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Student mobility and European Identity: Erasmus Study as a civic experience?

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Abstract

From its inception, the Erasmus student exchange programme has been promoted by the European Commission as a "civic experience" that instils or enhances a European consciousness among participants. Recent scholarship on European identity has made similar claims about the civic significance of foreign study, yet the empirical basis for these claims remains a subject of debate. This article unpacks the logic of the civic view of Erasmus and submits the individual assumptions to empirical investigation. Based on a survey of more than 2000 respondents from 25 EU countries, this study has the advantage of being both larger and more multinational in composition than the major previous studies. The data largely support the logic of the civic view of Erasmus, demonstrating the intercultural nature of the sojourn abroad, providing compelling evidence that the Erasmus experience contributes to attitudinal changes about Europe among participants, and highlighting significant differences between the Erasmus students and those who do not study abroad when it comes to levels of support for the EU and extent of identifying as European.

Keywords

European identity, social communication theory, contact hypothesis, Erasmus

INTRODUCTION

Created in 1987, the Erasmus programme is the largest programme for student exchange in the world and the most popular framework for student mobility in the European Union (EU).[1] Its objective is to promote and facilitate mobility in higher education.[2] In addition to preparing European students to work in an increasingly transnational economy, from its inception Erasmus has also been promoted by the European Commission as a "civic" exercise aimed at "forg[ing] a European consciousness" (Papatsiba, 2006: 99). The idea is that intermixing students of different nationalities instils or enhances a sense of European identity among participants and serves as a path to creating truly European citizens (EU, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 1998; Prodi, 2002; Figel, 2006, 2007).

Apart from the Commission's claims about Erasmus's civic potential, there is a solid theoretical basis to expect students who spend part of their studies in another European country to develop a European identity and a shared sense of community. Social communication theory (Deutsch, 1953; Deutsch *et al*., 1967) as well as social psychology's contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Stephen, 1985; Hewstone and Brown, 1986) and common in-group identity model (Gaertner *et al.*, 1993; Gaertner and Dovidio, 2012) all highlight the significance of transnational and intergroup contact as mechanisms for identity-formation and reducing intergroup bias.

Influenced by these theories, in recent years a number of authors have depicted foreign study sojourns in general, and Erasmus participation in particular, as a means of enhancing European identity and producing self-identifying European citizens with a stake in European integration (Fligstein, 2008; Green, 2007; Bruter, 2005). While the causal mechanisms of this transformative view of Erasmus participation are not always made explicit, the view rests on a number of fairly consistent, theoretically-derived assumptions. Distilled, the logic is that Erasmus students use their sojourn abroad to engage in meaningful contact with other Europeans, they become more aware of and interested in Europe and other Europeans as a result, and ultimately they self-identify as European. Following Papatsiba (2005), who uses of the term "civic" to describe precisely this rationale for the Erasmus program, I refer to this as the *civic view* of Erasmus.

There have been several empirical studies indicating that Erasmus participants do tend to identify as European (King and Ruiz-Galices, 2003; Sigalas, 2010a; Van Mol, 2011). However, a debate has recently emerged as to whether foreign study *causes* European identity (King and Ruiz-Galices, 2003; Van Mol, 2011) or whether students who are *already* European identifiers and supporters are more likely to choose to participate in Erasmus in the first place (Sigalas 2010a, 2010b; Van Mol, 2011; Wilson, 2011).[3]

Rather than attempting to establish the direction of causality between Erasmus study and European identity, this article instead provides an empirical analysis of the theoretically-derived assumptions underlying the civic view of Erasmus study. By design, this study *asks whether* (rather than *assumes that*) Erasmus students do, in fact, engage in meaningful contact with other Europeans during their sojourn abroad; whether they indeed become more interested in Europe and other Europeans as a result of their sojourn; and whether, compared with students who do not spend a part of their university studies abroad, they are more likely to self-identify as European and hold favourable attitudes toward the EU and European integration. The findings are based on survey responses from more than 2000 university students from 25 EU countries, making this study both larger and more multinational in composition than the major previous studies (Wilson, 2011; Sigalas, 2010a, 2010b; King and Ruiz-Galices, 2003).[4] Analysis of the data demonstrates the extensive transnational interaction that occurs during the sojourn abroad, provides compelling evidence that the Erasmus experience contributes to attitudinal changes about Europe among participants, and illuminates significant differences between the Erasmus and sedentary students when it comes to levels of support for the EU and extent of identifying as European. By synthesizing existing studies and contributing new data and analysis of both the experience of Erasmus students while abroad as well as students' attitudes about the EU and sense of their own European identity, the article contributes to a growing scholarly literature about the significance of educational exchange in promoting European attachment and identity.

The article proceeds in four sections. Part one outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the civic view of Erasmus and summarises what we know about the programme from previous studies. It also further explains the rationale for this new study and describes the research design. Part two evaluates, in turn, the assumptions on which the civic view of Erasmus is based. It examines the evidence that the Erasmus sojourn is, in fact, an exercise in significant cross-border interaction; that Erasmus participation indeed impacts students' interest in and Europe and other Europeans; and that Erasmus students do, in fact, feel more "European" than do non-mobile students. The section also considers foreign language ability as an additional aspect of the Erasmus experience that may impact identity. Part three disaggregates the data by nationality to make some cross-national comparisons. Part four discusses some methodological considerations and points to some promising avenues for future research.

ERASMUS AS A CIVIC EXPERIENCE?

It is widely accepted that – to endure – a well-functioning political system must be underpinned by "diffuse support" from the underlying population (Easton, 1965). The term is variously refers to a general sense of *loyalty*, *attachment*, *goodwill*, *we-feeling*, and *trust* in the political community (*see* e.g. Miller, 1971). Back in 1970, Lindberg and Scheingold, drawing on Easton, could plausibly assert that that European public opinion was characterised by a "permissive consensus" in favour of the European project. But events in recent years have made it increasingly difficult to sustain the notion that there exists a tacit reservoir of support for the integration project. Indeed, some scholars now talk of a "constraining dissensus" emerging in EU politics (Down and Wilson, 2008; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). As a result, renewed attention has been focused on the importance of enhancing what one edited volume calls "civic resources" in the EU – such

as trust, a shared identity, and solidarity – in order to overcome the political and economic crises the EU has faced in recent years (Karolewski and Kaina, 2012).

Following Karolewski and Kaina's (2012) and Papatsiba's (2005) use of the term "civic", the concept of a "civic experience" here denotes an experience that fosters a sense of shared European identity or promotes a sense of European consciousness. It is clear from Commission documents and speeches that Erasmus has long been viewed as a civic experience (EU, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 1998; Prodi, 2002; Figel, 2006, 2007) and not just as pre-professional training, even though the economic rationale for Erasmus has been advanced most prominently.[5]

This civic rationale for student mobility rests on a belief that, by bringing together students of different nationalities, the Erasmus program would promote a sense of European identity and create a constituency for European integration among future elite.[6] According to a 1996 Commission green paper, student mobility would bring with it "a growing European consciousness instilled through greater awareness of others as a result of exposure to new cultures and societies" (cited in Papatsiba, 2006: 101). More recently, Ján Figel, then-Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture, and Youth, praised Erasmus for its role in creating "truly European citizens" who act as "ambassadors of European values" (Figel, 2007). Indeed, the program's civic objective was encapsulated in the very motto used to promote it: "bringing students to Europe, bringing Europe to all students."

By the logic of this civic rationale, Erasmus is intended (and expected) to be a *transformative* experience for its participants. Indeed, the civic success of the programme could be said to rest on the extent to which Erasmus alumni were characterized by certain attributes: an awareness of and interest in other European countries and people (and perhaps in the EU itself); an affective attachment to some notion of "Europe"; and a tendency to identify as a European.

To date, the most thorough and largest (n>1000) empirical examinations of the Erasmus experience have been those assessing how well the program meets its material objectives (Maiworm, Steube, and Teichler, 1991; Teichler and Maiworm, 1994; Maiworm and Teichler, 1996; Jahr and Teichler, 2002; Bracht, Engle, Janson *et al.*, 2006). Thus, they focus on students' academic experience abroad and their transition from university into employment. These survey projects and the secondary literature that emerged from them describe a host of details about the academic aspects of Erasmus study. They also provide insights into how Erasmus study relates to future employment and subsequent mobility.[7] Large studies have also explored the barriers to student mobility, with the aim of making Erasmus more inclusive and accessible to students from various socio-economic backgrounds (Vossensteyn *et al*., 2010).

In contrast to the wealth of scholarship on the academic and economic aspects and impacts of Erasmus study, there have been relatively few studies investigating the civic aspects of the program, namely whether – or how much – Erasmus study affects participants' European attachment and identity. Even absent conclusive empirical evidence, several works on European identity have nevertheless argued – on theoretical more than empirical grounds – that Erasmus participation is a means of enhancing European identity and support for the EU. Fligstein writes that the international contact that Erasmus students experience abroad "ought to make them more European" (2008: 181). Green describes Erasmus (and other EU educational exchange programs) as "[a] significant EU project meant to enhance the sense of Europeaness felt by its citizens" (2007: 47). Bruter describes the objective underlying the development of Erasmus and other exchange programs: "to propose a new 'Social Contract' to European citizens, and to develop a new mass European identity rather than let citizens be mere 'consumers' of the economic benefits associated with Europe" (2005: 73-74).

Empirical work (most of which has been published subsequent to these works) provides only mixed support for these claims, however (King and Ruiz-Galices, 2003; Sigalas, 2010a, 2010b; Van Mol, 2011; Wilson, 2011). To understand the debate about Erasmus as a transformative experience, and what this article contributes to that debate, it is necessary to look at both the theoretical basis for such claims and to examine the existing empirical evidence.

Mechanisms of European identity-formation: Theory and evidence

Underlying any civic claims about Erasmus's role in European identity-formation is the constructivist view that collective identities in general, and political identities in particular, are not fixed but malleable. This view is rooted in scholarship on national identity formation that depicts these identities as modern creations (Mosse, 1975; Weber, 1976; Colley, 1994; Deutsch, 1953; Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1992; Hobsawm and Ranger, 1992). In contrast to essentialist notions of national identity (Smith, 2000), in the constructivist logic of identity formation there is nothing particularly sacrosanct or exclusive about national identities. Instead, they are seen as the historical by-product of structural changes in modern societies (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1991) or even conscious manipulation of political symbols by elites (Hobsbawm, 1992; Hobsawm and Ranger, 1992). Under analogous circumstances, there is nothing to prevent the emergence of a European identity.

From this point of departure, with the increasing institutionalisation of the EU (Stone Sweet *et al*., 1998), the subject of European identity has become an important area of EU scholarship. Recent works have examined the role of the Commission in fostering European identity (Shore, 2000) and the nature and implications of European identification (Green, 2008; Fligstein, 2010). In a more normative sense, others have argued the *need* for European identity, making the case, for example, that it is the prerequisite for more extensive, democratic political integration (Laffan, 1996: 95-99; Decker, 2002). The question then becomes: if political identities are constructed, how is (or can) *European* identity be constructed? Deutsch's theory of social communication and social psychology's contact hypothesis and common in-group identity model provide insights into this process of community-building and group identity.

Writing in the 1950s and 1960s, Deutsch and other 'transactionalists' emphasised the importance of 'social communication' as a means of identity-formation, both within the nation-state (Deutsch, 1953) and within transnational 'security communities' (Deutsch *et. al.*, 1967). By 'social communication' or 'transactions', Deutsch and his colleagues referred to the development of sustained and wide-ranging face-to-face interactions across different groups. What is important for the emergence of a shared identity is the creation of permanent networks that bring ordinary people together in a multitude of ways. Through increased interaction – social communication – trust and ultimately a sense of community were built.

Theories from social psychology also emphasise the potentially transformative significance of social interactions. The contact hypothesis suggests that, under certain conditions, direct personal contact between 'in-group' and 'out-group' members can have a transformative effect on the attitudes of group members toward members of the other group (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Stephen, 1985; Hewstone and Brown, 1986).[8] The common in-group identity model goes even further, suggesting that interaction between groups can not only reduce intergroup bias, but actually cause group members to recategorise themselves as a single group ("we") rather than categorising themselves as two separate groups ("us" and "them") (Gaertner *et al*., 1993: 3).

To the extent that Erasmus participation indeed promotes cross-border interaction and meaningful relationships across national groups, there are, thus, good theoretical

reasons to believe that it may be linked with attitudinal and identity change. Indeed, it is precisely this logic that underlies scholarly claims about the civic effect of Erasmus. Those who make the broadest claims about the transformative aspect of Erasmus highlight intercultural contact in a way that echoes both social communication theory and the contact hypothesis. For example, on the subject of Erasmus participation, Green writes that, "[l]eaving the bounds of one's local homelands, perhaps for the first extended stay or first time on one's own, meeting new friends, and experiencing other cultures—these are very likely to expand the sense of the individual's 'home space' from the national boundaries to the continental" (Green, 2007: 48). Likewise, for Fligstein, what is important about Erasmus is the "opportunity to interact" with other European students: when students go abroad and form friendships with other Europeans, they recognise the commonalities they share, boundaries between in-group and out-group are blurred, and ultimately they "[see] themselves more as Europeans and less as having merely national identity" (Fligstein, 2008: 139).

But while this interpretation of Erasmus participation as a civic experience has significant theoretical grounding, it has been only weakly verified by empirical evidence. Most of the empirical studies have been surveys exploring the relationship between Erasmus participation and European identity or attachment to the EU,[9] although the findings are not in agreement. Some studies find a correlation between Erasmus study and European identity while others dispute this claim.

Russell King and Enric Ruiz-Gelices (2003) surveyed 475 students from British universities and found that students who spent a year studying in continental Europe were more pro-European and held a more European identity than students who did not study abroad. More recently, Christof Van Mol (2011) surveyed 1054 mobile students, 798 "future mobile students" (who definitely want to study abroad), 786 "potential mobile studies" (who may want to study abroad), and 248 non-mobile students from across Europe. He found that mobile students were most attached to Europe, followed by future mobile students, then potential mobile students, and lastly by non-mobile students, who were least attached of all. When asked if they considered themselves citizens of Europe or considered themselves European, the same pattern emerged across the various groups. Both the King and Ruiz-Gelices and Van Mol studies therefore concluded that a foreign study sojourn was positively correlated with civic outcomes such as identifying with Europe, European attachment, or an increased sense of "belonging to a European cultural space" (King and Ruiz-Galices, 2003).

However, two recent studies have found just the opposite. Emmanuel Sigalas surveyed 161 British students who studied in continental Europe, 241 continental Europeans who studied in Britain, and 60 British students who did not study abroad, to investigate whether studying abroad impacted students' European identity (2010a) or level of support for the EU (2010b). In both cases, he found the foreign study experience had little impact on the dependent variable in question. Wilson (2011) surveyed 99 Erasmus students (mostly British students studying in France and French students studying in the UK) and 145 control students (mostly British students studying in the UK) to investigate whether foreign study made students more pro-European. Like Sigalas, his conclusion was that it did not.[10]

Without wishing to minimise the importance of these previous studies, it is clear that the question of whether Erasmus study is transformative, in a civic sense, is far from settled. For one thing, existing empirical studies differ significantly in their conclusions: some support the transformative view of Erasmus study (King and Ruiz-Galices, 2003; Van Mol, 2011), while other studies do not (Sigalas, 2010a; 2010b; Wilson, 2011). Apart from that, it is premature to draw conclusions about the transformative nature of Erasmus study from the existing literature for several reasons. First, the large-*n* studies are largely silent on precisely the variables that theory tells us are important for identity change – those related to the (supposedly) intercultural nature of the Erasmus experience itself. Additionally, many of the large-*n* studies do not compare Erasmus

students with students who did not study abroad, so it is not always possible to tell whether, or to what extent, Erasmus students are different from other university students.

The studies that *do* focus on the civic aspects of Erasmus are also limited in several important ways. First, most draw conclusions about the effect (or lack of effect) of Erasmus study on identity or attitudes on the basis of relatively small sample sizes. For example, Sigalas generalises about the attitudes of "non-Erasmus students" on the basis of survey responses from 60 from British students, at a single university, who did not study abroad. Wilson's findings about Erasmus students' support for the EU is based on responses from 99 Erasmus students. More importantly, most of the studies are limited in national scope, based primarily on surveys of British students or students studying in the UK. This is problematic, not only because of the lack of representativeness of the sample, but more importantly because British attitudes towards Europe are often well outside the norm (Spiering, 2004; Risse, 2002: 204-206).

Research design

This study attempts to remedy some of the deficiencies of the current literature by identifying the core, theoretically-derived assumptions about Erasmus study – e.g. that Erasmus students engage in meaningful contact with other Europeans, become more interested in Europe and other Europeans as a result, and self-identify as European – and investigating whether empirical evidence supports these claims. The data set analysed here is both large and multinational (2011 students representing 25 EU nationalities), thus avoiding some of the problems associated with works based on small sample sizes or primarily on British students. The subjects fall into two groups: 1041 Erasmus students and 970 university students who studied only in their home country. For brevity, the latter group is referred to as *non-mobile* students. The study focuses on the social aspects of the Erasmus experience that are overlooked by existing large-*n* studies, examining how much cross-cultural interaction occurs during the sojourn abroad, whether the sojourn makes Erasmus students more interested in Europe and Europeans, and the extent to which Erasmus students support and feel attached to the EU and identify as Europeans.

The survey was conducted online during the academic year 2010-11. Five universities were initially targeted for the survey, in Toulouse (France), Bremen (Germany), Bologna (Italy), Malaga (Spain), and Norwich (UK). The countries represent the largest sending and receiving countries for Erasmus students (EU, 2010),[11] and the specific universities were chosen because they have cooperative arrangements with the author's home institution, which – it was hoped – would encourage support from university administrators and faculty.[12] The survey was offered in five languages – English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish – chosen to make the survey accessible to as many students as possible. Not only are these the languages used in the countries targeted for the survey, but speakers of these five languages comprise a plurality of students in tertiary education within the EU and they are the most commonly-learned foreign languages in Europe (Eurostat, 2010: 263).

The target group was current university students, aged 18 or older, from EU member states. Between November 2010 and June 2011, 2740 participants meeting these criteria completed the survey. By design, the survey was brief; as an earlier pilot survey indicated an extremely high proportion of incomplete surveys among those whose completion time exceeded ten minutes. The average completion time of this survey was just over seven minutes, with 84 per cent of the surveys completed in 3-15 minutes.

To avoid analytical complications, respondents were excluded from the dataset if their foreign study experience took place outside of the EU or outside of the Erasmus

framework.[13] The non-mobile group was limited to EU nationals who had never studied outside their home country. After these exclusions, the remaining dataset of 2011 respondents consists of 1041 Erasmus students and 970 non-mobile students. Four nationalities (German, Italian, French, and Spanish) are represented by more than 80 respondents each, and a total of 25 EU nationalities are represented in the dataset. The gender distribution of the sample is 46 per cent male and 52 per cent female (the remainder did not indicate a gender) and the mean respondent age is 22.8 years.

UNPACKING AND EVALUATING THE LOGIC OF CIVIC ARGUMENT

As outlined in the introduction, the purpose of this article is to provide an empirical evaluation of the core assumptions made in the literature of Erasmus study as a civic experience: namely that Erasmus students engage in meaningful contact with other Europeans, become more interested in Europe and other Europeans as a result, and self-identify as European. Each assumption will be explored in detail in this section.

Cross-cultural interaction in the Erasmus sojourn

As discussed in part one, social communication theory and the contact hypothesis provide good theoretical grounds to expect that social interaction among students may lead to attitudinal change. But do we actually find that Erasmus students engage in significant cross-cultural interaction during their sojourn, as the civic view of the programme assumes?

The question of *with whom* mobile students are likely to interact is, in fact, the subject of debate. Neil Fligstein writes that Erasmus "[s]tudents who go abroad often get a good experience of the local culture of the host country and have the opportunity to mingle with young people from these other societies. Their experiences ought to make them more European[…]" (Fligstein, 2008: 181) However, Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune (2002) found that mobile students she interviewed – about one-third of whom were Erasmus students – only rarely interacted extensively with students from their host country. Instead, they often associated primarily with their co-nationals, or their "ethnic group" to use her term. "Relying on the ethnic group," she writes, "is first and foremost a method for the recreation of a primary relation around the native culture, a kind of 'home away from home'" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 184). However, the cultural isolation of this formation ultimately led many of the students in her study to reach out to other groups as well. Moving beyond the "ethnic group", most students found it far easier to connect with an "international group" of other visiting students than to break into the "native group" of host-country students.

In the Erasmus group surveyed for this study, the vast majority reported socialising in an "international group", with a small minority reporting that they socialised primarily within their own "ethnic group" and an even smaller minority reporting that they socialised primarily with the "native group" of host-country students.

Table 1: Socialisation by nationality whilst abroad (%)

Whilst abroad did you socialize primarily with…	
co-nationals	13
host country nationals	10
other nationalities	78

Source: Author's data.

It is theoretically possible that the 78 per cent of Erasmus students reporting that they socialised primarily with other nationalities while abroad also socialise with other nationalities even in their home country. If this were true, it would undercut the assumption that an Erasmus exchange provides a *unique* opportunity to interact extensively with other Europeans. This does not, however, appear to be the case. Indeed, only 10 per cent of Erasmus students reported that they socialised with other nationalities as much (or more) prior to studying abroad. It therefore seems safe to conclude that an Erasmus sojourn constitutes a unique source of intercultural contact for the vast majority of participants.

What more can we learn about the nature of that intercultural contact from the survey data? It is possible, by looking at students' reported language use while abroad, to establish whether students socialised primarily with speakers of their same native tongue (for example, Irish students with British students, Austrians with Germans, etc.). Based on the fact that only 15 per cent reported speaking primarily their native language, this is clearly unlikely. In fact, use of at least one foreign language on a regular basis was the norm for Erasmus students during their sojourn. Somewhat surprisingly, only 40 per cent reported speaking primarily the host country language outside the classroom. This means that 45 per cent of Erasmus students socialised in neither their host country language nor their native language, but in some other language. More than three-quarters of those students reported that they socialised in two third-country languages (neither their native tongue nor the host country language) and nearly a quarter reported socialising in three or more third-country languages.

Scholars investigating the contact hypothesis in the context of a study abroad experience have tended to focus on visiting students' degree of integration into the host society (Stangor, Jonas, Stroebe, and Hewstone, 1996: 674). Interestingly, this sort of integrative experience was extremely rare for the Erasmus students surveyed. In fact, only 7 per cent of Erasmus students reported both socialising primarily with host country nationals *and* speaking primarily the host country language. Nevertheless, the data clearly indicate that the Erasmus sojourn was indeed an intercultural experience, as is often assumed. Indeed, taken together, the data paint a picture of the Erasmus experience as one where students socialise in a multi-national, often multi-lingual group, and only very rarely cluster in insular national groups.

Given the non-integrative nature of the Erasmus sojourn, the contact hypothesis would not predict significant attitudinal change between native and visiting students. However, the transnational interaction that appears to characterise the Erasmus sojourn may indeed nevertheless be conducive to the formation of a broader European identity, as the civic view of Erasmus suggests.

Foreign study and attitudinal changes about Europe

At the heart of the transformative view of the Erasmus program is the belief that a sojourn studying abroad changes students' attitudes about Europe. But the existing empirical evidence is mixed. To assess attitudinal change, this survey asked students to indicate whether, and to what extent, studying abroad made them feel more European and made them more interested in Europe, other Europeans, and the EU.

As can been seen in Table 2, virtually all Erasmus students reported that studying abroad made them more interested in other European countries (91 per cent) and other European people and cultures (93 per cent), and a solid majority of them became more interested in the EU (66 per cent) and felt more European (73 per cent) as a result of studying abroad.

Table 2: Attitudinal change after studying abroad (%)

As a result of studying abroad…	
Are you more interested in the EU?	
To a great extent	23
to some extent	43
slightly	24
not at all	10
Are you more interested in other European countries?	
To a great extent	57
to some extent	34
slightly	7
not at all	2
Are you more interested in other European people and cultures?	
To a great extent	60
to some extent	33
slightly	6
not at all	1
Do you feel more European?	
To a great extent	24
to some extent	49
slightly	21
not at all	6

Source: Author's data.

Of the students reporting a greater interest in Europe, other Europeans, and the EU, the majority were not motivated to study abroad by these particular interests. Indeed, when asked about their reasons for studying abroad, 42 per cent of Erasmus students reported being motivated by a desire to learn about another country or culture, and a mere 2 per cent were motivated by some sort of European impulse (to experience Europe, learn more about the EU, feel more European, etc.). Thus, it seems safe to conclude that studying abroad induced additional interest in Europe *even among students who were not consciously predisposed to it*.

The finding that Erasmus study increases participants' interests in these various aspects of Europe supports the assumption that Erasmus participation leads to attitudinal change. And even the relatively lower proportion of students whose interest in the EU increased to "some extent" or more can be viewed as corroboration for the Commission's claims that Erasmus creates a constituency for European integration, given the extremely low proportion of students (less than 2 per cent) initially motivated to study abroad by an interest in the EU. Finally, the fact that 73 per cent of students reported that studying abroad made them feel more European must be taken as an indication of significant attitudinal change. While a longitudinal study that measured students' attitudes prior to and again after foreign study would more conclusively establish the *extent* of attitude change, these findings suggest that Erasmus study is indeed a transformative experience.

Are Erasmus students more 'European' than non-mobile students?

It is clear from the data presented above that – at least according to their own self-assessment – Erasmus study led to a significant degree of attitudinal change among the participants of this study, making students more interested in various aspects of Europe and leading them to feel more European. This section looks more closely at students' feelings and attitudes toward Europe and the EU. Specifically, it evaluates the assumption that Erasmus students are more likely than non-mobile students to support European integration, feel attached to the EU, and identify as European.

The data presented in this section indicate that Erasmus students overwhelmingly feel supportive of the EU and identify as European according to several measures, and they do so to a greater extent than non-mobile students. For each variable analysed below, a chi-squared (χ^2) test was used to determine the probability that variation in the two groups' responses was the result of chance. This p-value is reported along with the major findings in each case. Typical survey analyses report the findings as statistically significant when $p<0.01$ or $p<0.05$. As we shall see below, however, almost all tests in the present analysis resulted in p-values much smaller than this (often less than 0.0001), leading to very high confidence that the numerical disparities represent genuine differences in the populations of Erasmus and non-mobile students.

The first comparison is of the pro-European attitudes of the two groups of students. These attitudes were measured in two ways. First, students were asked to report their *favourability* toward the EU and toward the idea of European integration using a 5-point Leikert scale, where 1 means "very unfavourable" and 5 means "very favourable." Second, students were asked to indicate their level of *attachment* to the European Union, to their country, and to their village, town or city – a formulation used in several Eurobarometer (EB) surveys (Eurobarometer, 2007a: section 2.2 and p. 26 of the technical specifications; Eurobarometer, 2007b: section 2.2; Eurobarometer, 2008a: section 1.1).

For both questions, there was a statistically significant difference in the responses of the two groups ($p<0.0001$), with the Erasmus students reporting higher levels of both favourability and attachment to the EU. As Table 3 indicates, 72 per cent of the Erasmus group reported being favourable to the idea of European integration (a score of 4 or 5), compared with 60 per cent of the non-mobile students; 73 per cent of Erasmus students reported being favourable to the EU, compared with 57 per cent of non-mobile students.

Table 3: Favourability toward the European Integration and the EU (%)

	ERASMUS	NON-MOBILE
Favourability toward European Integration		
unfavourable (1-2)	8	14
neutral (3)	21	27
favourable (4-5)	72	60
mean response	3.99	3.64
Favourability toward the EU		
unfavourable (1-2)	8	13
neutral (3)	19	31
favourable (4-5)	73	57
mean response	3.99	3.58

Source: Author's data.

In the same vein, Table 4 shows that 71 per cent of Erasmus students reported feeling "very" or "fairly" attached to the EU, compared with 56 per cent of non-mobile students. While Erasmus students reported attachment levels significantly higher than the general European population, as measured by Eurobarometer surveys 65 (50 per cent reported feeling "very" or "fairly" attached), 67 (53 per cent attached), and 68 (49 per cent attached), the non-mobile students were only slightly more attached than the Eurobarometer respondents.

Table 4: Attachment to the EU (%)

	ERASMUS	NON-MOBILE
very attached	18	12
fairly attached	53	44
not very attached	26	35
not at all attached	4	9

Source: Author's data.

While a majority of students – both mobile and non-mobile – reported feeling favourable to European integration, there is a marked, and statistically significant, difference between the Erasmus group and the non-mobile group. The Erasmus students are clearly more favourable and attached to the EU, a finding that may be explained by material interests. After all, the European integration process has normalised, facilitated, and even subsidised intra-European study. The adoption of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) clarifies credit-transfer procedures, making it easier for students to apply work completed during foreign study sojourns toward their home-university degrees. The single market principle of non-discrimination on the basis of nationality has been successfully applied to students, with the result that universities cannot charge additional fees to students from other EU member states. Furthermore, Erasmus students receive grants to defray the additional costs of studying abroad. In short, because of the EU, students find it much easier to experience foreign study today than in the past. Erasmus students, in particular, benefit directly as a result.

Next we turn to the question of European identity. Eurobarometer data over time demonstrates a majority of Europeans identify, to some extent, as Europeans. It has also been shown that younger and better educated people are more likely than older and less educated people to identify as European (Dogan, 1993, 1994; Howe 1995; Hix, 1999: 147; Citrin and Side, 2004; Green, 2007; Fligstein, 2008; Eurobarometer, 2008: 34). There is reason to expect, therefore, that a greater proportion of respondents in the sample – composed entirely of university students aged 35 or younger – would report feeling attached or identifying as European than respondents from the general population, as measured by the Eurobarometer (EB) survey. As Table 5 shows, this was indeed the case.

But the critical question, of course, is whether Erasmus students identify as European more readily than their non-mobile counterparts, as Commissioners (Prodi, 2006; Figel, 2006, 2007) and scholars (Fligstein, 2008; Green, 2007; Papatsiba, 2006; Bruter, 2005) alike have asserted. In short, is Erasmus linked with students' sense of "belonging to Europe" (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003: 238)?

To measure students' European identity, the survey included two identity-related questions, both borrowed from the Eurobarometer survey. The first asked whether respondents often, sometimes, or never think of themselves as not only their nationality, but *also* as European. The second asked whether, in the near future, respondents

expected to see themselves as their nationality only; their nationality first, then European; equally their nationality and European; European first, then their nationality; or European only.

Comparing the two groups of students reveals modest differences in the responses of Erasmus and non-mobile students to the identity questions (*see* Table 5). By both measures, the Erasmus group reported a greater level of European identification. In terms of identification frequency, 44 per cent of the Erasmus students reported "often" thinking of themselves as European, compared with 33 per cent of the non-mobile group. In terms of extent of identification, nearly half of the Erasmus students reported that, in the future, they see themselves as European at least as much as they see themselves in terms of their nationality, compared with about one-third of the non-mobile students. While the magnitudes of these differences are modest, their statistical significance is nevertheless very high, with $p<0.0001$ for both questions.

Table 5: European identification (%)

	ERASMUS	NON-MOBILE	EB62	EB64	EB66
Think of yourself as not only your nationality, but also as European?					
often	44	33	--	17	16
sometimes	49	53	--	38	38
never	8	14	--	42	43
In near future, do you see yourself as…					
only nationality?	4	7	37	--	--
nationality then European?	51	58	48	--	--
equally nationality and European?	32	26	7	--	--
European then nationality?	12	6	4	--	--
only European?	2	3	3	--	--

Source: Author's data, Eurobarometers 62, 64, 66.

The assumptions of the civic view – that Erasmus students would be more favourable and attached to the EU and would more likely identify as European than non-mobile students – is unequivocally borne out by the survey data. However, we must interpret these findings with care and, specifically, refrain from making causal inferences where they cannot be supported. While it is possible that Erasmus students possess these "European" attributes *as a result of their Erasmus participation*, it seems equally plausible that students who identify as European are precisely the ones who choose to study abroad (Sigalas, 2010a). It is also conceivable that there is a pro-European identity bias inherent in the Erasmus selection process. That is, in cases where there are more students interested in foreign study than there are Erasmus stipends to support them, students who convey a more European outlook may prove more successful as applicants.[14]

Multilingualism as a facilitator for European identity

Related to the question of whether Erasmus students identify more readily as European in the present is the question of whether they are more likely identifiers in the future. This was not a main area of inquiry in the survey, but analysis of the language skills reported by Erasmus and non-mobile students provide an oblique insight into the question.

Indeed, those who have taken an interest in European identity sooner or later stumble against the problem of identity formation in a multilingual polity. The use of so many languages in Europe is one often-cited barrier to the development of a European identity (Kraus, 2008; Bakke, 1995: 10-11). Put crudely, how can individuals develop a sense of collective identity if they cannot communicate with one another? Certainly social communication theory and the contact hypothesis alike presume the ability to interact meaningfully. In an EU with twenty-three official languages – not to mention the dozen or more additional languages which are spoken throughout the EU without having the status of official working languages – the ability to speak foreign languages is almost a prerequisite for the type of meaningful cross-cultural interaction stressed by both social communication theory and the contact hypothesis.

The 2002 Barcelona European Council made language learning a part of the Lisbon Strategy and established the objective that all Europeans should speak two languages in addition to their native language (Barcelona European Council, 2002: 19). Recent surveys have found, however, that barely a quarter of Europeans could, in fact, do so (Eurobarometer, 2006: 9; Eurostat, 2009). We might reasonably expect young people, especially university students, to fare somewhat better than the general population in language ability.

In open-ended questions, the survey asked respondents to list their native languages as well as the languages they speak with native, fluent, moderate, and "a little" proficiency. As expected, the university students as a whole reported better language abilities than the general population. In terms of meeting the Lisbon Strategy's foreign language objective, virtually all of the students in this sample (96 per cent) reported being able to speak conversationally in two languages besides their native language. There was surprisingly little variation across fields of study in the percentage of students meeting the Lisbon Strategy objective. Rates varied from 91 per cent of business and management students to 98 per cent of language students. Any suggestion that science students are less proficient at foreign languages is strongly refuted: science and technology students had a 97 per cent success rate at meeting the Lisbon Strategy objective.

The data not only show that university students outperformed the general population in foreign language competence, but also that Erasmus students outperformed non-mobile students when it came to speaking foreign languages. As Table 6 summarises, students from the Erasmus group reported speaking more languages and speaking them better than students from the non-mobile group, and with a p value of <0.0001 the difference is statistically significant. While a similarly high number of students from both groups reported meeting the Lisbon Strategy objective (speaking two foreign languages conversationally or better), 78 per cent of the Erasmus group reported speaking a *third* foreign language conversationally or better, compared with 39 per cent of the non-mobile control group. In terms of fluency, a somewhat higher proportion of Erasmus students than non-mobile students claimed fluency in at least one foreign language (81 per cent of the Erasmus group versus 66 per cent of the non-mobile control group). But again, the real differences appear when we look at reported ability in additional foreign languages. The proportion of students from the Erasmus group reporting fluency in two or more foreign languages is four times higher than the proportion from the non-mobile control group.

Table 6: Foreign language ability (%)

	ERASMUS	NON-MOBILE
Fluent in at least 1 non-native language	81	66
Fluent in at least 2 non-native languages	25	6
Conversational or better in at least 1 non-native language	100	100
Conversational or better in at least 2 non-native languages	98	95
Conversational or better in at least 3 non-native languages	78	39
Conversational or better in at least 4 non-native languages	26	7
Mean # of languages (incl. native), conversational or better	**2.8**	**2.3**

Source: Author's data.

In summation, virtually all the students in the sample met the Lisbon Strategy's language objective – far exceeding the language abilities reported by the general European population. Moreover the Erasmus students reported a higher degree of multilingualism than non-mobile students.[15] Given that students planning to study abroad have a practical incentive to learn a foreign language, this is not particularly surprising. Additionally, with more than two-thirds of Erasmus students taking classes exclusively or predominantly in a foreign language during their sojourn (Teichler, 2004), the experience of studying abroad is likely to strengthen their foreign language skills. Nevertheless, given the abundant historical evidence linking communication with political community-building (Deutsch, 1953; Weber, 1976; Gellner, 1983), the finding is quite interesting. If we accept that the ability to speak foreign languages is a prerequisite for community-building in a multi-lingual Europe, then Erasmus students are undoubtedly more capable of forging the sorts of transnational ties and networks that are likely to lead to a shared European identity.

Evaluating the civic assumptions about Erasmus

This section evaluated the theoretically-derived assumptions that underlie the civic view of the Erasmus program – e.g. that Erasmus students engage in meaningful contact with other Europeans, become more interested in Europe and other Europeans as a result, and self-identify as European. Erasmus students were found to engage in significant levels of cross-cultural interaction during their sojourn abroad. Only a small minority of students socialises primarily with students of their own nationality or speaks primarily their native language. Indeed, data on students' socialising and language use indicate that the Erasmus experience exposes students to much greater cross-cultural and multilingual interaction than they are accustomed to experiencing at home, thus supporting the view that Erasmus provides a unique channel of cross-cultural contact. The data also support the assumption that Erasmus participation leads to attitudinal change about Europe. As a result of studying abroad, most Erasmus students reported that they became more interested in other European countries, in other European people and cultures, and in the EU, and that the experience made them feel more European.

Finally, Erasmus students were found to be more favourable both the EU and to the idea of European and more attached to the EU than non-mobile students. The data also indicate that Erasmus students self-identify as European more frequently than do non-mobile students and they appear to accord a relatively higher level of importance to their

European identity than do non-mobile students. Erasmus students also reported greater foreign language proficiency, which will make it relatively easier for them to engage in the type of extensive cross-cultural interaction the civic view identifies as so important for future community-building.

CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISONS OF ERASMUS STUDENTS

The findings reported in section two are based on an analysis of the entire sample of Erasmus students, encompassing 25 nationalities. However, large surveys administered in the EU are often characterised by cross-national variation. Indeed, the Eurobarometer reports routinely disaggregate the data by nationality in order to facilitate cross-national comparison. Variation across countries has also been observed in various large-*n* Erasmus studies (*see* Bracht *et. al*., 2006). To get a sense of how much cross-national variation exists among the Erasmus students in this survey, the mean response to the identity, attachment, and favourability questions on the survey was calculated for each of the four most-represented nationalities in the Erasmus sample (France, Germany, Italy, Spain) plus the UK. These results are summarised in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Mean responses of Erasmus students by nationality

	France (n=78)	Germany (n=926)	Italy (n=468)	Spain (n=143)	UK (n=33)
Do you ever think of yourself as European? *- lower numbers represent more frequent European identification*	1.74	1.77	1.64	1.51	2.24
In the near future, do you see yourself as national and/or European? *- higher numbers represent more prominent European identification*	2.47	2.43	2.76	2.06	1.94
EU attachment *- lower numbers represent greater attachment*	2.13	2.38	2.16	2.14	2.61
Favourability to idea of European integration *- higher numbers represent greater favourability*	3.65	3.66	4.15	4.16	3.27
Favourability to EU *- higher numbers represent greater favourability*	3.91	3.58	4.18	4.22	3.50

Source: Author's data.

The data indicate that the Spanish respondents most often identify as European; the Italians see their European identity as most prominent, in comparison with their national identity; the French are most attached to the EU, but are only barely ahead of the Spanish and the Italians; and the Spanish are the most favourable to both the idea of European integration and the EU. Apart from these observations, there are three interesting points to note.

First, in line with conventional wisdom on British Euroscepticism, students from the UK report the lowest frequency of and least prominent European identity, the lowest level of EU attachment, and the lowest levels of favourability to both the idea of European

integration and the EU. There were only 33 British students in the sample, but the British tendency toward Euroscepticism appears to be confirmed here, again raising a flag about the reliability of previous empirical studies of Erasmus students that are based primarily on British students.

Second, it is interesting that, while German students are significantly more favourable to the idea of European integration than the British students, their favourability to the EU is only slightly higher than the latter's, and both are significantly less favourable than the other three nationalities. Germans' comparatively low levels of support for the EU may reflect the timing of the survey, which took place while the EU continued to navigate the extremely costly financial rescue of the Eurozone's weakest members. Germany's economic contribution to the Greek bailout, in particular, has rankled many Germans and provoked a public opinion backlash. It would not be surprising if favourability among German students toward the EU and European integration were impacted by these developments.

Third, and related, it is noteworthy that Italy and Spain both report significantly higher levels of favourability to both the EU and to the idea of European integration than the other nationalities summarised in Table 7. It is plausible that this, like the German's relatively low levels of favourability, reflects the economic situation in Europe at the time of the survey. Already in 2010-11, mainstream media was predicting that Italy or Spain, or both, may need an EU bailout to avoid defaulting on sovereign debt.[16] The favourability ratings reported in the survey may partially reflect an assumption (subsequently borne out, in Spain's case) that the countries' European partners would provide the financial assistance to prevent economic catastrophe. But it is unlikely that this instrumental reasoning captures the whole story. Indeed, Eurobarometer surveys from the years preceding the economic crisis show that Spanish favourability toward the EU has consistently exceeded the EU average. On the other hand, Italian favourability to the EU had been slightly lower than the EU average and immediately prior to the 2008 financial crisis, had in fact decreased.

In addition to disaggregating the dataset by respondents' nationality, the dataset was further disaggregated by both respondents' nationality and Erasmus sojourn country in order to identify any obvious patterns related to destination. Of particular interest was the question of whether students spending their academic sojourn in the UK would have markedly different mean responses to the identity, attachment, and favourability questions than did their co-national studying in other countries. Unfortunately, the dataset contained only 61 Erasmus students who studied in the UK: 43 Italians, 14 Germans, and 4 Spaniards. With such small sample sizes in the case of the latter two nationalities, it was not possible to draw any firm conclusions on the question; the data do not reveal any consistent dampening effect on students' European identity, attachment, or favourability from studying in the UK. However, because of the prevalence of Britain as a study-abroad destination in existing studies of Erasmus students, this is a question that should be investigated further.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are trade-offs involved in any research design. The main drawback of previous face-to-face and mailed surveys of Erasmus students is the small number of respondents. Moreover, the reach of previous studies has often been limited – primarily – to British students and students studying in Britain. In order to reach a broader audience, this study has taken a different approach – namely, a widely-targeted, multinational, online survey – but there are trade-offs that must be acknowledged. This section discusses three potential drawbacks of this survey's methodology and discusses how they may affect the findings reported above. This is followed by some suggestions for future research.

Methodological considerations

First, the selection of universities and students did not conform to a rigorous random sampling methodology.[17] Nevertheless, students in the survey represent a wide range of academic specialties and nationalities and, to the best of the author's knowledge, the targeted institutions and students have no particular bias that would affect the study's conclusions.

A second drawback—not only of this survey, but of all extant surveys of Erasmus students—is the obvious source of potential bias arising from the self-selection of students who, having received a solicitation to complete the survey, actually chose to respond. Common sense suggests that this source of bias would affect the results to a certain extent, especially if students with strong views on the survey content (e.g. strongly pro-or anti-European) were more likely to respond. There is no easy way to quantify this effect on this study, especially in the absence of accurate data on the number of students who received invitations. Nevertheless, the large number of respondents is encouraging, the demographic information raised no red flags other than the national distribution of respondents discussed below, and the scarcity of extreme responses on survey questions is also reassuring. It therefore seems plausible that the results of the survey indeed reflect the views of a substantial proportion of the target populations.

Finally, the varying levels of support received from different universities in distributing invitations to complete the survey greatly affected the number of responses received from different nationalities (*see* Table 8). In particular, the tremendous support extended by Bremen University proved a mixed blessing, as nearly half the total sample consists of German students. The effect is especially marked in the non-mobile group, where three-quarters of the respondents are German.

Table 8: Nationality of respondents, as % of each group

	ERASMUS	NON-MOBILE
French	4	4
German	19	77
Italian	45	3
Spanish	9	5
Other EU nationality	19	6
None given	4	5

Source: Author's data.

This distribution is obviously far from ideal and did affect the findings to a certain extent. By rerunning the statistical tests discussed in the previous section, this time comparing the Erasmus group with a non-mobile group that excluded the German respondents (i.e. the 747 non-mobile German students were excluded, so that 223 non-Germans remain in the non-mobile group) we can see one measure of that effect. As Table 9 shows, excluding the German students from the non-mobile group had no qualitative effect on much of the analysis: the p-values remained well below 0.01 in most cases, thus implying high levels of statistical significance. On the questions measuring pro-Europeanism, however, the effect was stronger. When the German students were removed from the non-mobile sample, the p-values for these questions increased more substantially (in two cases, to slightly above 0.05, which is often taken as the threshold for defining statistical significance). This indicates that the German students were less pro-European than the rest of the sample. Indeed, the mean favourability to the EU of the German students in the non-mobile group was 3.53 (on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated "very unfavourable" and 5 indicated "very favourable") whereas the mean

favourability of the non-German students in the non-mobile group was 3.78. One possible reason for this has already been discussed – that the timing of the survey may reflect Germans' negative attitudes about shouldering the financial burden of the Eurozone crisis. However, in line with the analysis presented above, within the German cohort, the Erasmus students were markedly more pro-European than the non-mobile students, with a mean favourability to the EU of 3.91. (The mean score was 4.01 for non-German Erasmus students.) To summarise: the preponderance of German students in the non-mobile sample changes the level of significance of some of the statistical tests, but does not appear to affect the high-level conclusions of this study.

Table 9: Statistical findings from two comparisons of Erasmus and non-mobile students

	NON-MOBILE GROUP (includes Germans)	NON-MOBILE GROUP (excludes Germans)
Favourability to EU	p<0.0001	p=0.05
Favourability to European integration	p<0.0001	p=0.04
Attachment to EU	p<0.0001	p=0.06
Frequency of feeling European	p<0.0001	p=0.0015
Feel European and/or national	p<0.0001	p=0.0006
Language, fluent	p<0.0001	p=0.005
Language, conversational	p<0.0001	p<0.0001

Source: Author's data.

As a second check on the validity of the data – and thus the reliability of the conclusions drawn from the data – the data can be disaggregated by nationality and the findings compared against the aggregate data reported in section two above. Focusing on the four largest nationalities in the dataset, Table 10 shows that, while there is indeed variation across countries, in each case the reported differences between the Erasmus and non-Erasmus group still hold. For the questions measuring favourability toward European integration and the EU (where higher scores indicate greater favourability or attachment) the Erasmus students have a higher average score, both in the aggregate and when disaggregated by nationality. For the questions measuring attachment to the EU and frequency of feeling European (where lower scores indicate greater attachment or frequency) the Erasmus students have a lower mean score, both in the aggregate and when disaggregated by nationality.

Table 10: Comparison of Erasmus and non-Erasmus students, by nationality

	ERASMUS	NON-MOBILE
Favourability to EU (mean, all nationalities) *- higher numbers represent greater favourability*	4.0	3.6
mean French	4.0	3.9
mean German	3.8	3.5
mean Italian	4.2	4.2
mean Spanish	4.3	4.1
Favourability to European integration (mean, all nationalities) *- higher numbers represent greater favourability*	4.0	3.6
mean French	3.8	3.5
mean German	3.9	3.6
mean Italian	4.4	4.1
mean Spanish	4.1	4.1
Attachment to EU (mean, all nationalities) *- lower numbers represent greater attachment*	2.2	2.4
mean French	1.8	2.4
mean German	2.1	2.4
mean Italian	2.0	2.2
mean Spanish	2.1	2.3
Frequency of feeling European (mean, all nationalities) *- lower numbers represent more frequent European identification*	1.6	1.8
mean French	1.5	2.0
mean German	1.6	1.8
mean Italian	1.5	1.6
mean Spanish	1.5	1.6

Source: Author's data.

Section three has already discussed some of the interesting differences across countries that emerge when the data is disaggregated by nationality. An additional point that stands out in Table 10 is that the German students in the survey report lower levels of favourability to both the EU and to the idea of European integration than the other nationalities (with the exception, as noted above, of the British students). Yet the German students' level of *attachment* to the EU and the frequency with which Germans reported feeling European is about the same as that of the other nationalities. Unpacking the meaning that respondents ascribe to terms like "favourability" or "attachment" is beyond the scope of the current article, but could usefully be analysed in a future study.

Future research

The present study points to several additional promising avenues of research related to European identity. First, as yet there is no longitudinal study of Erasmus participation that contains respondents from more than a handful of nationalities. While this type of data collection is resource-intensive, it should be seen as the gold standard for inferring causality. Existing longitudinal studies are sceptical about the effect of Erasmus participation on attitudes and identities, but as discussed above, the focus on British students, or foreign students sojourning in British universities, may be problematic. Additional studies with a broader multinational perspective are needed. Van Mol's (2011) extensive study of students from 24 universities in 16 European countries utilises a

cohort design due to time constraints, but it demonstrates that the logistical barriers to administering a survey of this breadth are by no means insurmountable.

More substantively, existing studies, including this one, tend to take a rather one-dimensional approach to European identity. The survey instruments, for example, ask respondents whether, or how often, they "feel European" without actually unpacking what that European feeling means to them. Qualitative methods – e.g. interviews, focus groups – might be more appropriate for teasing out precisely what European identity actually signifies for its holders, but even surveys could incorporate questions that unpack the concept of European identity by asking those who "feel European" follow-up questions about the circumstances that engender such a feeling, how deeply-felt the identity is, and how important European identity is to the respondent, etc. A survey instrument could also be used to probe the relative importance of civic versus cultural attributes of the respondents' European identity (*see* Bruter, 2005).

Finally, a useful extension of research on European identity and attachment would be to establish a link between the presence of these attributes and specific policy preferences. For example, in the context of the current economic situation, it would be particularly interesting to know whether European identifiers are more supportive of "European" responses such as issuing Eurobonds, establishing a European banking system, or giving the EU the role of scrutinising national budgets.

CONCLUSION

In an era of economic and political turbulence the depth of European identity and the extent of Europeans' attachment to the EU and to other European states and people become especially salient. Responses to the current financial crisis – including the creation of a bailout fund for struggling Eurozone members (the European Financial Stability Facility, EFSF) and proposals to create Eurobonds that would effectively pool European debt – put the bonds of European solidarity to the test. Yet important questions remain about the nature of European identity and attachment and about the mechanisms that foster them.

Adherents of social communication theory have long held that cross-border interactions among individuals can be a significant mechanism of transnational identity formation (Deutsch, 1953; Deutsch *et al*., 1967; Lijphart, 1964). In the European Commission, a similar logic provided part of the rationale for creating programs to increase student mobility in the EU during the so-called "relaunch" of European integration in the second half of the 1980s (Corbett, 2005; Petit, 2007).

Because of the cultural interaction presumed to be at the heart of a foreign study sojourn, Erasmus participation has often been characterised as a civic experience. Bringing students from across Europe together for a shared university experience is held to reshape participants' attitudes about Europe and other Europeans and to enhance their own sense of European identity. However, this view has been *asserted* or *assumed* more often than it has been *demonstrated*. This article has identified three assumptions central to the civic view of the Erasmus experience – that Erasmus students engage in significant contact with other Europeans, become more interested in Europe and other Europeans as a result, and self-identify as European – and has submitted each one to an empirical investigation.

In each case, the assumptions largely hold up. The data clearly indicate that, for the vast majority of Erasmus students, the sojourn abroad is indeed an intercultural, transnational experience, although quite different from the integrative model where students immerse themselves in the host culture and language. The data also suggest that the Erasmus experience increases participants' interest in Europe and the EU and

that, as a direct result of the sojourn, students feel more European. Finally, the data from the survey confirm that Erasmus students are more likely to identify as European and to feel attached and favourable to the EU than are non-mobile students, although further investigation is required to confirm whether this is the result of a transformative experience abroad or the result of an over-representation of European identifiers and supporters in the Erasmus cohort. The data also indicate that Erasmus students speak more foreign languages, and speak them better, than do non-mobile students, a point that is significant because the historical evidence demonstrates that political community-building is rooted in communication (Deutsch, 1953; Weber, 1976; Gellner, 1983). The ability to communicate with other Europeans is the precursor to any sort of meaningful interaction. While recent studies have raised questions about Erasmus as a transformative experience (Wilson, 2011; Sigalas, 2010a, 2010b), the findings presented here indicate that the civic function of the Erasmus program is successful for a strong majority of participants, at least according to their own self-reported assessments.

With that said, there are limits to the civic potential of Erasmus. For one thing, the reach of the program is relatively modest despite its impressive growth over two and a half decades of existence. From an inaugural cohort of around 3000 students in 1987, participation increased to around 10,000 the second year, 100,000 in the 2000-01 year, and more than 200,000 in the 2009-10 year. Yet this remains well short of the Lisbon Strategy target of ten per cent of students in higher education. Furthermore, the people with the least-European outlooks and attitudes may be the least likely to participate in the program. There remain socio-economic barriers to mobility, even though Erasmus provides some funding to defray the additional costs of studying abroad (Vossensteyn *et al*., 2010).[18] On top of that, students' inclination to study abroad may be lowest for those with a firmly national identity and outlook and with no or low foreign language ability. Yet Theresa Kuhn (2012) suggests that the impact of cross-border mobility is strongest for precisely those people who do not feel European to begin with.[19]

But if we should not overstate the civic potential of Erasmus study, neither should we minimise it. More than 90 per cent of Erasmus participants surveyed reported that studying abroad made them more interested in other European countries, people, and cultures, and two-thirds reported that their interest in the EU had increased appreciably as a result of studying abroad. Moreover, three-quarters reported that their study abroad experience made them feel more European. As a programme accessible to only a minority of Europeans, Erasmus is unlikely to lead the way to a wide-spread European identity. But the programme is likely to reinforce any pre-existing European identity (Van Mol, 2011) and may quite possibly foster European identity or attachment in participants who were not previously predisposed to those feelings.

***

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[1] The programme name is both a reference to the Dutch Renaissance scholar Desiderius Erasmus and an acronym for the official title of the program, European Action Scheme for the Mobility of European Students. In addition to promoting foreign study for university students, the Erasmus framework also supports a much smaller number of university staff and faculty exchanges and, since 2007, university student traineeships abroad. The Erasmus program is not the only EU educational exchange programs, but is the most significant one. With more than 2.5 million participants since its creation in 1987 and a budget of more than €3 billion for the 2007-2013 period (Education and Culture DG, 2010: 3), Erasmus can be considered the flagship of all the EU-administered educational programs (Papatsiba, 2006).
[2] The Erasmus framework facilitates student mobility in at least three ways. First, it encourages inter-university cooperation. Second, it institutionalises a set of procedures to maximise the transferability of credits completed while abroad back to the home university. Third, it provides funding for small student grants, disbursed through national agencies, to defray the additional costs associated with studying abroad (e.g. travel expenses, language classes, student housing).
[3] Van Mol argues that a foreign study experience acts as a catalyst, activating and augmenting a European identity that, to some extent, already existed prior to studying abroad.
[4] A recent chapter by Van Mol (2011) is the first to take a similar (multinational, large-*n*) approach.
[5] A complex interplay of forces within the Commission, the Council, and indeed within European higher education institutions, has driven the promotion of student mobility within Europe (Wilson, 2011; Papatsiba, 2006; Corbett, 2005, 2003); as a result the Erasmus programme has been framed to appeal simultaneously to various constituencies and has been justified multiple rationales. While it is not emphasised in this article, the Commission's primary rationale for promoting student mobility in higher education emphasises the material benefits of Erasmus study, promoting the "economic" and "professional" objectives of the Erasmus programme (Papatsiba, 2005: 175-176). Since the 1980s, increased economic cooperation among European states has been understood to be an essential prerequisite if Europe is to successfully compete in global markets (Sandholtz and Zyzman, 1989). Therefore, training a cadre of European professionals with personal, first-hand experience of intra-European cooperation and life in other European states became a high priority (Papatsiba, 2006: 99-100). There is also an emphasis on the individual benefits to participants, in the form of professional development opportunities, certifications, and transferrable jobs skills.
[6] We know for instance, that Erasmus participants generally enrolled in fewer courses during their academic sojourn than they did at their home university and that the courses were often not directly related to their field of study; that Erasmus participation was correlated with a slight prolongation of university studies; and that Erasmus students were twice as likely as other students to continue on to advanced studies after graduation (Maiworm, Steube, and Teichler, 1991; Teichler and Maiworm, 1994, Maiworm and Teichler, 1996; Jahr and Teichler, 2002; Teichler 2004; Bracht, Engle, Janson *et al.*, 2006; Teichler and Janson, 2007: 488).
[7] While Erasmus students have reported that their sojourn abroad was helpful in gaining initial post-graduate employment (Maiworm and Teichler, 1996; Bracht, Engle, Janson *et al.*, 2006; Teichler and Janson, 2007), the experience has not been clearly linked to subsequent professional prestige or earnings (Teichler and Janson, 2007). Several studies have linked university study abroad with post-graduate professional mobility (Maiworm and Teichler, 1996; Teichler and Jahr, 2001; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Parey and Waldinger, 2010).
[8] As Amir (1969) reviews in detail, contact between groups does not, on its own, necessarily lead to positive outcomes. Indeed, there are many intervening variables – including the character of the groups, the length and character of contact, and the nature of pre-existing views – that affect outcomes.
[99] In a rare non-quantitative study, Murphy-Lejeune's (2002) analysis of mobile students in Europe uses semi-structured interviews with 50 students who partook of various mobility schemes to generalise about the personal-psychological impact of a foreign study sojourn. The qualitative analysis, which includes fifteen Erasmus students (continental European students completing a sojourn in Dublin and Irish students studying in continental Europe), provides ample evidence of the transformative effect of a study-abroad experience, but it does not specifically investigate the presence of emergence of a European identity among the interviewees. In the section below on mobile students' social experience abroad, Murphy-Lejeune's findings are discussed further.
[10] While it was not a comparative work, Fernandez (2005) surveyed 206 University of Bristol (UK) students with foreign study experience, concluding that the majority were favorable to an integrated Europe, if lacking a real comprehension of the EU itself.

[11] Students from these five countries comprised 58 per cent of all outgoing Erasmus students in 2009-10 and the five countries attracted 59 per cent of all Erasmus students.
[12] In fact, assistance with the survey's administration was mixed. With the help of university officials in Bologna and Bremen, an invitation to take the survey was e-mailed to all Erasmus students and a significant number of regularly-enrolled students in each university. The same degree of institutional support was not extended by the other universities, but numerous individual faculty members cooperated by inviting their students to participate. As the survey built momentum, faculty at two other institutions (in Murcia, Spain and Maynooth, Ireland) also issued invitations to their students.
[13] The Erasmus framework itself covers exchanges among universities from all 27 EU member states, plus Croatia, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey.
[14] The EU provides funding for Erasmus, but the grants are disbursed through national agencies.
[15] Two additional checks were performed to confirm the validity of these findings. To ensure that the differences in foreign language ability observed between the two groups of students did not simply reflect a greater proportion of language students in the Erasmus group, the same statistics were calculated after excluding the language students from each group. With foreign language students filtered out, there was still a statistically significant ($p<0.0001$) difference between reported foreign language abilities of the Erasmus group and the non-mobile control group at both the fluent and conversational levels. Additionally, the differences remain statistically significant ($p<0.01$) when students are disaggregated by discipline (humanities, social sciences, science and technology) and compared separately.
[16] See, for example, "Contagion Fear Hits Spain", *Wall Street Journal*, April 28, 2010; "Italy's Lack of Growth Makes Debt Burden Heavier", *Wall Street Journal*, May 13, 2010; "Fear of Spanish debt contagion sends markets tumbling", *The Guardian*, May 25, 2010 "Will Spain face a debt crisis?", *Time*, June 18, 2010; "Italy's debt costs approach red zone", *The Telegraph*, December 29, 2010; "Italy's debt crisis: 10 reasons to be fearful", *The Guardian*, November 9, 2011.
[17] As previously mentioned, the target universities were chosen because of their existing links with the author's institution. And, at some of the institutions, the targeted students were those who happened to be taking classes with the individual faculty members who cooperated with the survey.
[18] In the 2009-10 academic year, the monthly Erasmus grant provided each participant with around €250 per month for the duration of Erasmus study.
[19] Erasmus, she says, "misses its mark" by focusing on students in higher education who by virtue of their age and socioeconomic status, in all likelihood, feel fairly European to begin with.

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