foreigner students an important number from de same country of the interviewed ones.

It was a long semester giving the possibility to have a perspective as an outsider, even if I spent a lot of time inside their social circle. I had the possibility to see their experience from two different perspectives, one like a Portuguese student and later in Prague, as an Erasmus student.

Further in this dissertation, there will be a more detailed analysis of the answers here given with the comparison of the answers given by the students in Prague.

5. Interviews made in Prague (Czech Republic) (Summer semester) - Analysis

To carry on the work started in Braga during the winter semester, I used the same methodology in another city from Europe, located in Czech Republic the city of Prague. During the summer semester the same questions were made to different students from different countries, doing a mobility programme (Erasmus). In this way at the end it will be possible to compare different adaption styles to different kind of cities.

Prague is the capital of Czech Republic, known to be located in the centre of Europe and sometimes called the heart of Europe. This is the biggest city of the country, with almost one and half million people.

The group of students I worked with during this semester were all studying at the Charles University and all of them are from different countries and have different ways of thinking and living.

The interviews began in February 2013 and ended at July 2013 and I used the same methodology than in Braga. Four different stages were made, each one with different approaches and different questions.

In the following table is the information of the students who I worked with during this period of time.

Table 12 Information about the interviewed students in Prague

Name	Age	Studies	Country	City of studying
Manon	22	Geography	France	Lyon
Rodrigo	21	Geology	Portugal	Lisbon
Grettir	22	Geophysics	Iceland	Hafnarfjörður
Xènia	22	English studies	Spain	Barcelona
Mari	24	Science teacher	Estonia	Tartu
Rui	21	Geology	Portugal	Lisbon
Hugo	28	Geography	Finland	Helsinki
Arwen	22	Chemistry	Greece	Athens
Martha	22	Geography	Germany	Kiel
Miriam	22	Biology	Germany	Konstanz

5.1 1st Phase

The first phase is related to questions still in their homeland, preparing the mobility programme in order to know what their opinions were about the place where they would live.

The general opinion about Prague is that it is a beautiful city but not only that. The fact that Prague is considered a cheap city was important. For example for Mari the main factor to go to Prague was to know that it was quite cheap to live in. Besides that, there are other opinions: Czech Republic and its communism mentality, the weather that in spite of being cold it wasn't a reason for them not to go, or a place to party and drink cheap as the girls from Germany thought. Grettir, from Island, couldn't find enough information about Czech Republic in his country, but friends told him that this is a very beautiful place to visit. Friends in this group of students had an important role to them. The majority had friends who had already been there before and told them good things about Prague, like how beautiful it is and how cheap it can be. Hugo, from Finland knew that the ice hockey is a really important sport, because of watching several games of Czech Republic's team. A curios fact is that they knew more about Prague than about the country itself.

Their adaptation during the first weeks can be influenced by coming alone or knowing someone there. In order to know more about this subject they were asked about it. The majority came alone, only Rodrigo and Rui from Portugal and Mari from Estonia came with somebody but Mari`s case is different, she didn't know her colleague before coming. They were from the same University and after knowing that they both were selected to go to Prague they gathered to come together. All the others came alone but for some it was a hard decision to make. For Arwen it was really hard, she was afraid and she tried to convince her brother to go with her and stay for the first week. Grettir had a friend in Prague, a Czech friend that he met in Denmark when he made an internship there. Rodrigo sees that the experience can be very different if you arrive to a different country with friends or completely alone.

Before students go abroad they start to create expectations about their Erasmus, and I wanted also to know what their feelings and their expectations were before coming to this mobility period. The common topic in all answers given was the city itself. The majority wanted to know the city but the location of Prague being in the centre of Europe would be also favourable to travel and discover more places. There are more particular expectations to find, Manon wanted to improve her English, Rodrigo

wanted to end his carrier in Prague, Grettir wanted to use this opportunity to grow and be more mature, Xènia wanted to use this time to think about life and think about her future and maybe learn a new language (Czech). It is also possible to find people who didn't create many expectations about going abroad. Mari, for example, didn't want to create so many expectations because she didn't want to get disappointed later. Hugo also didn't have so many expectations, his first choice was to go to Italy but then he ended up going to Prague. After asking about their expectations I wanted to know more about the difficulties they were expecting, because sometimes the adaptation process can be easy or very difficult depending on a lot of the personality of each one of us.

They expected to find difficulties concerning the language, Czech was seen as a difficult language to learn and some feared to have to write in English. The idea of leaving the family, friends or lovers behind and the weather in Prague were other difficulties indicated. For some of them this would be the first time living alone and some were afraid of it, the responsibility is bigger in a different country by living on your own. Grettir and Rui were also a bit apprehensive starting to live in a big city because they were not used to it. For those who are going to live in a residence, that could be also a reason to be afraid of. Arwen was worried about this subject, she didn't know what to expect of the place where she would live for the next 5 months.

The last question in the first phase is about the knowledge they had about the Czech Republic's geography, this will be important to see later if they improved or not their knowledge about the country. The only one that had more information was Manon because his work is related to Czech Republic`s geography. The information the rest of them had was really poor. They only knew Prague and maybe some other two or three cities, Brno, Ostrava and Pilsner. Some of them tried to gather more information on the internet. They also had the idea that there still exist a communist mentality and that the country is well located to travel. Rodrigo had the idea that Portugal was smaller than Czech Republic, and Xènia knew that she could find cheap beer there.

Ended the first phase, the second one is related to their arrival, and about the first weeks in the city. This is when the first impact and the adaptation process happen.

5.2 2nd Phase

The first question made is about the place they had chosen to live: in a flat or in a residence, where it was located and why they had chosen it.

From the ten students, six of them were living in a flat and the rest in residences. Those who were living in flats were from Portugal, France, Iceland, Germany and Finland, the remaining from Portugal, Spain, Greece and Estonia chose to live in residences. The main reasons for them to choose to live in residences were:

- The low price.
- Staying a short period of time in the city.
- Creates the possibility to know more people.
- Good transportation system, being more far away from the city centre wasn't a problem.
- Not having worries to search for a place to live.
- The fear to feel alone.

These were the main reasons described concerning living in a flat:

- Living in the city centre.
- The transportation system. (not depending on them)
- Not to share a room.
- More privacy
- The cost benefits are better, it's safer and more comfortable.
- Less communist style.
- Different routines of a possible roommate.
- A good well prepared kitchen to cook.

Besides this, the main problem was to choose the place where to live in. Almost everyone wanted to live in the centre of Prague, (maximum to live until Prague 4). Almost everyone searched for a place to live when they still were at home. For Rodrigo it was important to have a place to stay as soon as he arrived at Prague, for his safety and for his comfort and it was the best choice to do so. But not all have done the same, Hugo lived in a Hotel during the first week, and only then he decided to search for a place to live. He wanted to live in the centre, he didn't care so much about being close to the university, because the good transportation system would mitigate that. He never expected that it would be so hard to find a place to live and he admits that his first weeks were really difficult. Another student who only searched for a place to live when arrived to Prague was Martha. She didn't know what she wanted to do but she wasn't worried about that. She tried to live in a residence but didn't like it ending up to live in a

flat. She searched for one day and chose one in which she felt good. Its localization wasn't important, she only wanted to choose a place in which she would feel good in it.

Language is one of the most important aspects in the adaptation process, it can create facilities or difficulties depending on how you deal with it or adapt to it. That´s why I wanted to know in the beginning of their Erasmus how their language skill concerning the Czech language was. Before arriving, only one studied Czech, having lessons with a Czech girl in France. When she arrived, she didn't learn more because her studies would take a lot of her time. Only two of the rest of the group studied Czech. Grettir participated in a language course in the beginning of the semester and Miriam learned it during the semester. None of them knew Czech before coming. All the rest answered almost the same thing, as they would stay for a short period of time and the language is too complicated to learn their goal was to learn only the basic so as to be polite and to ask for the essential in their daily life. Some of them considered to learn the language but only if their stay would be longer.

To do a mobility programme like Erasmus, people decide to live abroad and leave everything behind. To do this each one must have different reasons, so I wanted to know what their objectives were for their stay in Prague.
Each one told me different objectives for their stay, the more common were:

- Finishing the Course
- Meeting People
- Exploring the city
- Travelling
- Living the experience
- Knowing other cultures to be able to compare and learn
- Having fun
- Knowing the Czech culture
- Thinking about the future
- Improving language Skills (mainly English)
- Resting
- Seeing the different methods of teaching between countries
- Being independent, more intuitive and confident

The next question was concerning to their first impressions when they arrived to Prague related to their thoughts about the city, the climate, people, food and

transportation. This group of students arrived to Prague using different kind of transportation system. Three came by bus, Manon, Mari and Miriam, one came by train, Martha and the rest came by plane. Each one had a different reaction when arrived and each one had different thoughts. When Manon arrived after a bus journey of 17 hours she thought it was horrible, she was very tired because it had been a long journey and everything she knew was in Lyon, it was very cold, she was stressed and very angry. When she saw the National Museum for the first time she thought it was very ugly and wondered how she chose this place to live in, she was disappointed. Also her first impression about the climate was bad, it was very cold and windy and she thought that she would never get used to this kind of weather. About the people until now she hadn´t met many Czechs, just her buddy and she was very pleased. The impression she had of the Czechs is that they weren´t fun and don't like outsiders. She is a bit disappointed to be treated like a tourist because she doesn't consider like being one. In the tram or subway they are always so serious and not understanding the language complicates things. When she was at the police station (to do the residence registration) it was very bad, she just thought about giving up and returning to France. In what concerns the food she tried some local specialties and liked it but the food is quite different from the one in France and they don't use many vegetables. In her opinion the transportation system is very good, it's cheap and works 24 hours per day, but she is living in the centre so it is not important to her.

Rodrigo arrived by plane, he said that everything was so white even today he remembers the image that impressed him. On the way to the centre he was a little scared because he saw a lot of things under construction. When he saw the centre he was ecstatic and very happy to know that it would be there where he was going to live for the next 5 months. The adaptation to the climate was quite difficult and he even got a bit sick. He hoped that the weather would be better until the end of his stay. About the people he found a bit of everything, young people that are very open-minded and friendly and others who are unfriendly and unfortunately he had dealt with more unfriendly people so far. However he wasn´t worried about it because he thought he would not have a great relationship with these people anyway. He couldn´t understand if it is because of he being a foreigner or if it happens to everyone. Regarding the food he didn't like it so much and he missed the Portuguese food but regarding the transports he can only say good things, it's very good, always on time and Lisbon should learn with Prague in this aspect.

For Grettir, it was difficult to get used to the food. In Prague the meals are based on meat and he is more used to eat fish. Concerning the people he seemed a bit surprised by people speaking more English than expected. Concerning the transports he is very pleased, it is very good and cheap and here he saw a train for the first time. When Xènia arrived she was really exited but also a bit nervous, it was a mixture of feelings. The weather wasn't a problem, she was ready for the cold because she knew that it would be like this.   Regarding the people she differs a lot from Grettir, she was a bit shocked because almost nobody speaks English, she wanted to communicate but the language barrier was too big. Like the others she loves the transportation system, it is always punctual something that in Barcelona doesn't happen. Mari came by bus after a journey of 30 hours, for her the biggest shock was when she arrived to the residence and no one could speak English there, even if they are locating Erasmus students. She was also a bit disappointed about the weather, she was expecting something different from Estonia but it's almost the same. She complains also about the locals saying that they are amazingly in a bad mood, they help a lot to each other, something that doesn't happen with foreigners.

Rui came by plane and it was his first time, he didn't have so much information when he arrived and he didn't know how to go from the airport to the residence. It was difficult for him to get used to the weather, once the temperatures in Portugal are different but he doesn´t want to use this argument as an excuse for not doing something, if the rest of the people can support it he also will. Czech people were for him wonderful, here it is normal to find one or two people less helpful, the language can be a barrier but young people are more open and he could get nearer them. When Hugo arrived he was a bit nervous, he was hoping that his luggage wouldn´t get lost, and the fact needing to speak English as soon as he got there made him a bit nervous about that. Compared with the Finns, Czech people can be more closed and not so nice. If there is the chance to communicate with a local, he/she might be nice and even helpful but being so closed can be a positive thing, he can shop more relaxed without someone always asking him if he needs something. In his opinion the metro remembers him a bit the communism style but he is getting used to it and he is starting to like it.

 Arwen in her first day in Prague was much excited and happy, she knew that the weather would be very different from Greece and she brought warm clothes and was prepared for it. She doesn't like the people much, she considers them a bit snob but this doesn't upset her so much because she doesn't have connection to them. Martha was

also quite exited on her first day in Prague, when she arrived by train from Germany. Until now she is a bit disappointed with the weather, she hopes that it gets better because it was really cold and it is not favourable to sightseeing. When Miriam arrived by bus, she was tired, full of luggage and very cold. She needed to meet her future flatmates but it was funny because when she met them she went to drink a beer with all her luggage with the new flatmates before going to her flat. Her first impression about the people was good, her flatmates were friendly and her Czech teacher was very nice. Sometimes on the streets or in the stores it is very difficult to communicate. The food is quite difficult, because she is vegetarian and there it is all about meat, but even so she likes some kind of food and sweets. She also shares the opinion of the other students regarding the transportation system which is great and working at night, being this a positive aspect indicated by all. The same doesn't happen with the other topics like the people or the food.

After ending the second phase of interviews, I waited 2/3 months to start the third phase. The third phase was made 2/3 months after their arrival. This phase is about their opinion about the place where they were living, what they think about this experience, the places where they had been and also to see with whom they have more connection with, namely other international or local students.

5.3 3rd Phase

This third phase started with the question with whom they have more contact with in this period of time. I asked them to tell me the name and nationality of ten people they have more relation with until now in order to see at the end if the Erasmus trap is present or not.

Table 13 Friendship network in Prague

Manon	Rodrigo	Grettir	Xènia	Mari	Rui	Hugo	Arwen	Martha	Miriam
Matilde, France	Helena, Czech	Elisa, Finland	Serapa, Turkey	Martha, Germany	Ines, Portugal	Márcio, Portugal	Márcio, Portugal	Miriam, Germany	Martha, Germany
Remi, France	Raul, Portugal	Sara, Denmark	Salou, Finland	Victor, Australia	Tania, Portugal	João, Portugal	Rodrigo, Portugal	Judi, Germany	Judi, Germany
Pser, France	João, Portugal	Mari, Estonia	Matilde, Quebec	Franzisk, Czech	Kate, Poland	Raul, Portugal	João, Portugal	Mari, Estonia	Urska, Slovenia
Miriam, Germany	Márcio, Portugal	Maria, Estonia	Felix, Germany	Maria, Estonia	Adrian, Spain	Rodrigo, Portugal	Raul, Portugal	Márcio, Portugal	Magda, Poland
Martha, Germany	Arwen, Greece	Simon, Germany	Gotfired, Germany	Elisa, Finland	Mari, Estonia	Martha, Germany	Miriam, Germany	Arwen, Greece	Gael, France
Judi, Germany	Miriam, Germany	Victor, Australia	Julian, Germany	Grettir, Island	Ocean, France	Miriam, Germany	Judi, Germany	Victor, Australia	Márcio, Portugal
Thomas, Czech	Esperanza, Spain	Dder, Czech	Bell, Italy	Caterina, Italy	Nico, France	Judi, Germany	Kelly, Greece	Jonas, Germany	Raul, Portugal
Arwen, Greece	Anna, Germany	Caterina, Italy	Carlos, Spain	Simon, Italy	Maria, Poland	Manon, France	Katia, Greece	Urska, Slovenia	Haritz, Spain
Márcio, Portugal	Hugo, Finland	Basilia, France	Márcio, Portugal	Gabri, Italy	Renau, France	Samuli, Finland	Martha, Germany	Raul, Portugal	Mango, France
Hugo, Finland	Martha, Germany	Samuli, Finland	Cahaternina, Quebec	Paril, France	Maria, Estonia	Arwen, Greece	Emma, Ireland	Rodrigo, Portugal	Manon, France

▮ Friends from the host country

It is possible to see that only three of hundred names given are Czech. The rest are all from other countries, including countries outside Europe. Another curious fact is that everyone besides Grettir had friends from his own country in the list, they are willing to meet people from their own country even being abroad.

After this question they were asked about the trips they have made and why they decided to go to those places. This is something quite natural when someone is abroad doing Erasmus. Sometimes even before leaving their homeland they make a list to which places they want to go and travel. The places more visited by them were: Bratislava, Vienna, Budapest and Krakow. After these, some of them went to Berlin, Dresden, Paris, Italy and Serbia. These were the trips they made outside the country, but not all made international trips. Mari didn't make any and Grettir and Rui only made one.

Inside Czech Republic the most visited place among them were: Cesky Krumlov, Karlovy Vary and Kutna Hora. Some of them also went to Bhoemia Paradise, South Bhoemia and National Park Switzerland.

The main reason to do international trips it is because it's relatively close to Prague. It was the first time in those cities for almost everyone. Some of these trips were organized trips. So it was easier to go there and it also had a plus meeting new people. Concerning the trips made inside Czech Republic, the majority of them were made by organized trips and also the factor of some of those places being UNESCO heritage influenced them to go there. Sometimes they choose to go to places because other friends have already been there and they spread the word.

After knowing where they had been during these months, I wanted to know what their opinion was about the city, the people and about their experience until now. In order to do this I asked them to describe their opinion using three words for each topic.
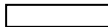
Table 14 The stay in Prague

Name	Three words to describe your stay until now		
Manon	Fantastic	Tiring	Opportunities
Rodrigo	Friendship	Fun	Knowledge
Grettir	Fantastic	Warm	Friendly
Xènia	Experience	Knowledge	Friendship
Mari	Busy	Fun	Interesting
Rui	Dream	Fun	Unreal
Hugo	Exciting	Home sick	Depressed
Arwen	Crazy	Happy	Classes
Martha	Snow	Trips	Pubs
Miriam	Friends	Czech wine	Crazy roommate

Table 15 The city of Prague

Name	Three words to describe the city		
Manon	Free	Crazy	Beautiful
Rodrigo	Night	Majestic	Culture
Grettir	Clean	Transports	Amazing
Xènia	Beautiful	Magic	Alive
Mari	Historical	Cheap	Touristic
Rui	Beautiful	Cold	Big
Hugo	Eastern Europe	Strict	Relaxed
Arwen	Amazing	Bad Weather	Party
Martha	Old	Impressive	Dirty
Miriam	Beer Garden	unfriendly people attendants	good sight places

Table 16 The Czech citizen

Name	Three words to describe a Czech citizen		
Manon	Unfriendly	Bad-dressed	Pessimistic
Rodrigo	Unsympathetic	Impatient	Doer
Grettir	Tourist Haters	Open	Proud
Xènia	Unfriendly	Cold	Antisocial
Mari	Relaxed	Introverted	Dog lovers
Rui	Didn't want to Generalize		
Hugo	Closed	Friendly	Silent
Arwen	Rude	Ugly	Calm
Martha	Funny	Closed	Friendly
Miriam	Afraid to speak English	Helpful	Hard drinkers of beer

Positive aspects   Negative aspects   Neutral opinion

5.3.1 Interaction with the locals

Something curious about Erasmus is that even living in a different country, people with whom students will have less contact with are the locals. To confirm this idea, after asking them whom they had more contact with I asked them directly how their interaction was with the locals until now. Concerning these students only two of them replied saying that they had a good relationship with the Czechs, these two students were Martha and Miriam, both from Germany. They had sport activities every week with others Czechs students in spite of thinking that this could be even better if the classes would be mixed. Besides that she was living with Czech people so she considers that she had a good relation with them. In the beginning it was a bit hard to interact with them but with the time they were getting friendlier to her. The rest of the group couldn't establish a good connection and the main reason for that were:

- Living with People from other countries
- Different Classes
- Too big Language barrier
- Enormous number of Erasmus students
- Short Stay

- They don't like foreigners
- Different "worlds"
- Not open

After knowing some reasons, I wanted to know whose fault it was and they revealed having different opinions about this matter. Manon thinks that it is both parts' fault. On the one hand she didn't try to meet Czech people because she doesn't speak Czech but on the other hand the Czechs don't try to speak or understand English being disappointed for them not making an effort to communicate with her. Grettir shares a different reason, in his opinion it is hard in Erasmus to connect with the locals because the implemented system is not suitable for this and groups are created, perhaps it is more Erasmus' fault than the Czechs because Erasmus ends up being a very close group. Rui answered that the Czechs have their lives and it ends up not being compatible with the life of Erasmus. In his opinion it isn't anyone`s fault since there are different routines and those who are doing Erasmus lives in a world apart. Hugo shares the same opinion of Rui, that it is no one`s fault. The life of an Erasmus students is so different that it is difficult to make contacts with others, but this could be different if the faculty`s students organized something different in which they could include foreign students. Arwen considers that it is more their fault by not being so friendly to Erasmus students. In the dorm where she lived there were plenty of Czech people and they didn't like Erasmus students. Erasmus students also seek more other Erasmus students than locals.

Connected with how they were living with the Czechs and their culture I intended to know if they tried to follow the news about Czech Republic or if they follow at least the news about their country even being abroad. Almost all of them answered the same thing, that is they didn't follow the news giving similar reasons for it. If something really important happens they will naturally find out. They don't have much interest in things that doesn't affect them directly. For example they only saw the news and tried to get more information when the explosion occurred near the national theatre or when the floods happened. Besides of not being so curios about the news they say that the language is also a factor for not trying to know more, because they don't understand anything. Some of them said if they would stay longer maybe they would start to watch the news but as they are going to live for a short period of time abroad it isn't worth it. Regarding the news in their own country the majority follows them

almost every day or just once a week. Rui or Martha for example didn´t watch the news about their own country, Rui says that trough social network he can be aware of the things or their parents would tell him. Martha doesn't have a specific reason for not watching, just don't want to.

5.3.2 Contacting Home

The last question of this third phase is about the contact they had with their family, friends or lovers, how often they speak to them and how they do it. The way they contact with their homeland is using Skype and Facebook. They use also the text message service in spite of not being as often as the other two. Almost all of them spoke every week with their family, only one said that spoke two in two weeks with their parents. One thing that is very common among them is that to speak to their parents they use Skype but with friends they rather use Facebook. Mari and Martha sent postcards being a good way to communicate and make people happier.

5.4 4th Phase

After this phase I waited one more month to start with the fourth and last phase of interviews. The last phase is important to see the knowledge they have now and to compare the things that have changed since their arrival, if they felt adapted and what they thought about this experience. These questions were made in their last week in Czech Republic and in their last day in the country.

The first question in this last phase is about the knowledge they have now considering the geography of Czech Republic. In the beginning I made questions about the knowledge that they had about the geography of Czech Republic and now I repeated the same question to see if they improved their sense about the geography of Czech Republic. All of them said that they know more now and some even changed some ideas they had before. Grettir doesn't see Czech Republic like a country belonging to Eastern Europe anymore but being part of the centre of Europe. Like the others he learned things because he travelled inside the country and met different regions and different landscapes, adding that he could see that there is a big difference between Prague the capital and the rest of the country. Hugo also shared the same opinion saying that the difference is quite large between the capital and the rest of the country.

Martha said that it is natural, knowing more now after living there for some months. With Manon it was a bit different, because her work at the university was

related to the country making her study and read about Czech Republic. The rest didn´t read anything and they said that the main cause to know more it´s derivate to the trips they have made. Miriam commented that she put a map of Czech Republic in her room to get familiar to it, and also her mother gave her a guide of the country for her birthday.

The next question is related with their experience during these months, they were asked what they would change in the university and in the city concerning what they experienced during these months. The topics are organized from the most common answers to the less ones and the changes they think the University should have are the following:

- Classes with Czechs students, being set aside, it is almost as if they lived in a world apart.
- The treatment received is different when it comes to Czech students or Erasmus students.
- Some teachers do not take Erasmus students seriously
- Teachers could help more international students.
- People who work in international relations office should be able to communicate with students perfectly.
- Had a bad experience due to credits, expecting more organization.
- They don't have terraces for students because the university is something more than just having classes.
- During the school year teachers are quite relaxed but then the performances of their work are quite restricted
- Change the level of rigor, they think it is too low, it was very easy to make the courses with this requirement level and only ultimately benefit people who work less.
- The first month was a bit confusing because there was no information which or where would be held the courses.
- Communication between teacher and student, sometimes is not the best

And regarding the city:

- Teaching English to Czech population.
- Amount of homeless people in the city. It is a serious social issue
- The weather if they could change.

- The suburbs are quite different from the city centre, everything is very focused to the centre of the city meanwhile in the suburbs little is done.
- The city has too many tourists and it is often bad.
- Too many shops and its consumerism is taken to the extreme. More people should live in the centre instead of having so many stores.
- The traffic in the city centre can sometimes be chaotic, they should try to decrease the traffic in the city centre. The noise is annoying and sometimes here are too many huge queues. It should be created more free car parks in the suburbs making people use more public transport.
- The city should try to solve its trash problems, Prague is a dirty city.
- Graffitis that can be found throughout the city. Prague is a city with many historical monuments of great value and it is a pity that they can be vandalized.
- If the Czechs could be friendlier it would be perfect.
- Locate the dorms more closely to the city centre.
- Doesn't need so many changes, because the city is very historical and what is built is necessary to be maintained and preserved.
- More nature parks and better maintained parks, the ones that exists are quite small and everybody go there walking the dogs and end up not being comfortable. Stays with idea that parks are for dogs and not for people.
- Would make the metro more tourist friendly. It has gaps regarding the information provided, such as with time accounting for the coming of the next metro that simply doesn't exist.
- Prague has to start to be seen more than a place for parties and cheap drinks. Prague is a city full of culture and it should be more publicized.
- Should have bike rental stations around the city, as there are in many European cities and improving the conditions for using it.

5.4.1 The Concept Erasmus

After knowing what they would like to change, they were asked what they can say about Erasmus after these months, about this experience. And the responses had these principal topics:

5.4.1.1 Parties/Travel

Almost everyone refereed something about this. Manon said that besides everything people know that Erasmus is also parties and trips. Rodrigo shares the same opinion saying that there are many parties and it is also an opportunity to travel, and it serves as an incentive to start travelling more and who knows maybe leave Portugal. Arwen also agrees that this is a good opportunity to travel.

5.4.1.2. Contact with a new culture/ Friendship Network

Almost everyone came up with this topic. For Manon Erasmus is living in a foreign country, knowing that it isn't going to be hers and needs to live among another culture and adapt to it. It is to learn a new language or develop another such as English. When she came, she intended to be able to develop another language apart from her mother tongue. When she saw the movie *Albergue espanhol* that portrays Erasmus she found it very similar with what she experienced, she met new people and through these people she knows new cultures and the information collected is huge.

Rodrigo said this experience is to make good friendships. Undoubtedly it has been the best five months of his life. The amount of people he knew is simply amazing and through them he knew different cultures and enriched himself culturally. The spirit is different there. Everyone should do Erasmus and then go visit people in their countries from the ones he met in Prague.

Grettir refers that for him it is to know a new country and a new culture, to grow and to get new perspectives. Sometimes he compares his country with this one and states that they are quite different, he feels the lack of eating fish since there all is on the basis of pig that is overkill.

Xènia said that she was really happy, she could meet people from everywhere, from different cultures in a short time. It is time for learning and fun and happiness. She is satisfied with her life there, she learned many things and sometimes learned more of other countries than properly about Czech culture.

Mari admits that she learned several things about her own country because being outside can help seeing things differently, comparing various cultures is good to learn so much in little time. She liked a lot having done Erasmus.

Hugo said that the first thing that comes in his mind is an exchange of cultures in which Prague is perfectly located for this purpose. It is in the centre of Europe where you can meet all kind of people and cultures. Erasmus is the possibility to live with other cultures and learn from them. In faculty you can read about it but here you can see if everything you have read is true and also our stereotypes are shaken. He thinks that people who come from Erasmus can't put studies first because honestly you will not learn a lot in classes when it is Erasmus, it is the experience what matters. You have the ability to develop another language than your own, and become a fearless person. Erasmus can be very difficult but sometimes it's good, it's like a roller coaster of feelings and emotions. You shouldn´t try to think too much about the difficulties, you must come with an open mind, not creating too many expectations and now that is almost finished he thinks that he learned a lot and that this experience will be very important in his future.

Miriam said that it's about meeting new people, different nationalities, and cultures, it´s observing how they talk, how they eat, what they eat and what other people know about her country. It is all about to live outside of her country and learn more about another one. It is also fun and travel. It's studying in a different university with a different educational system, it is to have new experiences, live a different life that was hitherto accustomed. Learning to see the differences between her country and others and to know what people think about Germany is sometimes funny. When she returns home she will go back with a different perspective.

5.4.1.3 Process of growth/ Stereotypes

To a lot of students Erasmus is not only about classes or university, for them it is more than that, here it's possible to see in which way Erasmus influenced them.

Manon said Erasmus is learning to be more tolerant and to see the differences and thus contributes to the reduction of stereotypes that she had when she arrived. It is sharing experiences, knowing the city and people. It is something new, because living without friends or family around, is to learn to manage it and it is quite different to live this way. Erasmus is having a special status, to be an international mobility student is special.

Rodrigo shares the idea that Erasmus is a process of growth, it is a change in life, he will go back to Lisbon with another perspective and thinking he made good friendships during this period, and also giving importance to things that seemed to be so insignificant.

For Mari it was to learn new things, simple things like opening a beer in many different ways or meet new cultures, for example she never thought so much about religious matters, but during her stay she had several conversations about it, something that hitherto had never given many thoughts. You think about things that maybe you could never think of.

For Arwen it is an experience that will always stay in her mind. It's possible to learn so many things, it is undoubtedly a period of growth, meeting people and learning about other cultures. No one can regret having done Erasmus. It is something unique and memorable. Erasmus changes a person and when she thinks about it, she will come back with a stronger personality since she learned to live alone in a different city in a different country. At first it was hard but now she is sure that no one can be afraid of doing Erasmus. It is simply amazing.

5.4.1.4 The coming back and other ideas

The coming back is always a delicate subject after an experience like Erasmus. Manon knew that she wouldn't live there for a long period so she wanted to enjoy her time in the best way. First she didn't want to be there and now she didn't want to leave. For Rodrigo Erasmus it's a mixture of feelings and livings and now coming back to Portugal after this experience it's complicated, this life is good and it's hard to leave it behind.

Xènia thinks it is a great experience. It is to live on the edge and make millions of different things without routine. Here different things can happen every day, during all days and all nights. To Rui it was a very good idea to have this experience. When he got there he arrived with low expectations and now he is leaving with a positive idea. Erasmus is having a different life, it's possible to do a bit of everything, studying, meeting people and having fun. Everything gets simpler. And to end with their opinions about what Erasmus was in their opinion, for Martha it is leaving her country, meeting people and don't take the University so seriously. It's exploring the city and maybe learn another language. Some people don't need the credits, they just come to live the experience. She doesn't regret having done Erasmus. Erasmus can be stressful when it's

about managing time, when they leave all the things for the last minute as usually happens.

5.4.1.5. Adaptation Process

After considering what Erasmus represents to each one of them, the next question is related with their adaptation, if they felt having managed to adapt themselves to this conjunction of things, to be in a new place, maybe for some living alone for the first time, and other variables that exist when someone goes to live abroad. Besides asking if they felt adapted, I asked them what they have done to feel more comfortable and more adapted.

In what concerns if they felt adapted or not the responses weren´t the same, although the majority felt adapted. One of them confessed that didn´t succeed to feel that way. This student was Rui, to feel adapted he would need his friends and family nearby, he added that people are those who make the city so he doesn´t know if he could live there much longer since he missed his homeland. Another student who wasn't sure was Hugo, there were moments he almost considered that this was his home but there were others in which the idea was the opposite. This is not a normal period of his life, but he considers that the differences between Czech Republic and his country are quite large and also not having there his friends and family makes everything harder. Among the others they felt comfortable there, Manon said that at the beginning it was quite difficult, to start to know the name of the streets, shops and markets, but now she doesn´t feel herself any more like a tourist, she knows how to interact with people even this process took some time. Arwen felt like she was at home after two months, but this depends on a lot of the type of person you are. Despite she misses her homeland she considers that Prague is an easy city to live in and she has enjoyed it a lot. For Rodrigo the difference between Lisbon and Prague is not so big, because the dimension of both cities is quite similar. If he went to a bigger city it would be more difficult to him, but he added that having his friends there helped him adapting.
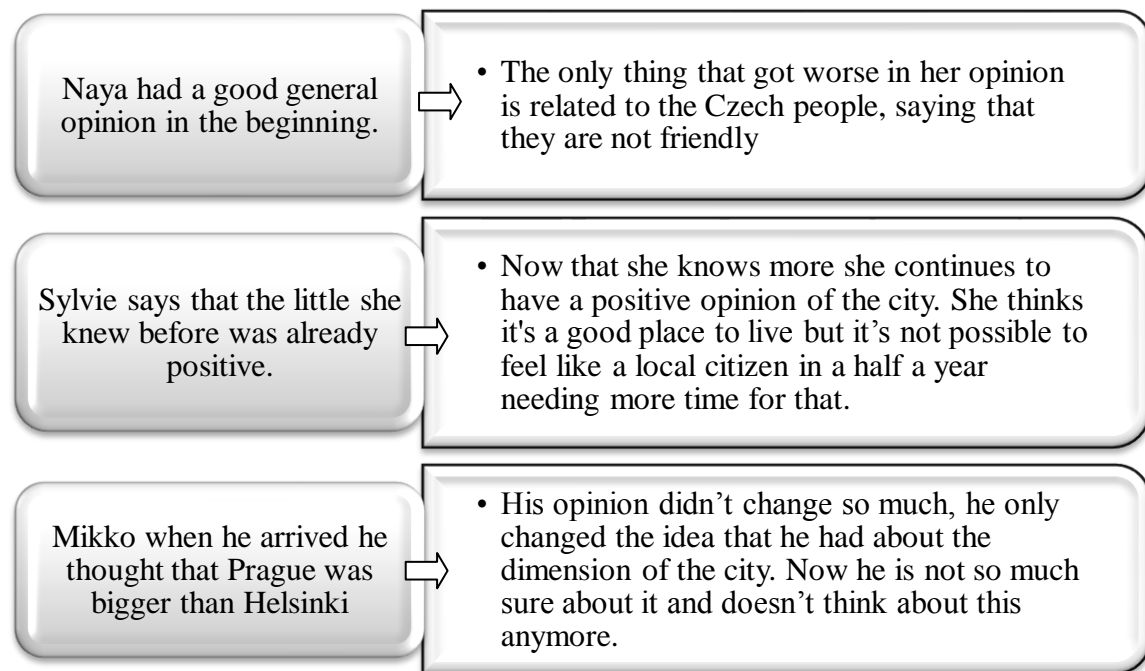
Concerning what they made to feel more adapted, almost everyone said that having a routine was important, to make something in which they would feel good. Arwen for example decorated her room to create a space in which she would feel good in it. They said that is important to try to live a normal life. Rodrigo, tried to explore the city as maximum as possible, even getting lost in the city. In this way he could start to recognize places and learn how to move in the city. Martha said that is important to

keep doing things they like, that makes them feel good with themselves in order to feel comfortable with the city. To Xènia it was important to find a space just for her. It could be to take a coffee alone or to do yoga, this would help her to feel good. Only one of them considered that learning Czech language would be important, and would help to be in Prague, she also kept some routines she had in Germany like having the same breakfast that she had at her homeland since she found the same ingredients there in the supermarkets and took advantage of it.

Before they leave the country I wanted to know if the opinion they had in the beginning of this mobility programme was the same and if not what changed.

Figure 12 Expectations vs Results in Prague

At first Anais was pretty disappointed as in the beginning everything is more difficult	⟹	• Now she enjoys the city and thinks that it is a good place to live. The transport are great and cheap and the university is also quite good
For David in the beginning everything was great for him	⟹	• After living here some time it's possible to discover some flaws, however he continues undoubtedly with a positive idea of the city
Saskia considered that in the beginning everything was really good.	⟹	• Now she can't see the beauty in things as when she arrived to Prague. When people get used to things and live among them it is normal for her that the citizens forget how beautiful things are.

Naya had a good general opinion in the beginning.	• The only thing that got worse in her opinion is related to the Czech people, saying that they are not friendly
Sylvie says that the little she knew before was already positive.	• Now that she knows more she continues to have a positive opinion of the city. She thinks it's a good place to live but it's not possible to feel like a local citizen in a half a year needing more time for that.
Mikko when he arrived he thought that Prague was bigger than Helsinki	• His opinion didn't change so much, he only changed the idea that he had about the dimension of the city. Now he is not so much sure about it and doesn't think about this anymore.

5.4.1.6 Accomplished goals

Erasmus students going abroad normally have some goals for what they want to see accomplished. Now I wanted to know if after these months in Prague they succeed doing what they thought doing in the beginning or sometimes even before coming here. The majority left something to do or they didn't succeed to accomplish everything they wanted to. Manon accomplished her official goal that was to work in her thesis, but she didn't go as many parties as she wanted because she had a lot of work. Rodrigo didn't manage to end his course, but he is very pleased for having the opportunity to come to Prague and he is happy for what he did there. Grettir also failed in what concerns doing more sports, he wanted to climb minimum three times a week but he didn't manage to do that but this is not a reason for him to be sad, he is very pleased about this experience and knows that when he will return to Iceland he will miss Prague. For Hugo creating too many goals can be bad, for him the best thing was to let the things happen naturally. He experienced good things and adds that it could been worse. Rui regrets haven´t risked so much and maybe he could go to more places, but generally he is satisfied, he wanted to live a new experience and succeed it.

In general none of these students regret having done Erasmus, they are happy for what they accomplished during these months but also almost all of them let something to do or didn´t achieve do to everything they dreamed of.

5.4.1.7. Stay longer?

To end the fourth phase, I pretended to know if after this experience they would like to stay longer and if they improved their language skills concerning the Czech language.

Almost everyone answered they wouldn't stay longer, the main reasons they pointed out were about being homesick, they missed their homeland including the food, the climate, the family or friends. Others would like to stay but if everybody is leaving the city there is no reason for them to stay more time. Rodrigo said he came to Prague because it was a beautiful city, now he says that the city is a secondary factor, the key were the people he met and the friendships he has created. Another important factor is the money.

5.4.1.8. Language Skills

Regarding their Czech language one student improved. Miriam learned Czech, but she says that now she can understand better than speaking it, she wanted to improve even more but she thinks she will stop on this level. At first she thought she could continue learning in Germany but she doesn't think like that anymore. Concerning the other students they didn't improve, the most common is being able to say some basic words, like thank you or please. The main reason that they pointed out for not improving was related to the duration of their stay, if they would stay longer maybe they could learn more. Another reason given is the relevance of the language on an international level. If this would be a more important language maybe they would do a bigger effort to learn it but they don't see so many advantages for their C.V to know how to speak Czech.

5.4.1.9. Summary

In Prague in spite of the main work being the same as in Braga, the perspective in realizing the work was different, this because even if I was doing the interviews I was an Erasmus student myself going also through these different moments that involves the Erasmus experience.

The same questions were applied than in Braga with the same goals to understand a large variety of things related to their adaptation, experiences or feelings. The behaviour of the students was in some part influenced mainly by the city, how they

managed to move and live their daily life. There was also possible to see differences since they arrived, with some students overcoming themselves. There are Erasmus' students who arrive to an unknown place or environment and are disappointed with what encounters but they end up to enjoy living there, there are others who enjoy it so much in their arrival that at the end they get used to it and only give it some importance again when friends come to visit and remind them how beautiful the city is. Usually the pre-defined idea of how everything is or is going to be is different as everything really turns out to be such us the size of the city and the connection with the host culture, something that got worse during their stay.

The friendship network ends up to be very important for each student, especially when they need to ask for help or get some comfort in the most difficult days. Concerning this point there aren't similarities to Braga, the presence of locals are less making the students pointing to have more relation with other foreign students and students from the same nationality.

They had an unique experience and admit that this is an important phase in their life until now, saying that this is a growth phase where they can learn many things since their studies until how to behave in a different culture.

In the next chapter more detailed analysis of these interviews is followed and a comparison from the answers given by the students in Braga.

6. Final analysis

This chapter contains the interviews analysis of the comparison of two approaches in two different cities and attempts to identify differences and similarities of the experiences in different countries.

This master thesis involves students from many different countries namely: Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Turkey, Finland, Estonia, Belgium, and Iceland. The variety of students from different countries allows to see the way they think.

The first possible thing to compare are the thoughts they have, still in their homeland while for preparing their mobility period, when they start having the first idealizations of how their Erasmus will be. The ways they gathered information of Braga and Prague were very similar. The use of the internet was the most common one, using websites from the city or of the university. Some students who went to study in Prague had friends who had already been there, providing them more information about the city, something that the students who came to Braga couldn't do. It is easier to find and gather information about Prague than Braga since the latter is a smaller city and it is possible that the majority of the information that exist about Braga is in Portuguese. The information available can be significantly different considering that Prague is an important touristic place in Europe and it is normal to find more information about Prague in English or other languages in contrast to the information that is possible to find about Braga. Regarding the type of information they gathered, Braga is seen as a destination with good weather, near the sea, and an old, historical and religious city. Prague is different, when they heard the name of that city the thoughts were: beautiful, cold, cheap place to live, to party and with cheap beer. One similarity among them was the sport practised there. According to Bridget, in Braga she could have more information about the football team of the city, *Sporting Clube de Braga*, and in Prague, Hugo knew that the ice hockey modality was important there. In this way it is possible to see the importance that sports can have in a city, being a vehicle to internationalize it and providing the possibility to reach more people.

The expectations they had in both cases were quite similar. Both groups were seeking to open their horizons, to grow and become more mature. Another common topic was the will to travel, independently of the city they would go, being this a very consensual topic among them. But there are specific expectations depending on the city destination. For example in Braga they wanted to learn Portuguese and were searching

for good weather to surf. In Prague it is different. Those who want to go to Prague aren't searching for good weather but the city itself. Prague is known for being one of the most touristic cities in Europe, and those students pointed out exploring Prague to be one of their biggest expectations. Some of them wanted to learn the language of the country where they would go and even a new one (Czech). Concerning still their expectations, two students, each one from a different group, Walter from Turkey and Mari from Estonia didn´t want to create too many expectations because they were afraid of being disappointed later. That shows that independently of the destination, going abroad can be to face an unknown experience without knowing what to expect. Tied with their expectations are the difficulties they were expecting. When someone starts thinking about a future experience, an experience never had before, they will bring up some difficulties they were expecting for their stay. In both study cases they had a main common topic, in particular the difficulty concerning the language. The idea living in a country where they are going to have problems to understand the native-language is always a normal concern for a foreign student.

Other difficulties indicated are more specific concerning the differences between Braga and Prague. In the case of Braga four in ten students referred being afraid of the cultural shock or the Erasmus trap or even simpler things like weight gain or the food. In the case of Prague they referred other things like leaving their family, friends or lovers behind, living for the first time alone, living in a big city. This last one can't be compared to Braga because, meanwhile, Prague for many of these students is considered a big city. To fear the unknown is easy, even if they collect as much information they can before their departure to participate in an experience like Erasmus. Nothing is certain and they will never know what to expect.

This phase of expectations goes according to what Hottola (2004) claimed about when these students still are at their homelands "their imagination takes them abroad while their body is still located at home. At this phase, positive expectations are high, although fears and doubts may also be lurking in the background: "Will the visit fulfil my expectations? Will I stay healthy? (...)"" "Transition from the originating country to the destination country involves physical and mental hardships."(Hottola, 2004,456).

The last question made in the first phase is related to their geographical knowledge of the country they would go. It is common to know the big cities of the country: in Portugal they knew Lisbon and Porto and some knew Algarve because of its tourism and just one student said that Portugal was close to Morocco. In Czech

Republic besides Prague some knew something about Brno and Ostrava. Normally people just look at Europe taking into account their borders, and in Portugal it is very often forgotten that besides Spain, Morocco is the nearest country. Another geographical fact is the reference to Prague being a good location for travelling, it is perceptible looking into a map that Prague is in the centre of Europe and that offers opportunities to travel and to know the neighbouring countries.

The second phase consists in their arrival to the cities, their first impacts. Here I will analyse the location of their homes, and why they have chosen to live in those places. Besides that, I also will see their goals analysing their similarities and differences. Also concerning their first impacts these ones are not always positive "instead of the euphoria anticipated in the U-curve, they [sic.] had both positive and negative experiences on arrival and felt them especially strongly at this point (...) people are friendly and welcoming, but they [sic.] do not seem to understand her questions. It may not rain, but the weather is uncomfortably hot and humid, or too cold. The available food does not smell quite right, although the locals seem to enjoy it" (Hottola, 2004,456). This is why the first weeks are important for these students because the first impact they had with the host culture will be important for the image they will create of the country that will host them.

Looking at the following map it is possible to see the different locations students had in the cities of Braga and Prague.

Figure 13 Map of the location of the students in Braga
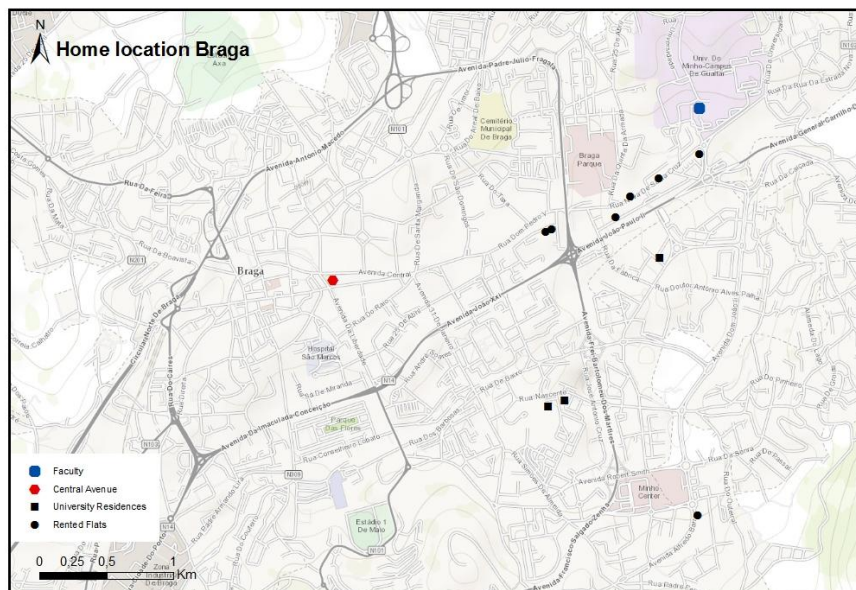
Figure 14 Map of the location of the students in Prague
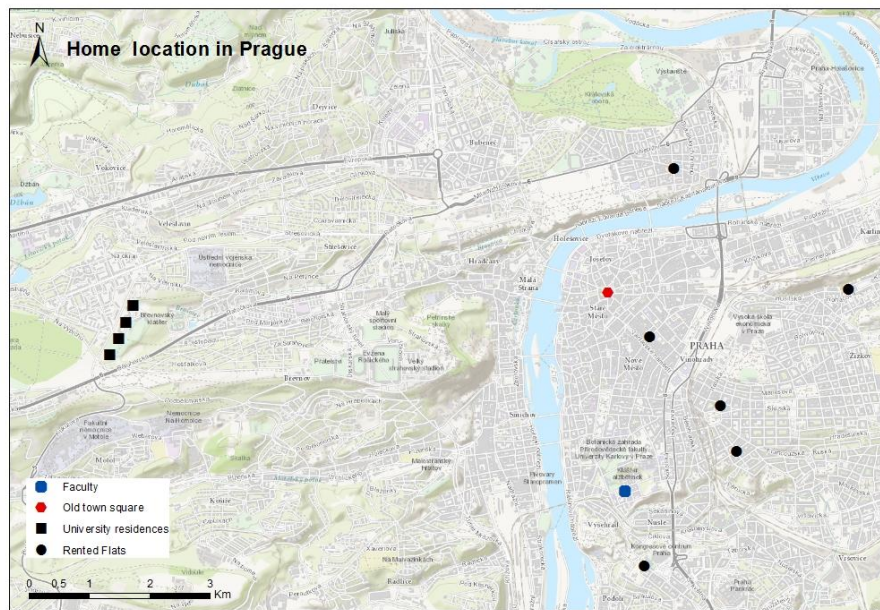
By looking at this map it is easy to verify the differences, how the students organized themselves in space in the two cities. In Braga almost all of the students have chosen to live in the same area, near the University campus, with the exception of one student who lived more distant from that area.

The students gathered in a specific area of the city, and because of this tendency, and not only because of the international students, this area had developed services like restaurants, cafes, supermarkets, clothes stores, hairdressers, laundry services etc. In spite of Braga being a small city and the university campus not being so far from the city centre (3km), this separation is very obvious just looking at the map. On the other hand in Prague this did not happen. The students are more dispersed, even the city being bigger and 9 out of 10 students were attending the faculty referred in the map. Another student was attending another faculty near the Old town square also identified in the map. The university residences in which the interviewed students lived were located in the other side of the river, even further, compared to the students who lived in a flat. If we compare these two cities there is a big difference in how the students organized themselves in space. This can happen for some reasons. Probably the main one is the transportation system in the city. When students need to choose a place to live, they use

very similar strategies in both cases: the prices of the houses and their locations, the privacy and the mobility.

Although Braga is a small city, the mobility inside it is poor and works deficiently. The public transportation doesn't give good response to the students' needs, not having any transportation working during the night. In Prague this doesn't happen. For those students localization wasn't that important because it has a good transportation system therefore they could live a bit more far from the city centre, paying less and were "close to city centre". In Prague this idea of gathering the students all in the same area doesn't exit. It is possible to find some areas where students gather but not as in Braga.

Looking at the map it is possible to see that in Prague only one student was living quite close to the Faculty meanwhile the others preferred to live near the city centre or in dormitories even further from it. Another thing that can influence the location of the students is the night life. In Braga besides the poor transportation system, the animation of the city centre at night barley exists during the year, except during the summer months. For this reasons students prefer to stay closer to the university campus where all the services are, and the students don't feel the need to go to the city centre unless for sightseeing or spending some free time. In Prague students don't gather to live at the same place until the districts of Prague 4, (city centre Prague1). The option to live or not in the city centre exist and can be influenced by the costs of renting a flat there. The services there are well dispersed and the night life is one of the strengths of Prague besides the public transportation system which works 24 hours a day. Independently of the place students will choose to live they will be able to move inside the city without big complications.

Although Prague has more faculties I only pointed out one in the map, since almost all of them where studying there. In Braga there are two campuses and one of them is situated in the city centre but all students who were interviewed were studying in the Faculty that is showed in the map. Further with the use of other maps it will be able to see how their routines were and which places they thought would be ideal to have social gatherings. Having this information of the two cities it will be possible to analyse why they have chosen to behave in this manner and if the space where they were living influenced them to have the routines they had. I will return to this topic again.

Still regarding their locations, here it is possible to verify if the concept of Heterotopia is a reality or not in this study case. "Heterotopia are spaces that are kept out of sight, either to control them or to conceal them" (Dervin, 2009a,122). In this case it is possible to apply this when the students are all located in the same places, like halls of residences reserved for foreign students or shared flats with foreign students.

In this case it is possible to verify mainly in the cases when flats mainly shared among foreign students making it possible to see the application of this concept. What concerns the hall of residences in Braga is not so common with the mixture between local and foreign students being a reality even if it is only about sharing the same place, not being this a cause to exist more interaction. In Prague in my case study the students that were living in that specific residence were sharing it with other students that were also locals. But Prague has a considerable size and is possible to find in the city others residences where this idea of not mixing the foreign students with the locals is a reality.

In both cases, it is not possible to say that a specific place exists inside the city where these students want to live in the Heteropia way but they end up sharing the same places and living together in the same houses or rooms, being this phenomenon something real.

Related to the goals they had, even going to different cities some of their goals were the same or quite similar. The most common between the groups was the will to know the local culture, to be independent, the need to be more intuitive, confident and responsible along with the curiosity for the education system in a foreign country. The goals were quite general, the most specific one was from one student in the group of Prague who wanted to finish the course there. Apart from that, the goals mentioned were having fun and living without monotony. Things that didn´t involve the space where they were going, but their experience.

The next phase they are going through is the adaptation phase, in which they arrive to the city and adapt themselves to a different life-style and culture. While elaborating this work I could identify some critical topics about this subject. The things these two groups had more difficulty with were the following: food, weather, mobility and language. These ones have a direct impact in the lifestyle of any foreigner intending to live there. The food is normally very connected to the cultural aspect, although you can also find international food, but living for such a long period in a foreign country the need to learn how to deal with the national cuisine of the country will be almost a must for them. When she arrived at Braga Liana´s first meal was at MacDonald's,

"(Mac Donaldization or cocalitzation). In other words, through "global" cultural artefacts that each and every one of us shares, uses or is made/said to use, culture is said to have become unified all over the world" (Dervin, 2009b, 10). She ate what was known to her in an unknown space to feel more comfortable and safer, because when these students saw some references they already knew the feeling of being lost would be less, even if they had never been there before. The weather is another delicate subject, it can happen that the students choose the place concerning the weather, for example the students who decided to go to Portugal or the students who didn´t care so much about the weather conditions (Czech Republic). Normally students think that Portugal is a country where they will find sun, good weather and be able to do some specific sports like surf or bodyboard. But sometimes they are not so well informed and it can happen that they are expecting to find good weather and when they arrive to Braga, they find a cold and rainy winter.

In Prague it is a different case, the students knew that they would find snow and cold temperatures and even if they go prepared with warm clothes, sometimes that is not enough. Psychologically students who are not used to this kind of climate like people from Portugal, Spain, Greece or France will not be ready to find weather conditions like that. For example Manon, from France when she arrived to Prague she admitted to be disappointed the first days since she was stressed, dealing with so many things at the same time and it was so cold. Knowing how to deal with the weather will depend mainly of the students and how they can adapt themselves to different conditions they aren´t used to. Another important topic is the transportation, knowing how to move is essential, the sense of fear will be present if someone doesn't know how to go from point A to point B. Students only start to feel really safe after knowing how to move inside the city. First normally they start to use one single route because they know that using that one, they won't get lost, after that it´s a question of time to start moving around the city without fear. When someone arrives to an unknown place it is terrible not knowing how to move inside it, not knowing where the safe places are. Normally when they were asked about this subject some students replied that the best way to know how to move inside the city is to get lost, to start having some reference points they can identify and later recognize places due to these places. This factor can be included to leaving their comfort zone and the need to start to find a safe zone first and then with time adding new places to it. This is a very important step in the adaptation process of each student. Directly connected with their comfort zone is the place where

they are going to stay, their flat or their room. This place will be the first safe zone they will have, and the tendency is turning this place the more familiarized possible using photos, decorations or flags and like this way, even being outside their comfort zone they start to create one. This happens independently of which city the students will apply for. To end the critical points for their adaptation, it's necessary to discuss about the language.

When students go abroad one of the big worries is the different language they will find. To be in a place where they cannot understand anything about what is written or what people talk about. It is a feeling of not belonging to that place. Students worry before arriving there and especially about how their daily life will be without understanding anything. After the interviews that were made during last year I believe that the most delicate topics were regarding the adaptation process when a student arrives to a foreign country.

In Erasmus the creation of a new friendship network is quite mandatory. When students arrive without knowing anyone they are kind of "forced" to create new friendships. With the purpose to analyse their friendship network they made a table referring the names of ten people they had more connection with until that moment. This question was made after being 3 months in the city of Braga or Prague. With those tables it will be possible to see whom they had more connection with and compare the two different perspectives. Concerning the connection the students had with locals, the experience was different in Braga and Prague. In Braga from the 10 students I worked with, 5 of them pointed out in their lists having connection with at least one Portuguese and 3 of them said having good connection with 2 locals. In Czech Republic the situation is different despite 4 students saying that they knew 1 Czech. None of the 10 students pointed out more than one local person in their friendship network. This table was first created in order to see how their connection with the locals was but after paying more attention to it, it is possible to see a curious fact.

Among almost all of the students in the two cities, they referred in their list having friends from their own country. In the group of Portugal all of them said they had friends from the same nationality as themselves, and one of the students had 5 friends of 10 people from his country. The students who only pointed out one student from of the same nationality were from Belgium and Lithuania. The others had good connection with 3 or more people from their country. Meanwhile in Prague the same happens, what concerns the 10 students, only one said he didn't have friends from his

country (Iceland). Among all of the others they said they had friends from their countries but in lower quantity than the group of Braga. Here the maximum were 3 people in 10 while in Braga this number was higher (five in ten).

Dervin (2009a), refers that some students have "deliberately tried to avoid people from their own country during their home abroad because they wanted to meet "different people" and speak foreign languages" (Dervin, 124,2009a). In my case study it was possible to find some statements like this in the beginning of their stay, having the will to have interaction with people from other cultures. In the end of this case study and after doing this question about their friendship network it is possible to verify even if they had the will to interact with students of another nationality, they would fail and claimed to have had interaction with students with the same nationality.

The creation of friendships within the same nationality enables them to feel a bit more comfortable being with someone who shares the same language or cultural beliefs. Finding in others something familiar and supporting each other. Besides this table, I also asked them directly how their interaction with the locals had been and the reasons for this one being so little. The reasons given by the two groups were very similar, they identified reasons like the language barrier or the locals being so close towards foreign students but I wanted to know more about it and asked whose main fault it was for the inexistence of this interaction and here the students' opinions were divided. Some said it was only the locals' fault, others assumed that the fault was of both parts. One student of the group of Prague, Grettir said something very interesting about this. He claimed that the system that is implemented is not suitable for the creation of close connection between international and local student. He mentioned that probably the Erasmus are more guilty than the others. Hugo added that it is no one´s fault: who is doing Erasmus lives in a world apart of the rest who likes living in "different worlds" making the interaction more difficult to occur.

This can be confirm the theory of Dervin (2009a), claiming that the students are absent-present in the country where they are doing Erasmus. Being the locals generally seen as " nice but cold, and distant" (and sometimes even xenophobic); though, once again, research results show that they rarely get to "meet" locals apart from tutors, teaching staff and shop assistants" (Dervin, 2009a,122). This reinforces the idea that this bubble in which the international students live in is a reality possible to be seen in different cases study.

After dealing with so many international students I need to agree with this last point of view. The system is implemented in a way that the interaction almost doesn't exist. This interaction can happen but it will never be like the connection they have with other international students. The gap between their lifestyles and the local's lifestyles will end up being too big in order to have a bigger relation with locals and especially when these students end up staying there for a short period of time. Another reason that can be pointed out is the short period of time of their stay. Knowing that they will stay for a short period of time is understandable creating a new friendship network with other students who share the same situation. Probably it is more difficult to make an approach in an already implemented network and having in mind that they will not spend that much time there the effort for creating friends with locals will not be worth it. In Erasmus everything happens so fast and so many things happen at the same time and it will reach a point that the international students will just join the "wave" and will stop to enter into a parallel world, the locals' world. This happens in both cases, Braga and Prague and that is why I have reasons to believe that regardless of the location the students will choose as a destination to do Erasmus, they will always have more connection with other international students than with local ones. In specific cases it can happen the other way round but normally this doesn´t happen.

In relation to their experience students were asked to say three different words to describe their stay, the city and a local citizen. In a general approach it is possible to see that these two different groups of students while describing their stay were quite similar but in what concerns the description of the city or the people their opinions turned out to be different. With this it is possible again to affirm that the chosen place won't affect so much the final idea they will have about their experience. In both cases, Braga and Prague students used very common words like: Fantastic, Dream/Unreal, Travel/Trips, Friendship/New Friends, Miss/Homesick and Classes. These were the words that even the students doing Erasmus in different places said, it's possible to see how similar it is.

With the description of the city and the people the same didn't happen. About the city they mentioned some equal aspects for both cities like being old. Besides this, the students referred Braga as a small city in a more consensual way and some words they revealed as characteristics of it are: religious, simple transports, clean, romantic... About the city of Prague the description was different, the exultation of the city is more evident here, being Prague described as: beautiful, amazing, magic, impressive, majestic and historical city. Besides these words others were said like Prague being a cheap place

or very touristic, also the reference to the weather is present as a cold place with bad weather. Comparing the references they made to describe the city it is possible to see that the city of Prague has much more exaltation than Braga. The student´s need to say that Prague was so magnificent, was much bigger than the students from Braga. To end this topic the students also needed to describe a local citizen and also here the answers differed. The group of Prague said more negative things about the locals, they said that the citizens were unfriendly, unsympathetic, tourist haters, closed, rude and pessimistic. However two students believe they were friendly and one of them, Rui, refused to answer this question in order to not generalize the citizens. There are also descriptions like: dog lovers, proud, badly-dressed or hard beer drinkers. About the city of Braga the answers were quite different, with some words being more often repeated by them such as: friendly and helpful. In this case this differs a lot from the description of Prague. In Prague it is possible to find some curious descriptions as well, like: relaxed, noisy, speak a lot, innocent, no English or smiling. After analysing what they considered about these topics, it reflects how the students saw their experience, their city and the locals.

After gathering their thoughts about the place they chose to live, their experience, I will here analyse the trips the two groups made during their Erasmus. Normally these two subjects are connected. In this way I pretend to see how their localization influenced their travel choices or even if their geographical location is connected with the trips they made. In this case Braga and Prague will be in this case perfect for it, they have a different geographical localization and this will give me the possibility to compare these two situations.

In Braga students preferred to travel more inside the country, the most common places where they went to were Porto and Lisbon. These two are easy to understand why, besides being the two largest cities of Portugal, Porto is closely located to Braga and Lisbon being the capital of the country. All ten students went at least to these two cities. Inside the country they were very often to the national park *peneda-gerês,* located very close to Braga. Some of them just wanted to know the country better but others had some objectives, Mario said that he choose his travel destinations to be able to surf. These students travelled more inside Portugal than going abroad, Izabel explained why this happen. For her being from Lithuania going to Portugal is quite far and expensive so she wanted to know more about the country itself than visiting more things abroad. This doesn't mean that this group didn't make international trips. Another common destination is Madrid, the nearest European capital of Portugal. Students have quite a lot

of curiosity in Morocco and at least one student from this group went there. But if we compare the national and international trips they made it´s very explicit that they made more intern travel, this one related to the geography location of Portugal this one being the most south-west country in Europe.

In Prague the situation is different from that group, only one of them didn't make any international trips. First about the national trips they made, the main places they went to were Cesky Krumlov, Karlovy Vary and Kutna Hora. What influenced the students going there were the organized trips or because some of those places are UNESCO heritage. In what concerns the international destinations they chose mainly to go to: Bratislava, Vienna, Budapest and Krakow. They chose these cities because they are big cities and very close to Prague with good connections, so they could go there without having a lot of concerns. Here it is possible to see that the geographical location can be an important issue when it comes to deciding which places to go. Besides the location the connection that exists between Prague and the central region of Europe is very good.

After seeing their preferences about travelling, I also analysed how their behaviour inside the city was, the routines they had and the places they indicated as social gather locations. I already wrote about where they lived during their stay and why and now I will show the other maps that show how they interacted with the city.

Figure 15 Map of the daily life of the students in Braga
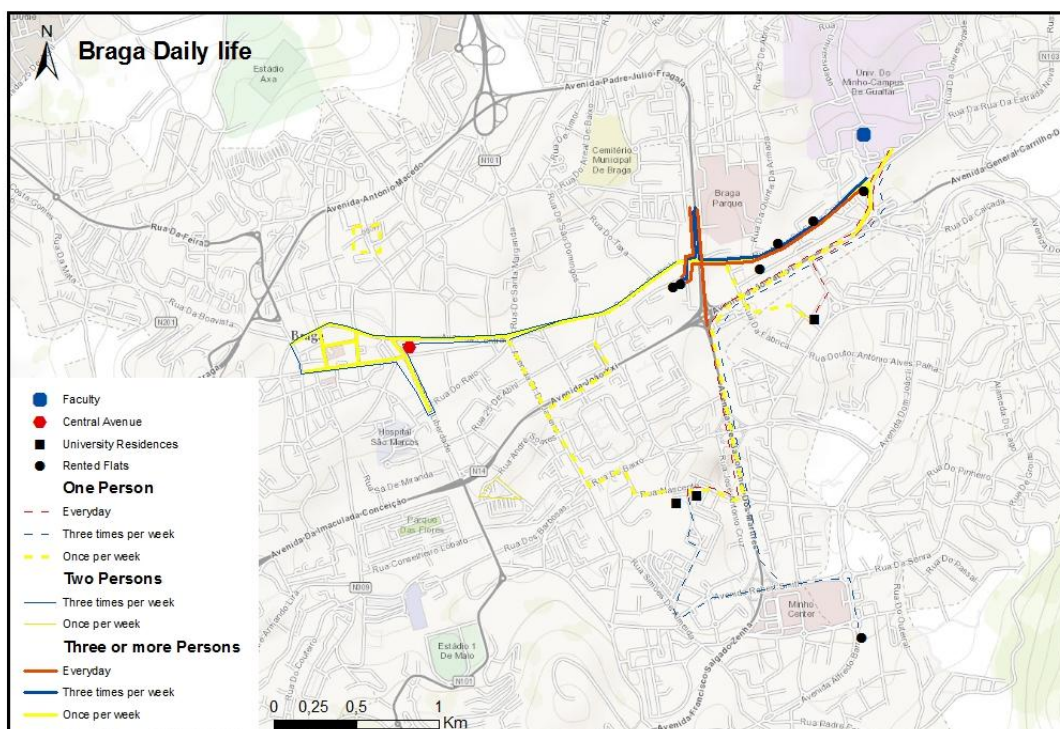
Figure 16 Map of the daily life of students in Prague
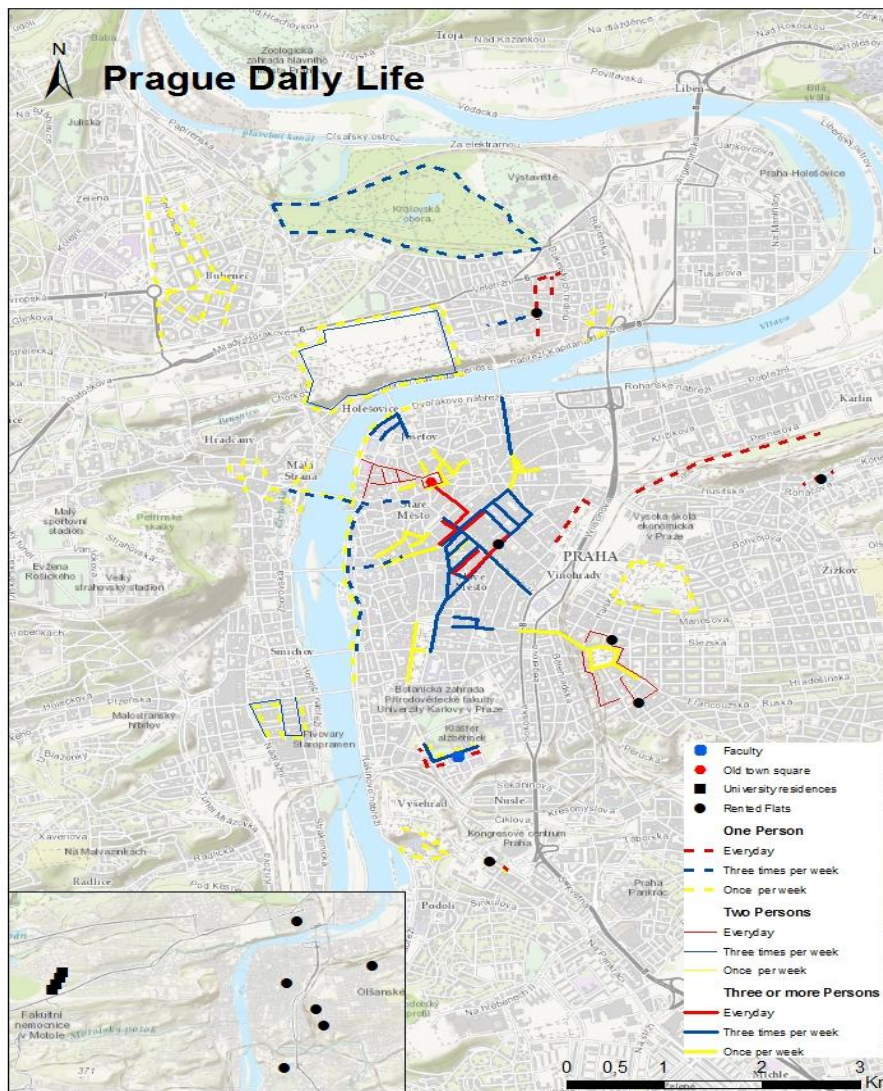
After completing these maps it is possible to reach to some conclusions about how the students lived their lives, which were their routines and where they spent more time during their stay. In the map where their home locations were analysed, the blue dot indicates the faculty and the red dot the most central part of the city. Concerning the location of the faculty in Prague, there are other faculties but all the students I worked with were studying in this one. To realize a better analysis of the answers given I divided their habits per frequency they had in that place. There are three different lifestyles, in red we see who went there everyday, in blue, those who spent time at least three times a week there, and in yellow, where they went at least once a week. Besides the colours they have different symbols, showing how many students said they spent

time there. With this purpose I also created three different scales being the pointed line the symbol of one student, the thinner line for two students pointing that place and then the thicker line where three or more students were during the week.

Comparing these two maps it's possible to see different behaviours among the students. In Braga they frequently made their daily life near the university campus. In what concerns the city centre at least two students went there at least once a week and another two students went to the city centre at least three times a week. However if we look at the map we see that the surrounding area of the university was much more indicated by them than the city centre. As already analysed before, this is an attractive area, a lot of different services were implemented there and with this the students don't need to go on purpose to the centre to go to the grocery store, restaurants, hairdresser or clothes stores. By referring these services I don't want to make reference to the biggest shopping mall of the city (*Braga Parque*) that is located very close to the university.

In what concerns sightseeing the students have another reason for not going often to the city centre, mainly because of the poor transportation system especially at night, where it doesn´t exist. Another negative thing students pointed out is that the city centre seems like a ghost town at night in which nobody is seen, something they miss once they find it nice. Another reason why they didn't go there so often is because they only went sightseeing two or three times unless the Erasmus gather together and go there to do something or if the Erasmus student received a visit from family or friends and wanted to show them the city. In addition to the centre and the university campus they marked the path they normally use from home to the university, for example from the university residences to the university. One student living a bit more distant from the city centre showed that normally he was going to the other shopping mall *(Minho Centre)* three times a week. There is another who went to the bus station once a week.

The daily life of the students in the city of Prague is quite different from the daily life in Braga. Not forgetting that the city of Prague is bigger than Braga and has more population, still the way that the students moved inside the city I believe is not that much influenced by that aspect. First the students here were more spread, so the area covered by their movements was bigger. Here is where the big difference between the two cities is. The students pointed out the city centre and surrounding area to be the place where they went more often. Quite different from Braga, because in what concerns the faculty they didn´t point out this area so much. Besides these places others were indicated like near the river, some students liked to do some walks there or go to

parks like *letna* park (other side of the river) to be one of their favourites places as seen in the map. Some students marked the area on the other side of the river facing the faculty, even though students didn't live nearby, because there a big shopping mall, with cinema and restaurants was located (*Andel*). So here it is possible to see how the easy mobility can influence the place to go, because Prague has one of the best public transportation systems. In this way students move without problems inside the city, having more choices where to go and sometimes preferring some service further than others near home, only because they can move more easily and don't focus on only the surrounding areas of the faculty where they can find some grocery stores or places to eat. It is also important to refer that the city centre is not only marked as a place to do sightseeing but a place where the soul of the city is located. There you can find a well prepared city for foreigners, otherwise Prague wouldn't be one of the most visited cities of Europe. A city centre full of people during the day and night even when the weather is bad, a place with different restaurants, bars and street animation in every corner.

In order to make an overview of these two different cities and habits, it's possible to see that the mobility and the location of the services are important to explain how the students will behave in space. Prague even being a bigger city than Braga offers better mobility options than Braga, a small city in which it should be easier to reach any specific place. Because of this, students in Braga end up using services closer to them than going to the city centre or another place. Meanwhile Prague is a bigger city and has more choices to offer students having for example more parks or a river where it is possible to walk nearby.

After analysing the daily life of the students, I also asked them to point on the map which were the places in their opinion that were socialization places, places they avoided or places hard to reach.

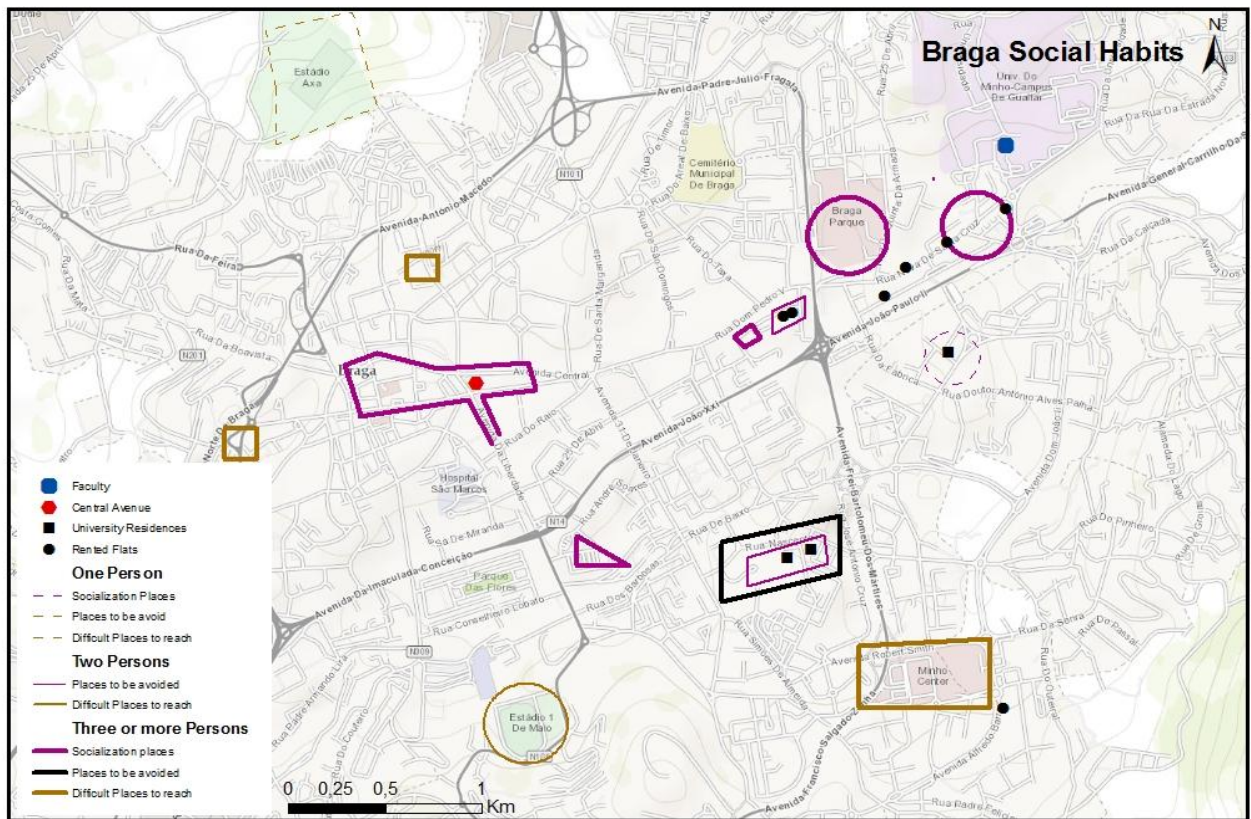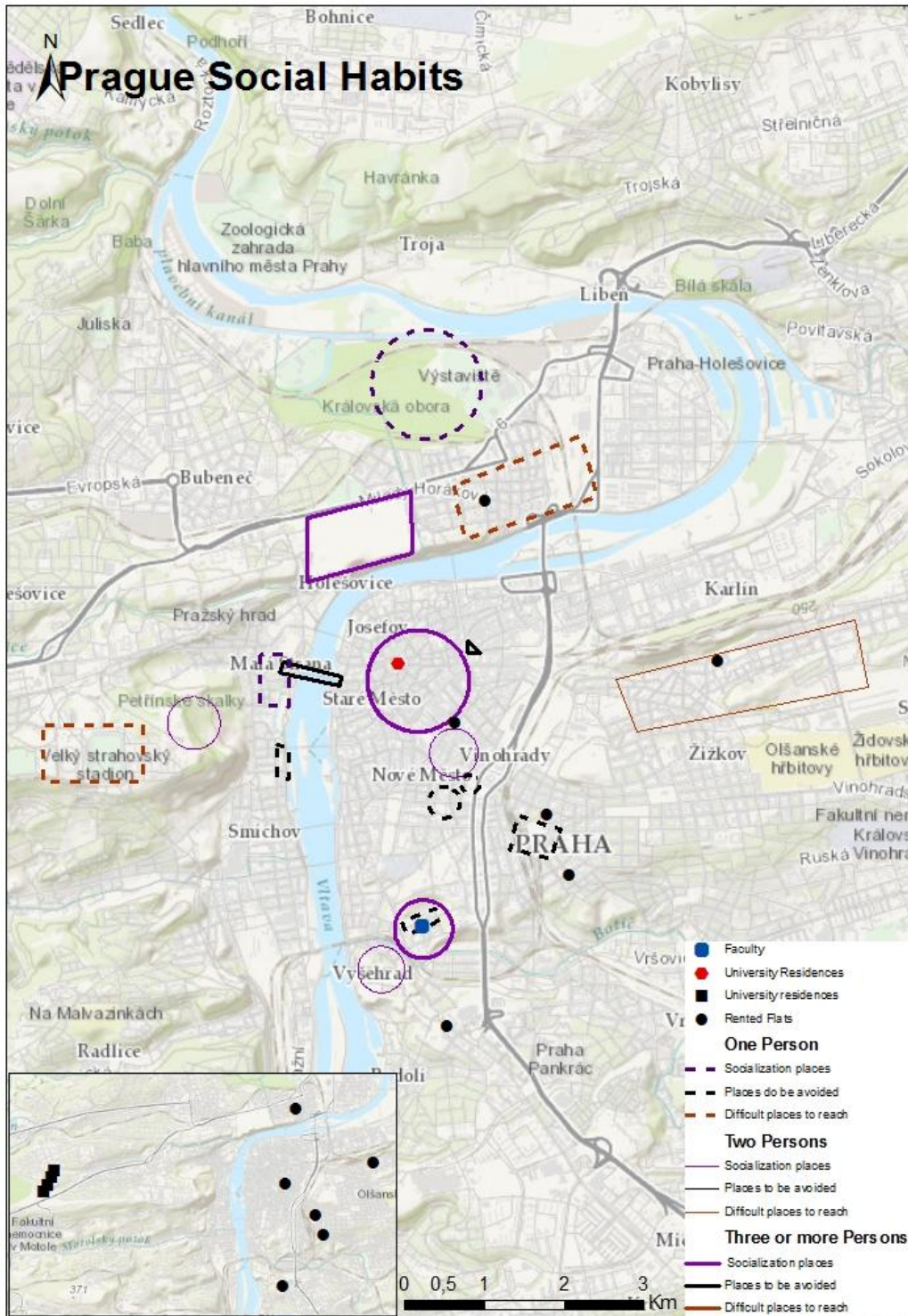Figure 17 Map of the social habits of the students in Braga

Figure 18 Map of the social habits of the students in Prague

Related to their social habits, the same methodology was implemented, here it is possible to be aware of which places they considered during their stay, socialization places, on other words, places where they could gather with friends or just have a good time like going for a walk or just eat something. It could also be clubs, bares or any other places. In

these maps we can also see places they considered to be avoided, those are places where they couldn´t feel so comfortable passing through or wouldn't be so safe for them but it is not only related to safety, it can also be related sometimes to crowded places or with too many tourists preferring to avoid them. To end I asked them to indicate in the map places they considered for any reason more difficult for them to reach, it could be for being far or because of insufficient means of transportation.

Starting with the city of Braga, in what concerns socialization places students considered five main places: the city centre - that can be considered normal, even if in Braga students don't go often there they like it and consider it to be a good place to go for a walk or just spend time with friends. The second place marked is located south of the city centre and it is a club, at least three students considered this to be a place where they could have fun and meet people. Between the city centre and the faculty it is possible to identify two more main socialization places: one pub where the students normally gather sometimes to end up the night and find people they know and the shopping mall (*Braga Parque*), this happens probably because here is where they normally go to shop, eat or just go to the cinema. The last main social area is the area near the university, this is where many restaurants are located with also many cafes and pubs, here is where they gather just for a coffee or to have lunch/dinner and to enjoy the nightlife. Other social places were listed as the university residences and also rented flat where two students were living considering them places like a social place where they spent a lot of their time and where they could gather with friends having dinners or just hanging out.

Considering now the avoiding places they only pointed out one in the city of Braga, this one is also where one of the university residence is located. This is an area where several social housing can be found and with some social problems. Students talked among themselves and spread the word that that place wouldn't be a good place to live and go to. Students are more aware of the things explaining why that area was pointed out and not others. The places they said to be hard to reach in Braga most probably are related with the transportation system and not because it could be far. Maybe it can be possible to indicate one situation that only one student pointed out this one being the football stadium, in the north of the map. The other ones already said probably were related to deficient urban transportation system, like the bus station located more north of the city centre, the train station located west and the old stadium located south of the city centre. Besides these places also others were pointed out by them as another shopping mall a bit more distant from the places where these students normally have their daily life.

Now regarding the city of Prague, students here brought up three main social areas, this being a bit similar to Braga. In Prague they marked the city centre as a place with good conditions to gather and have a good time. The other two main places were a known park of the city (*letna Park*) in the other side of the river when we consider the location of the city centre. This park is known to be a good place to do sports, to go for a walk, make barbecues, drink a cheap beer or just enjoy the view of the city. This is why the students had decided for this place, and now comparing to Braga where no student indicated a park to be a socialization place, showing how Braga can be deficient in what concerns green places inside the city. The other main place was the faculty, they considered this to be a place where they could meet their colleagues and have lunch together in the *menza* (canteen) or another place. A curious fact is that the students in Braga didn´t mark the university as a social place but only the area near to it. Like in Braga also other places were pointed out, but among these places none of them are clubs or pubs as in Braga. Two different parks were indicated, Vysehrad, located near the faculty, and Petrin hill, located also on the other side of the river like Letna Park. Besides these places one more was pointed out, this one located near the city centre, being an area where shops and restaurants are located. With this it is possible to see here students related more social places to outdoor activities and not so much to indoor like in Braga.

Regarding the avoiding places there is a different situation than in Braga. In Braga it is more connected to social problems, in Prague it is more related with crowded places in the city. As already explained Prague has many tourists over the year, and the students living there first don't like to act anymore like a tourist, they are proud to say they live there and sometimes when they are mistaken for a tourist they can be offended. The places marked in the map are mainly where you find a large number of tourists, being the Charles bridge the place more pointed out by them. Other places were referred like the biggest shopping mall of the city (*Palladium*) located near the city centre also related with the amount of people that gathers there.

Concerning the areas they considered difficult to reach it is possible to see that fewer students pointed out having problems to reach a specific location being different from the study case of Braga. In this case one student pointed two very specific areas in the city, probably he considered that those would be more distant from his place. Besides that, another area in the city was identified by two students claiming to be difficult to reach, probably because it's more distant from the city centre. In my opinion in these cases it is complicated to know the reasons for these decisions. However comparing this case with

Braga it is possible to see a difference. There are less places pointed out in Prague than in Braga. This even being a bigger place can show how the urban transportation system can be important, because even if the place they pretend to reach is more distant than usual, a good transportation system will mitigate that situation.

To end this chapter the students were asked before leaving to choose ten pictures that could represent their Erasmus experience. In this way I would able to see how their experience was in their perspective. I ended up with 100 pictures from each group making in total 200 pictures. Some of them will be added and analysed in what concerns their different perspectives and conclude if between the two cities the students have similarities regarding their perceptions. The pictures were organized concerning the topic that is possible to be found like for example, travels, food or friendship.

The city of Braga

<u>Travel</u>
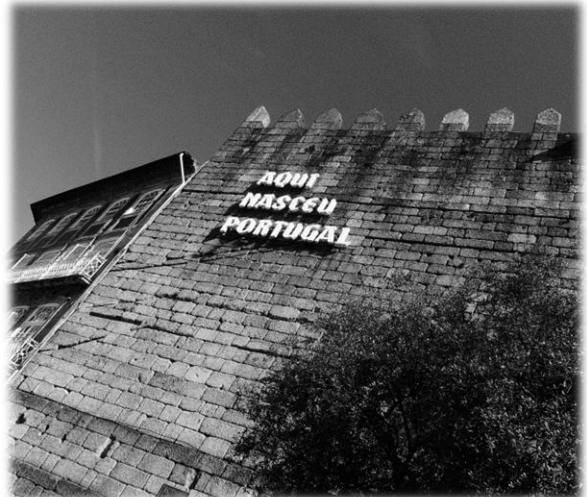
Friendship

Food

Pictures of the city (Braga)

Host Culture interaction
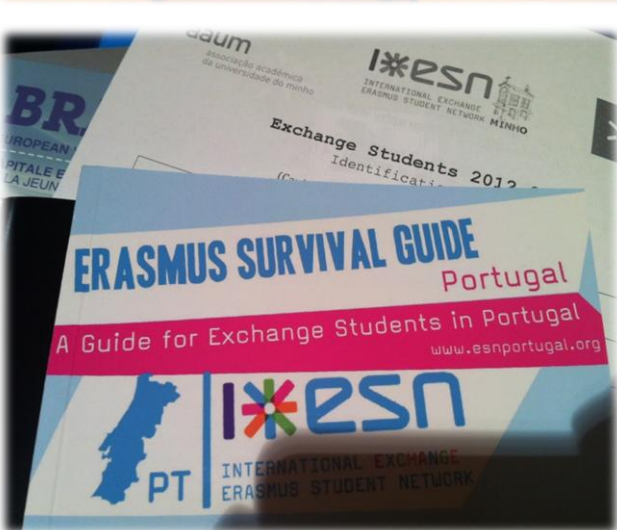
Classes

These were some pictures taken from students who made Erasmus in Braga. There is a pattern: almost all of them represent new friendships, interaction with the hosting culture like using the clothes of the university's student or taking pictures of the food. It is possible to see here three main topics represented: Friendship, Travels and Culture. All of them decided for pictures of places they went during their stay like pictures from: Santiago de Compostela, Porto, Guimarães, Serra da Estrela and even pictures at the beach or in the plane. This supports even more the idea of the strong connection between Erasmus and Travelling. Inside the group of Braga one of the students said didn't take any pictures because in his opinion the best memories would be inside him and he wouldn't forget it, not having the need to take pictures during his stay.

From the 100 pictures students have taken of their Erasmus experience, 72 of them were related to the topics here presented. Being this a good example how this pattern between the students is established.

As following there are the pictures chosen by the students that made Erasmus in Prague and we will see if the main topics are the same or if being in a different city influenced them creating a different perspective.
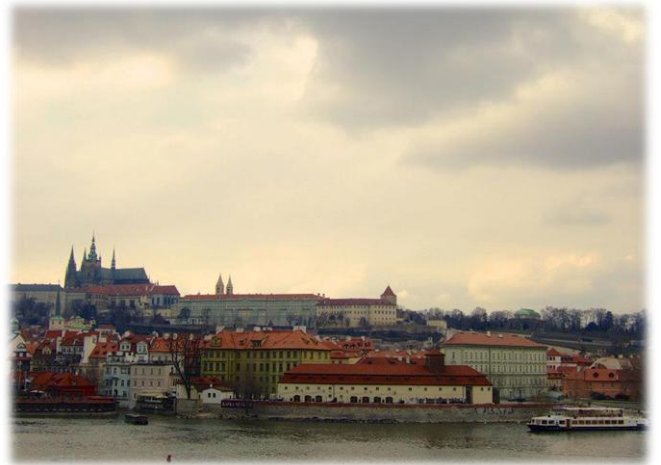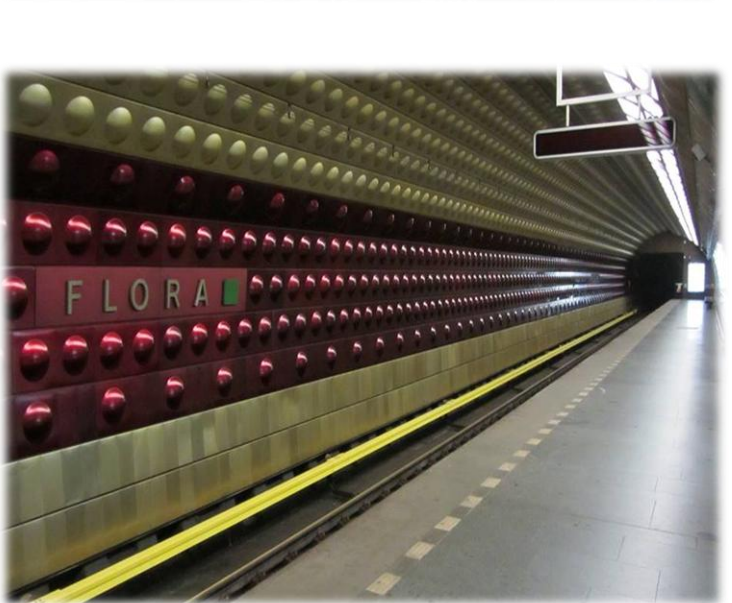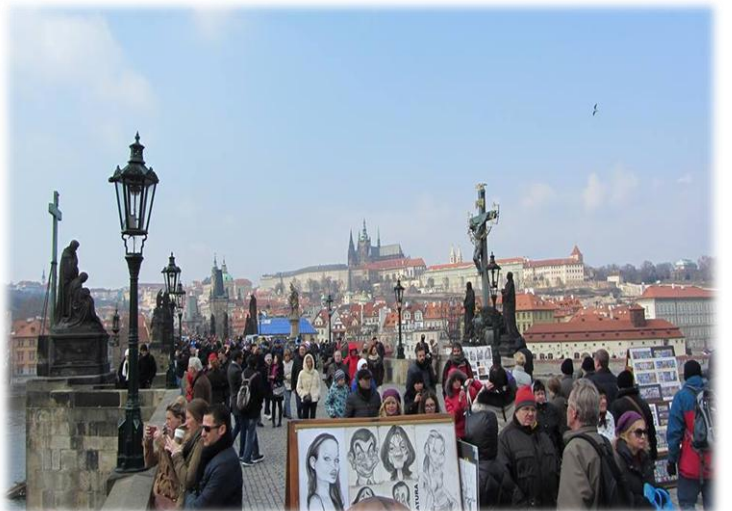
The city of Prague

<u>**Travel**</u>

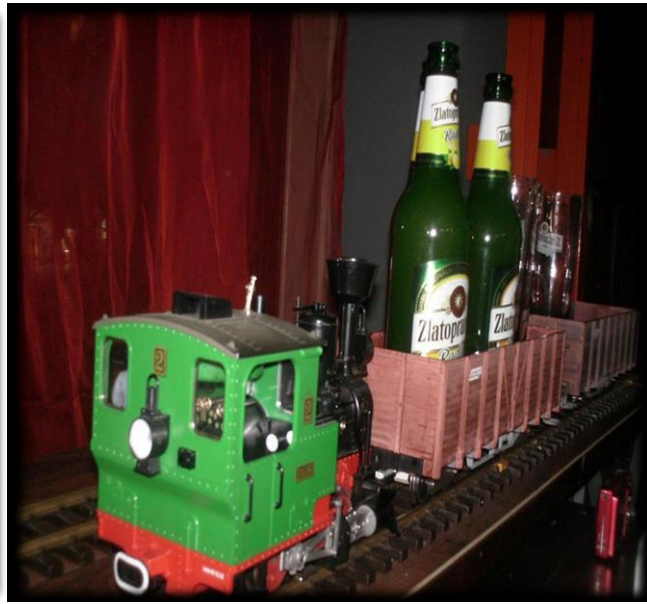# Friendship

Pictures of the city (Prague)

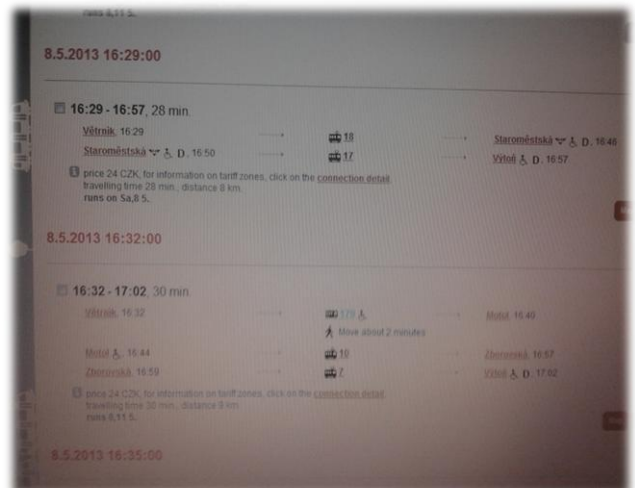# Outdoor activities

Food/Drinks

Parties

Faculty

Others

Regarding the pictures from Prague it is possible to see that this group of students chose more a less the same kind of pictures as the students of Braga. The strong connection between their experience and the new friendship network is present in all ten students, being considered normal them to choose pictures with others at parties, dinners or others places that makes them remember moments and feelings. It is also possible to see that these students chose more pictures from Prague than the students in Braga. The relation between them and the food in this case is less important by the less quantity of pictures taken comparing it to Braga. The pictures of trips are also present here, as shown in the pictures in the mountains and in other countries. Another difference that is possible to find are the pictures of some outdoor activities such as in parks or in the snow. In Braga there are some pictures in Parks but in Prague there are more, making the activities there something more usual than in Braga. The interaction with local culture through the pictures is also possible to see, by the food or some monuments that are present.

From the 100 pictures taken, 84 pictures were related to the main topics here presented, showing that they were all thinking about their experience in a very similar way, choosing a very similar kind of pictures ending to create this pattern very easy to observe.

In this way it is possible to refer that even these pictures being located in different cities, chosen by students that never had contact with each other, the main topics are the same: Friendship, Travels and Culture. Even if this involves different countries, different students all from different places it's possible to affirm that the Erasmus experience will be more concerned not about the place they are living but with whom they are doing it. It is not correct to claim that space will not influence their behaviour, like already was explained but the way students think and what they are searching for will end to be very similar either studying in Braga, Prague or in another place in Europe.

7. Conclusion

> "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."
>
> (Mark Twain, The Innocents Abroad/Roughing It)

In one quote it is almost possible to resume what this dissertation is about. On the one hand travelling according to Mark Twain can be fatal once we are going to face the unknown and we need to adapt ourselves to a reality we aren't used to, but on the other hand by "vegetating" at home, playing it safe, it isn't possible to grow and open our horizons.

This quote reflects the statements given by the students, who explained how their experience was and what changed with it. With the interviews and having myself been part of this world it was possible to see and experience the changes, which happened considerably fast.

Several things were discussed during this year, it started to be a discussion about space and the adaptation to it and ended up to be a mixture of experiences and feelings making this dissertation a lot more than just a study case in two cities.

After this year I conclude that the adaptation to a foreign place depends on some essential factors. The mentality of the student is something important to deal with the different culture and how it will affect their behaviour. Each one of them has a different background, some travelled more, others were living with their parents before doing Erasmus and others were from smaller cities and weren't used to live in a bigger city, factors which consequently make them afraid of leaving their country like Arwen or to live in a bigger city than his own hometown like Rui or even to live in a different culture and different religion like Bridget in Braga. Sometimes even the smaller things can influence their behaviour.

Another essential factor is how the host culture will integrate these students and the role of the university. A good welcome week is essential for a better adaptation. The buddy programme existing in both cities reveals having an important role in what

concerns a local student to welcome and help a foreign student. One local student has the task to contact the foreign student still being in his hometown and help them preparing their arrival and probably pick up the student on arrival, being the first contact in the country. The relation between the host culture will be important but in the end like during this dissertation these two worlds end up not be mixed, being very different from each other. In this case, the adaption happens with the Erasmus students having contact mainly with other international students.

The location where they are going to live is another important issue. It can influence their routines and habits, existing here a big difference between Braga and Prague, being Braga a city where the students try to live in the same area with a low interaction with the city centre, even if they consider this one a pretty place they end up living near the university campus. In Prague this is very different, here the students don't care so much about where they live only being influenced by the price of the houses. In this case the public transportation system is essential for this result, being this a service of excellence the location won't be that much important because it ends up to be possible to move around in a fast and cheap way.

The cultural shock is also a very important issue, like Oberg defined the different stages of cultural shock, this can be visible during their stay. Being this one separated in different phases each one of them is very different emotionally. These phases can influence in different ways the students, depending on their emotional strength. Here we have the example of the search of recognizable things in an unknown place. For example, in Braga, the first meal of Liana in MacDonald's or the search of other brands that could make them feel better knowing something that also exists in their hometown. The first weeks of the students are a very critical phase, the creation of the new ontological security, the need of creating a new friendship network, the need to discover the city and learn how it works, to understand how the transportation system works, where the good restaurants are or the cheapest places to buy things can lead to a stressful situation by not knowing which direction to go. Besides this, an Erasmus student ends up not being a normal foreigner because the stay is about 5 months in the country not being possible to be compared to a tourist who doesn't need to learn or deal with the situations above referred. This is why the first weeks are very important for them. Not forgetting that some students can be homesick and feel not so good during this moment. Nevertheless, students enjoy it and the feeling of facing a new challenge ends up to be a good sensation for them.

After the integration they start to seek to extrapolate and know more places, these ones inside the country that is hosting them or even going abroad. This is very common and in this way it is impossible to disconnect Erasmus and the will of travel. Students being abroad are already facing new challenges ending up wanting more and so they carry on searching new challenges, with some students overcoming themselves, doing things they never thought before. This is why students consider that Erasmus, besides being a period to study, is much more than that, it is a growth phase where they need to learn to face a different city and costumes they weren't used to.

Students are trying not to be chained like Bauman said "Some inhabit the globe; others are chained to place" (Bauman in Hubbard, Kitchin and Valentine, 2004, 37) preferring to think in an open view way, in a cosmopolitan way. Ending up going to the initial purpose of the Erasmus in 1987: The creation of an European identity approximating the countries by sharing cultures and experiences.

And when the time to return arrives we can use the W-Curve and see the readjustment period because "some have found their place in the new culture (...) and prefer the other environment and the careless tourist life, and would consequently not like to return home" (Hottola, 2004,460). Students will be obligated to re-adapt to their old life, but this feeling don't concerns all students, "those who have taken a diametrically oppositional stance towards the Other, or miss their family and friends, are euphoric and may experience little or no reverse culture confusion" (Hottola, 2004,460)

Besides the differences between the two cities, the experience students had was quite similar, having the same thoughts and wills independently of which city they were going. The adaptation may be different because of the space where they were living obligated them to do so but in the end although these students had never have met each other before, they shared the same opinions and the way they faced this experience was very similar.

To sum up, the city can influence in some different ways their adaptation or experience naturally because they are located in different countries with different cultures but at the end they share the same feelings. As stated by a lot of Erasmus students it is not about the place you are doing Erasmus but about the people they end up to know there. It is also very common that when the time to leave the country turns up to be very difficult for them, a lot of students end up returning later one or more times to remember their experiences and even considering these cities like home

because the feeling of being so comfortable exists and like some students said "home is where your heart is".

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