

**LANGUAGE LEARNING IN STUDY
ABROAD: SOCIAL, CULTURAL,
AND IDENTITY-RELATED FACTORS**

VASILICA MOCANU

6 monographs

P U V
UNIVERSITAT
DE VALÈNCIA

**LANGUAGE LEARNING IN STUDY ABROAD:
SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND IDENTITY-RELATED
FACTORS**

ERASMUS STUDENTS IN NORTHERN, SOUTHERN, AND
EASTERN-EUROPEAN ENGLISH AS A *LINGUA FRANCA*
CONTEXTS

INSTITUT UNIVERSITARI DE LLENGÜES MODERNES APLICADES DE LA COMUNITAT VALENCIANA (IULMA)

IULMA MONOGRAPHS

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Vasilica Mocanu-Florea

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Publicacions de la Universitat de València

<http://puv.uv.es>

publicacions@uv.es

Layout & cover design: Publicacions de la Universitat de València

ISSN: 2605-4469

ISBN: 978-84-1118-195-2 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-84-1118-196-9 (PDF)

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7203/PUV-OA-196-9>

Digital edition



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ELF – English as a lingua franca
FL – foreign language
L2/SL – second language
MMR – mixed method research
SA – study abroad
SLA- second language acquisition
TL – target language

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

- / - indicates the minimal but clear pause between phrases/ sentences in normally-paced speech
- ... - indicates pause of significant length (more than 0.5) seconds
- :- indicates elongated vowel
- “ “ – indicates that the speaker is overtly voicing her/ himself or someone else
- XXX – indicates incomprehensible speech
- ? – indicates rising intonation (including questions)

PREFACE

Research on second language learning in study abroad can be divided into two periods, according to the nature of the studies that were published from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1990s, and those that came to light afterwards. The first was concerned, for the most part, with assessing linguistic gains in SA (for instance: Carroll, 1967; Willis *et al.*, 1977; Magnan, 1986; Dyson, 1988). In the 1990s, language learning in study abroad underwent a change of direction towards a more socioculturally oriented framework.

Barbara Freed's (1995) edited volume can be regarded as the starting point of the second period in the history of SLA in study abroad. Apart from synthesizing the research field of study up to that moment, Freed tried to approach unaddressed issues, for instance, the need to compare the effects of the study abroad and the *at home* settings, as well as the acquisition of pragmatic competence. Many of the studies that came after had a clear shift towards the sociolinguistic facet of study abroad: the majority were qualitative in nature (e.g., Kinginger, 2009 and 2013; Jackson, 2008; Pelegrino Aveni, 2005). However, another strand of studies continued focusing on language-related gains, most of them of a quantitative type (Borràs & Llanes, 2020; Köylü, 2021 Serrano *et al.*, 2011).

Nevertheless, research on study abroad has rarely combined the study of social, cultural, and identity-related aspects with the analysis of perceived language-related gains. Similarly, there has been a lack of studies integrating qualitative and quantitative methods in SA research. At the same time, a combination of different contexts in which major languages, minor languages, and English as a lingua franca interfere and interact has rarely been considered (Tracy-Ventura and Köylü have recently put the spotlight on this, see Tracy-Ventura & Köylü, 2022), and most often, the origins of the participants showed very little variation. Thus, the present volume responds to the need to triangulate social, cultural, and identity-related aspects with perceived language-related gains, qualitative and quantitative methods, three different European contexts, and participants from almost every corner of Europe for a deeper understanding of the study abroad phenomenon on the European continent.

This volume contributes to shed light on the social, linguistic, and cultural facets of study abroad by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods at every stage. Therefore, interpretations are made, and conclusions are drawn based on results obtained from both quantitative and qualitative data and through the combination of both methods. By doing so, the present study brings to the field increased confidence in findings, improved accuracy and completeness, and it informs and contributes to overall validity of the results (McKim, 2017: 203).

Probably the most important contribution of this publication to the study of social, cultural, and identity-related determinants of language learning in SA is that participation in an Erasmus study abroad program impacts identities, language attitudes and uses, and employability, as perceived by the international students in three different European contexts. This impact is visible both at a quantitative, statistical level, and at a more fine-grained, qualitative level. This volume demonstrates that participating in an Erasmus sojourn abroad, independently of the context, triggers a destabilization and hybridization of identity. Spending at least one semester studying at a foreign university through the Erasmus program provides an environment where individuals are confronted with cultural, symbolic, and material differences. These enhance awareness of how things work in different places and open the minds of the participants to their sense of belonging and their position in the world. Living with difference for a prolonged period may lead to a feeling that the differences are few, increasing tolerance, openness, and an expansion of personal horizons. However, this study shows that it can also prompt in certain cases an increased sense of nationalism which nevertheless combines with an openness to navigate difference.

In this volume, the reader will discover that a sojourn abroad without moving from the European continent, even for a period as short as one semester, can expand the array of options for participants' future careers. There are substantial implications here for education policies that aim to improve the willingness of university graduates to become mobile workers in the future. Furthermore, since it also has implications for the overall state of economy, training Europeans to expand their identity horizons through study abroad should be a matter of concern for both public and private stakeholders.

This volume will show the disparity between students who choose certain contexts for their stay, in terms of participant expectations, and

the areas that most interest students in each group. These results provide a means to orient students when they choose the setting for their Erasmus stay and inform them about each region to avoid unrealistic expectations and potential disappointment. Since the decision to resist or accept the target language and culture could affect the outcomes of the experience, this volume reveals a need for stakeholders in the Erasmus program to promote willingness among the participants to integrate into local societies to avoid unpleasant experiences and consequent disillusion. An Erasmus stay should not be understood as a homogeneous identical experience for everybody regardless of the context, since different gains are achieved through stays in different contexts.

As regards second language learning, the evidence presented shows that for the Erasmus students in all three contexts, the ability to speak English is more important in identifying with a given group of people than being European, and the Erasmus stay had no effect in this respect. These results indicate that for Erasmus students, language, in this case English, is a much more powerful identity connector than an alleged European identity. We should therefore consider the possibility that promoting English, and more concisely, English as a *lingua franca*, may contribute to stronger identification among young European higher education students. The reader will also discover that Erasmus students prefer to spend most of their stay with other international students, followed by local people, then native speakers of English. While the desire to spend their stay with other international students and with local people is high, there is little interest in learning the local languages (Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan). The exception is Spanish, which appears to hold a very different and more desirable status.

Expectations and outcomes also differ in this respect. At the end of their sojourn, the participants report having spent significantly less time with local people, as well as with native speakers of English and significantly more time with people from their own countries. These networks, together with the hybridization of identity reported above could contribute to the creation of flexible forms of citizenship which allow an opportunistic response to the flux of markets and neoliberal politics brought by late capitalism. The participants in this study give reasons to believe the Erasmus stay could open the way to a more flexible and dynamic identity where an individual's life project becomes perpetually adjustable. On the other hand, that participants spent more time than expected with students

from their own countries could have created a critical perspective towards Europe and increased closeness to their own nations.

The study of expectations and outcomes from the sojourn abroad reveals that overall, the highest hopes concern the personal. Personal aspirations and benefits are the only ones that show no significant difference between the degree of expectation and the degree of accomplishment while professional and academic benefits are lower than expected overall. At times personal and professional expectations are intermeshed, and the participants struggle when it comes to separating personal outcomes from others that may be obtained in relation to professional skills.

A further contribution of this study relates to language expectations, attitudes, investment, and outcomes in study abroad in Europe. It shows that from the start the local languages Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan, are given similar importance, while Spanish clearly stands out from the rest. These results indicate that Erasmus participants are well aware of the perceived economic value of each language, which has an outstanding role in Erasmus sojourns. All three groups feel significantly less motivated by the local languages (Catalan, Romanian, and Finnish), while significantly higher motivation for Spanish is reported in the Lleida group. A sojourn abroad can contribute to decreased student motivation to study local languages, which are perceived to have little importance in the market. Conversely, there is increasing admiration for languages perceived to have high economic value. This might suggest that feelings of being rejected by the host culture or a certain degree of superficiality in the relationship with the host members can lead to withdrawal and reduced success in second language acquisition. However, the positions that the learners adopt when encountering sociocultural and linguistic differences may also play a role in restricting or facilitating their access to the target communities. In fact, a more negative attitude towards the local languages, Finnish and Romanian, also become apparent at the beginning of the sojourn, which relates more to the economic idea of investment in Flubacher *et al.* (2018). This study found a tendency among Erasmus students to report a significantly lower use of both English and the local languages and a significantly higher reported use of their own languages at the end of the experience.

Regarding the perceived language-related outcomes of the sojourn abroad, overall, the low level of improvement in Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan is similar among the three respective contexts signaling that there

is no direct relationship between study abroad and linguistic immersion but a much more complex relationship, where there is a substantial economic role. This study shows there is room for language learning in study abroad, except for local languages whose economic value is perceived to be low. A different outcome would probably be obtained if participants were migrants intending to settle down in the host environment rather than a short study experience.

As for communicative skills, there is a significantly higher perception of the participants in Bucharest that the mobility stay impacted positively on their communicative skills than in the case of the participants in Oulu. Furthermore, in relation to the impact of the sojourn abroad on a willingness to learn other languages, there is significantly lower motivation to learn foreign languages as a result of the sojourn abroad of those students who had Finland as a destination than the ones who were in Lleida and Bucharest. The interviews show that the linguistic expectations of the participants are closely related to the contexts they had chosen for the Erasmus experience. At the end of the sojourn, participants in Oulu improved their English level but, in some cases, remain unsatisfied by their level of acquisition. Hence, some participants affirm that their English level has opened some professional doors for them. Bucharest provided a good environment for improving competences in English as a *lingua franca*. Many participants mention that their English progressed because they were able to develop communication strategies that enable them to manage in situations when English is used among non-native speakers.

This research will shed light on those social, cultural, and identity-related factors which might affect study abroad experiences and the ways in which they interact with foreign language learning in SA in three European contexts where English as a *lingua franca* predominates between Erasmus students. Furthermore, it is the first study (as far as I am aware) that contrasts and compares social, cultural, and identity-related factors affecting second language learning in SA across three European countries located in strategic positions in the North, East, and South of the continent. It also considers a substantial number of nationalities (N=26). Accordingly, it is a straightforward answer to claims for further research in the area in which the study is situated, for instance, that of Kinginger (2013: 354): “future research should attempt to address these gaps, representing the experiences of a broader range of students, questioning students’ motives for particular language-related choices, and

attending aspects of identity that are of clear relevance but have remained unexamined”. Furthermore, the longitudinal nature of the study, as well as the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods breaks new ground by bringing to the forefront both a broad and an in-depth image of study abroad.

By taking into account speakers of English as a lingua franca as representative of the Target Language community in the Erasmus experience, this volume contests the idea that input from native speakers and contact with communities of native speakers are the only rationales for foreign language learning in study abroad: “[i]t seems generally true to say that second language acquisition is characterized by a drive towards approximating native speaker behavior and accommodation to native speech norms” (Regan, 1998: 77). This idea has recently attracted interest and has been explored in studies, such as Llanes (2019), Llanes *et al.* (2022), and Köylü & Tracy-Ventura (2022).

All in all, this research contributes to the bulk of studies on social, cultural, and identity-related factors that determine language learning in SA by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods at every stage of the study, thus responding to research questions that could not be fully answered by other methods. Further, it sheds light not only on the similarities between qualitative and quantitative types of data, but also on the paradoxes and contradictions that might arise from combining surveys and interviews, achieving a more detailed picture of the study abroad phenomenon, and leading to a better understanding of the impact of study abroad and sociolinguistic processes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the editing committee of Institut Interuniversitari de Llengües Modernes Aplicades de la Comunitat Valenciana, for the trust that they deposited in the publication of this volume, and most especially to Prof. Diana González Pastor (Universitat de València) for her helpful remarks on the outline and initial proposal for this book. Similarly, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers of earlier versions of the manuscript for their priceless work. Any further flaws are my responsibility.

A very special “thank you” goes to Prof. Francisco Ivorra Perez (Universitat de València), for inspiring me to publish this volume; to Prof. Gwyn Fox, for revising earlier versions of the manuscript; and to Prof. Enric Llorca (Universitat de Lleida) for being the guiding hand that led me on this path.

My deepest gratitude to my family, Mirela, Ion, and Estrella for their ongoing support in the writing process of this manuscript; and to Alberto, for all the little things that matter the most.

The research was funded by the Agència de Gestió d’Ajuts Universitaris i de Recerca, Generalitat de Catalunya (ref. 2016 FI_B 00624), SGR 2017-2020 (ref.2017-SGR-1522) and by Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades (Development of disciplinary literacies in English as a lingua franca at university – LIDISELF, ref. PID2019-107451GB-I00).

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This volume analyzes the social, cultural, and identity-related aspects believed to be determinants for language learning in the SA experience of university students participating in the Erasmus program in three European countries. The title calls for a need to inform the reader about the conceptualization of language, and language learning that it takes on. Heller's (2020: 125) claim is an appropriate starting point:

relativizing the autonomy of “language” potentially opens up new realms of inquiry, which allow for recentering the communicative dimensions of social process as part of understanding more broadly how social process works and what it produces – not just something that “linguists” (“sociolinguists,” “linguistic anthropologists”) do, over there, somewhere.

Connected to the above, the aspects approached here draw on sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and a considerable body of research on language and identity (e.g., Norton, 2013; Darwin & Norton, 2015; Mocanu, 2019 and 2022), and language and emotions (e.g., Diert & Martín-Rubió, 2018; Pérez-García & Sánchez, 2020) which share frontiers with current social psychological studies (e.g., Useem, 2020).

Building upon poststructuralist theory, it is connected to the work of Bourdieu, not a linguist but a sociologist who brought the social dimension into the study of language. Bourdieu (1977) introduced concepts such as ‘authorized language’, to indicate that communication is not just about speaking but also about the degree of power of a speaker to impose reception on a listener. He further claimed that “an adequate science of discourse must establish the laws which determine who (*de facto* and *de jure*) may speak, to whom, and how” (Bourdieu, 1977: 648). Of considerable interest are the *bourdieussian* concepts of ‘habitus’, ‘capital’, and ‘market’. These are instrumental in describing the complex and permanently changing relationship between the speakers’ position and that of their interlocutors. A couple of decades later, Bourdieu & Passeron’s (1990) theorization regarding reproduc-

tion in education, society, and culture showed how education serves the purpose of perpetuating the interests of the dominant power in society. The entire analysis is highly important for the understanding of the relationship between SLA and educational, social, and cultural systems (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990: 118):

no one acquires a language without thereby acquiring a relation to language. In cultural matters the manner of acquiring perpetuates itself in what is acquired, in the form of a certain matter of using the acquirement, the mode of acquisition itself expressing the objective relations between the social characteristics of the acquirer and the social quality of what is acquired.

The concerns of the present volume are not connected, though, with the social quality of what is acquired in the *bourdeussian* manner — the symbolic meaning of being able to use certain rhetorical devices, but with the symbolic meaning that being able to speak certain languages has (and certain other do not). In his description of the dynamics of the linguistic fields, Bourdieu (1991: 61) affirms that “the linguistic competence measured by academic criteria depends, like the other dimensions of cultural capital, on the level of education (...) and on the social trajectory”. In the same way, I would argue that certain languages, whose symbolic power is acknowledged worldwide, can provide membership to desired, privileged social categories. This assumption is one of the main forces driving the participants in this study to take part in a sojourn abroad and for this reason the present volume keeps an eye on neoliberal rationales for study abroad that can be considered a matter of social reproduction.

Furthemore, the present work examines language as a “common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness” (Weedon, 1987: 21). According to Weedon “language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet, it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, *is constructed*” (p. 21). Consequently, this volume departs from the hypothesis that there is a need to address the social, political, and economic discursive practices that shape language learning in study abroad. In Weedon’s (1987: 26) words:

how we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests which they represent.

Understanding the material conditions under which the participants in this study experience their sojourn abroad is, therefore, a matter of concern for the present work. Hence, this volume contributes to shedding light on the ways in which power relations shape human experience at an individual level, as well as in communities and groups.

1.2. STUDY ABROAD AND LANGUAGE LEARNING – AN OVERVIEW

In this volume, study abroad is understood as a period at a foreign university which can last for one or two semesters, where the study of or studying through a second language(s) is implied, even though it might not always be the main purpose of the sojourn. Study abroad became a matter of concern during the 1960s (e.g., Carroll, 1967) though it remained exclusively focused on the terrain of language gains until the 1990s (e.g., Magnan, 1986; Dyson, 1988) when it shifted direction towards a more socioculturally oriented framework (e.g., Freed, 1995). Studies conducted in the field of study abroad can be divided into those that have had a more linguistic orientation (e.g., Sasaki, 2007; Cubillos *et al.*, 2008; Llanes *et al.*, 2011; Kang, 2014; Juan-Garau, 2014) and those with a more sociocultural inclination (e.g., Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Jackson, 2008; Kalocsái, 2014). The present volume is situated in the latter group.

Overall, the results of the research concerned with language gains show that SA seems to be a productive environment for language learning. As a matter of fact, in her review of research on study abroad, Kinginger (2009) makes the point that each modality of language use appears to benefit from sojourns studying abroad.

Studies oriented towards the social facet of the experience relate to the need to look at language learning as part of a complex life experience, in which language(s), identities, motives, desires, opportunities

to learn, circumstances, and the ways students react to these are deeply intertwined (e.g., Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Jackson, 2008; Benson *et al.*, 2013; Llurda *et al.*, 2016; Durán Martínez *et al.*, 2016). In this respect, research up to this moment points to study abroad as an opportunity for students to encounter and face cultural and linguistic difference. According to Pellegrino Aveni (2005) SA triggers what she calls a ‘deprivation’ or an ‘alteration’ of the self, due to the need to live in a foreign language. In another study, Murphy-Lejeune (2004) claims that Erasmus mobility opens the way for a particular form of migration as a result of international experiences that ultimately increase the participants’ willingness to live internationally in the future. Similarly, Jackson (2008) shows that, despite SA being a valuable and life-changing experience, there is a tremendous diversity in international students’ life journeys abroad. Llurda *et al.* (2016), looking at the development of Catalan students’ attachment to European citizenship during their Erasmus stay, concluded that the study abroad sojourn brought no positive impact in this respect.

All things considered, there is a perceived need for what Block (2014) has called an opening of SA studies which involve “different nationality combinations as regards sending and receiving countries” (p. 223) and for “research which might capture the specificity of the learner’s socio-linguistic development from the learner’s own perspective as well as in relation to the specificity of his/her opportunities for such development from a micro-perspective” (Regan *et al.*, 2009: 143). The present study responds to this need by considering a wide array of students from different nationalities and the three contexts where they spent their study abroad sojourn, thus “representing the experiences of a broader range of students, questioning students’ motives for particular language-related choices” (Kinginger, 2013: 354).

The present volume is concerned with SA within the European Union through the Erasmus Program (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) which started in 1987 with 3244 students from 11 countries (Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2013). According to the European Commission (2020), in the academic year 2019-2020, despite the mobility restrictions triggered by the COVID19 pandemic, 312.800 student mobilities were achieved which was “a sharp drop from the previous year attributable to the pandemic” (European Commission, 2020).

This mobility is made possible by the Erasmus+ Programme, which has at its core fostering sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion. Furthermore, it aims to strengthen European identity and active citizenship. According to the European Commission (2023), the specific objectives of the programme are the following:

- promote learning mobility of individuals and groups, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion and equity, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of education and training;
- promote non-formal and informal learning mobility and active participation among young people, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of youth;
- promote learning mobility of sport staff, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of sport organisations and sport policies.

This volume aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Which social, cultural, and identity-related factors are determinant in language learning processes through SA across three different locations in Europe?

RQ2: What is the impact on foreign language development of each of these factors as reported by international university students in Finland, Romania, and Catalonia?

The monograph is composed of four main parts and a final section that gathers the final remarks. The first part offers the theoretical background and reviews the relevant theoretical and research driven literature, establishing the gap that this research attempts to fill: understanding the social, cultural, and identity-related determinants of language learning in SA by considering three different European contexts, each of them with their particular linguistic, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural peculiarities and taking into consideration students from 26 nationalities.

The second part comprises the research methodology. Mixed methods research is the paradigm in which the study is embedded, and the instruments and procedure are considered. In this section, the design of the

study is explained, offering a detailed account of the Erasmus program, the locations, and the participants.

The data was gathered using two instruments: a questionnaire—mainly composed of Likert-scale questions, and a semi-structured interview. PRE and POST versions of both research instruments were used for collecting data at the beginning and at the end of the sojourn abroad. Descriptive statistics were employed to examine the demographic data. A Shapiro-Wilk test was run for all the items in order to see if the data distribution was normal—the results indicated that the data violated the assumption of normality. Consequently, the responses have been analyzed by means of non-parametric tests. A Kruskal-Wallis test was used in order to ascertain any differences between the three contexts, firstly in the PRE and secondly in the POST-test. In those cases where significant differences were detected, Pair-wise tests were employed in order to determine the particular contexts in which the differences were significant. Finally, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to examine the evolution between the PRE and the POST-test. This test was run primarily for the combined sample, but in some cases, each group was considered separately.

The aim of the interviews was to deal with narratives voiced at the beginning and at the end of a sojourn studying abroad; therefore, thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis has been identified by Block (2010) as one of three distinct ways to deal with narratives, together with structural analysis, and dialogic/performative analysis. Because the main aim was to interpret meaning from text data, all the selected interviews were transcribed using basic transcription conventions (included at the beginning of the manuscript). Since the questionnaire was designed before the interview and since the latter was meant to corroborate, validate, or show contradictions with the former, first of all, information related to the different themes around which the questionnaire was built was searched for in the interviews. After this step, the transcripts were analyzed again to see if other relevant themes emerged. If this was the case, new themes were added to those of the questionnaire. Finally, the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses were combined and compared.

The third part encompasses the results of the study. It focuses on the social, cultural, and identity-related factors that impact language learning in SA. In the first place, the role of the context is examined. Special attention is devoted to the languages that are encountered in each of these

contexts (e.g., Gallego-Balsà, 2014). Secondly, it focuses on the degree of contact with other speakers, considering both contact with the local communities and connection with the more transient communities of international students. Additionally, individual differences and the role of motivation and investment (Norton, 2013, Darwin & Norton, 2015; Duchêne, 2016) are studied. The connection between the sojourn studying abroad, language learning, and the concept of “employability” (Flubacher *et al.*, 2018; Courtois, 2020) is also explored in efforts to understand how language competencies are ultimately transformed into human capital and the purposes this capital is expected to serve.

The final section contrasts the most outstanding results of the study. It is intended to bring together and jointly discuss the results, as well as to triangulate the results with other findings from other literature on the same topic. It summarizes the most important findings of the study and their relevance to the field of applied linguistics, bringing to the forefront certain implications for the implementation of institutional policies that would better approach the interaction between social cultural, and linguistic factors, with language learning in SA.

CHAPTER 2. STUDY ABROAD: SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND IDENTITY-RELATED DETERMINANTS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Chapter 2 offers the theoretical background and introduces the relationship between social, cultural, and identity-related factors that have been identified by research as determinants of language learning in SA. This section reviews both the theoretical and research-driven literature that informs the present study and establishes the knowledge gap: understanding the social, cultural, and identity-related determinants of language learning in SA by considering three different European contexts, each of them with their linguistic, social, and cultural peculiarities and taking into consideration students from a wide array of nationalities.

Study abroad has been defined as “a temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes” (Kinginger 2009: 11). As previously-stated, in this volume, SA refers to a period at a foreign university which lasts for one or two semesters, where the study of or through a second language(s) is implied, even though it might not always be the main purpose of the sojourn. Furthermore, SA challenges students to test their capacity to function in a context where a second language is required. Secondly, the participants might experience a change from language learners to language users (Unamuno & Codó, 2007), since the situations will require use of the target language, leading to a marked change in student abilities.

Therefore, SA is understood as a holistic experience whose outcomes are both linguistic and other, and the aim is to understand them as a whole. I am aware, though, of difficulty involved in untangling linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes. In the following sections two factors will be introduced that have been reported to affect language learning in SA: the host context and program variables. These will be followed by a further section devoted to identity-related factors that determine second language learning in SA.

2.1. PROGRAM VARIABLES

Studies on how program variables might affect SLA in SA have focused on the one hand, on the effects of program length, and on the other, the program characteristics and their impact on the language learning process. Regarding the former, it is generally acknowledged that longer stays are more beneficial, even though there are no conclusive results about the most efficacious length. Elsewhere, Brecht *et al.* (1993) conducted a study with a sample of 658 US college and graduate students enrolled in a four-month program abroad in the former Soviet Union in 1984, concluding that “at least one semester of study in-country is required if any sizable percentage of students studying Russian are to reach at least a functional level of competence in speaking” (p. 17) and that some characteristics of the students are predictive of language gains abroad; for instance gender, previous learning of other foreign languages, and the command of grammar and reading skills.

In another study, Llanes *et al.* (2011) compared the effect of length of stay on the written and oral development of two groups of Spanish-speaking students learning English in the UK through the Erasmus program, concluding that there were no significant differences between those students who spent two months abroad and those who spent three.

Other program characteristics that have been reported as relevant in different studies are housing, the characteristics of the lessons, and the amount of time spent travelling. Since there is a considerable variety of programs, and they also interact with individual variables, it is difficult to establish general trends. However, the results warn about the possibility for program arrangements to unwittingly restrict opportunities for interaction with local people, by housing students together. Housing arrangements are also a delicate topic, since they are highly dependent on the dynamics of the host families or dormitory arrangements.

2.2. CONTEXT-RELATED DETERMINANTS. THE ROLE OF ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

Research on the host context has mainly focused on how the host culture, together with the program characteristics can shape opportunities for

language learning. Kinginger (2009) identifies three major settings in which students are believed to have variable access to communicative interaction: (1) educational institutions and classrooms; (2) place of residence; (3) service encounters and other informal contact with native speakers. Taken as a whole, the results show negative experiences arising from cultural differences, with a pronounced orientation towards gender, where females have to face challenging cultural practices which limit their opportunities to interact with native speakers (e.g., Hoffman-Hicks, 1999). Elsewhere, Kinginger (2011) states that study abroad is not a magic formula for language learning *per se* and recommends programs that foster observation, participation, and reflection by the students about the social, cultural, and linguistic context. Equally, Regan *et al.* (2009) point out that the assumption that the best way to learn a language is to go to the country where the language is spoken has gone mostly unexamined until recently.

DuFon & Churchill (2006) affirm that feelings of being rejected by the host culture or a certain degree of superficiality in the relationship with the host members can lead to withdrawal and reduce success in SLA. However, the same authors highlight the positions that the learners adopt when encountering sociocultural and linguistic differences, which may also play a role in restricting or facilitating their access to the target communities. In the present volume, in order to shed light on an alleged impact of the host context on SLA in SA, three different European settings for study abroad are considered.

A context-related relevant factor for this study is the concept of English as a lingua franca, defined by Jenkins (2017: 1) as “English used in intercultural communication chiefly, if not exclusively, among its non-native speakers from different first languages, and often in ways that differ substantially from native English”. Collaboratively constructed intelligibility is one of the key properties of ELF, given the priority in ELF interactions of ensuring mutual understanding and successful communication. It follows that formal accuracy based on native speaker language use is an expression of a rigid conception of language education. Focusing on accuracy in reproducing native speaker models can thus be equated to a rigid bridge connecting speakers to one single destination, a single local community, rather than the global community of ELF users (Llurda, 2015).

Cogo and Dewey (2012) make the point that although the code and context of ELF speakers might not be shared, “there is still something else that speakers of ELF can build on – this is, the awareness of being involved in an especially diverse linguacultural encounter, where speakers are predominantly using English as a second/additional language and thus tend to share a rather unsteady common ground” (Cogo and Dewey, 2012: 115). Consequently, the ideal speaker of ELF “is not a native speaker but a fluent bilingual speaker, who retains a national identity in terms of accent, and who also has the special skills required to negotiate understanding with another nonnative speaker” (Graddol, 2006: 87), in an encounter where the instability and lack of a single shared set of communicative norms binds speakers together, regardless of how transitory their encounters are (Cogo and Dewey 2012). Therefore, ELF research has repeatedly emphasized the importance of pragmatic strategies that pave the way for intercultural communication (Jenkins *et al.*, 2017).

In the European Union (EU), where the present study is located, English, in theory, has equal importance to other languages. However, in practice, it has a very different status, serving as the lingua franca of communication in a variety of professional domains and on “all levels of society in practically all walks of life” (Seidlhofer *et al.*, 2006: 8). However, and despite English being the de facto lingua franca, its meanings for different people across Europe can differ significantly since “the uses of the language as a wider means of communication are various and coexist with other languages with their own cultural and political claims” (Seidlhofer *et al.*, 2006: 8).

Widdowson’s conceptualization of ELF as a “virtual language”, “a system with a generative encoding potential whose properties can only be inferred from its variable use” (2016: 33), is illuminating in this sense. Needless to say, all languages have adaptive variability, since they have to serve communicative needs across different contexts; that is, there is a presupposed “availability to users of an unrealized meaning-making resource of a virtual language” (Widdowson, 2016: 32). ELF, therefore, is as communicatively normal as any other language despite the common assumption of its abnormality due to its deviation from “normal use”. However, the peculiarity of ELF stems from the fact that its users “also have to find ways of accommodating to each other across their different linguacultural backgrounds” (Widdowson 2016: 35), and here is where identity comes into play: “a highly politicized process in which social

actors claim, contest, and negotiate power and authority” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2008: 151). According to these authors, “[w]hen identities are forged in relation to language, they become bound up with language ideologies, which, as historically rooted and publicly articulated statements of cultural belief about language and its users, mediate between the interactional moment and broader socio-political structures” (p. 151). Today, conceptualizations of English as historically bound to certain nations are still in trend. However, the ELF phenomenon, whose extension has been exacerbated by globalization (Mauranen, for instance claims that “speakers of the roughly 7,000 recognized languages of the world can be in some kind of contact with English” [2017: 9]) may be a turn of the screw in our traditional understanding of language-related identification processes.

Kalocsái’s (2014) ethnographic analysis of a group of six Erasmus students in the Hungarian city of Szeged challenges the traditional understanding of the host context for SA formed by native speakers of the target language. The main objective of the study is to understand the functioning of the communities of practice that were formed by the Erasmus students, as well as the linguistic practices of this community, most especially, the role of English as a lingua franca. Kalocsái (2014) captures the ways in which social meanings are construed through ELF by a group of Erasmus students in Hungary, while getting inside the intricacies of using English as a common language among speakers from different countries. Kalocsái’s conclusion is that Erasmus exchange students settle in a “third space” (Duff, 2007) which calls for a reconsideration of the goals of the European Commission regarding the Erasmus exchange, towards facilitating student integration into local social networks. ELF is used on a daily basis and socializing practices into the linguistic code are employed when some students do not adapt to the rule. The author emphasizes that the democratic choice concerning the use of ELF “was not a threat to linguistic diversity: it helped the participants gain access to the multilingual setting, and once in there, it opened up the way for using other languages” (p. 135). The study shows how, by constructing meaning collaboratively, the Erasmus students in Szeged brought their community together, thus opening new directions for further investigations into the role of ELF in communities of international students.

2.3. IDENTITY-RELATED FACTORS

SA challenges the identities of the participants, enabling them to reshape a sense of self by experiencing both learning and living in a second language. Therefore, aspects related to the perception of student competence in a second language affect their perceptions about their personal competence, at a more general level, and hence their conception of who they are and who they want to be, through an improvement in self-confidence. Accordingly, this volume identifies an understanding of SA as a holistic experience whose outcomes are both linguistic and other, and the aim of this manuscript is to holistically understand them. Benson *et al.* (2013) for instance, claim that study abroad is already an experience that challenges identities for it requires students to negotiate them under new cultural circumstances. To add a second language to it, then, according to the authors, magnifies the challenge to identity, since the development of second language identities and language skills are interconnected.

Improvement in sociopragmatic competence, which implies managing the sociolinguistic norms of a given community, is directly connected to the ability to negotiate one's identity in an unfamiliar context and while using a second language. Therefore, to encounter situations where problems need to be solved in a second language requires some identity work. At the same time, having to solve problems, establish relationships, express desires, etc. in a second language will lead to readjustments in the participants' 'linguistic self', "which refers more to students' affiliations to the languages they know and their conceptions of their capacities as they are articulated in, for example, self-assessments of proficiency, goals, self-efficacy, motivation and beliefs" (Benson *et al.*, 2013).

Norton (2000), Block (2014), and Riley (2007) have referred to the complex, often impossible to dissect, intersection between identities and second languages as 'second language identities'. The term refers, in its essence, to all those aspects of an individual's identity which are connected to a second language in which they may be proficient and/or might use.

So far, research relative to study abroad and identity as an individual determining factor in SA has focused on three contexts: the North American (e.g., Kinginger, 2009; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005), the European (e.g., Coleman, 2005; Murphy-Lejeune, 2004; Ambrosi, 2013; Gallego-Balsà,

2014; Llorca *et al.*, 2016; VanMol, 2013, 2018), and the Asia-Pacific (e.g., Benson *et al.*, 2013; Jackson, 2008).

2.3.1. Study abroad as challenging the self

To shed light on the impact of language use in SA on the construction of the self, Pellegrino Aveni (2005: 11) gathers data from narrative journals, interviews, and questionnaires from 76 participants from the US who were enrolled in a study abroad program in Russia (the author refined the study to six primary case studies which at some points she complemented with accounts given by eleven other students). In her theorization of the self —“the mental representation of an individual’s own personal qualities and characteristics” (p.11), Pellegrino Aveni (2005: 11) draws on studies from clinical, developmental and social psychology, as well as sociology to show the features of individual subjectivities:

- i) it cannot be objective or factual, since self-knowledge is processed through the subjective eyes of the individual and his or her interlocutors.
- ii) it consists of perceptions alone (both the ones of the owner and the ones of his/her beholders)
- iii) it is neither monolithic, nor static – it undergoes constant growth and change, adapting and bending with new experiences.
- iv) the self is preserved by memory through the recording of events, which serve to build a system of knowledge and perceptions held by the individual about the self, a unit known as the ‘self-concept’ (which allows the individual a sense of security in his or her personal strengths and weaknesses, as well as a feeling of predictability about the self’s future capabilities)
- v) its nature is highly personal, and only its owner can be privy to its multiple facets and secret depths
- vi) it is impossible to define in isolation from its environment (since it is inextricably linked to the interpersonal relationships, society, and culture by which it is formed).

In the author’s account, language is the strongest social means by which one portrays oneself, a fact that becomes even more visible in the case

of people who can manage more than one language. This study recalls Block's (2014) conceptualization of SL identities, by specifying that the self suffers an alteration when exposed to a new culture and a new language, which Block characterized as a crisis of identity. In both cases, the alteration of the self and the identity crisis lead to a reevaluation and restructuring of one's identity. However, Pellegrino Aveni (2004) and Block (2014) do not agree on the fact that study abroad constitutes an experience that can lead to the reformulation of the self, with the latter being more skeptical than the former.

Pellegrino Aveni (2005) states that SA gives rise to a 'deprivation and/ or alteration' of the self because of SL use, and therefore "(t)he learner's self becomes trapped behind the communication barrier that results, and only an altered picture of the self, one filtered through this new, incomplete language, is projected by the learner" (ibid, p. 14). Consequently, when an individual uses a given language, he or she needs to make sure that their self is "enhanced, or at least, protected" (ibid, p. 16). However, SLs and different cultures lessen the amount of control learners have on self-presentation. For this reason, if a SL learner perceives that the security of their sense of self is threatened (i.e., differs from the one they imagine), they might experience anxiety and opt to keep silent, in an attempt to preserve their self-esteem. Thus, a conflict is created between the wish to communicate in the L2 and the need to protect the self.

This conflict might be resolved in different ways. One of them is to encounter situations in which they perceive that their intellectual and linguistic abilities are given legitimacy. Naturally, autonomy and control are achieved through experiencing situations in which the worth of the SL speaker is validated, and their efforts are appreciated by the interlocutors or, conversely, by experimenting with frightening situations that may menace the self and finally are better than expected. It seems to be a matter of empowerment, where one's self-confidence is improved through exposure to diverse SL situations. However, according to the author, an important role here is played by the attitudes and beliefs that the learner holds about themselves and others, the foreign language and the foreign culture as well as their own language and the language learning process.

In any case, it follows that belief in one's ability to perform successfully in a SL ('self-efficacy') and the assumption that one is worthy as an individual endowed with status and intelligence ('self-esteem'), lead

to a decreased need to protect the self, and thus, to more exposure to communicative situations in a SL.

In sum, learners' presentation of the self and their resulting language use is affected both by the environment, including interlocutors, and their own clues which affect their interpretations of the situations they encounter. Furthermore, learner self presentation, their resulting language use, and the environment are mutually related. Therefore, SA provides an opportunity to grow, both personally and linguistically.

To examine SA from a sociocultural point of view, Jackson (2008) conducted an ethnographic study with 15 Chinese students born in Hong Kong who were majoring in English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. At the time of the study, the participants were enrolled in a short-term study and residence abroad program in the UK, called the Special English Stream (SES). Jackson relies on different data sources: interviews, journal entries, surveys, observations, visual recordings, group discussions and fieldnotes. However, the author decides to focus on four female case studies in order to "better illustrate the connections between language, culture, identity, and context, and not lose sight of the personal dimension" (p. 69). The study reflects the enormous diversity and complexity of the individual journeys of each of the four women. Their personal stories, together with the social, political, historical, and linguistic realities of both Hong Kong and China account as possible factors in their construction of self. A common element is that the ability to manage English is a tool to access the global world. Consequently, the imagined identities of the participants in Jackson's study determine their motivation and investment in learning the language. That the students envisioned themselves as possible members of an imagined global community might have contributed to nurturing their knowledge of English.

Jackson suggests that expectations could have contributed to the reactions of the students regarding the culture shock they underwent; to which they respond in different ways. Their decision to resist or accept the target language and culture may have impacted the actual outcomes of the experience. Two of the participants, who showed a considerable degree of willingness to improve their knowledge of the target language and culture and to become a member of the host community, show a higher degree of change at the end of the SA —"their willingness to experiment with novel forms of expression was directly linked to their desire to make social connections across cultures, a deeper level of investment in enhancing their

social English and intercultural communication skills, a growing self-confidence, and a more open mindset” (p. 210). Therefore, we are cautioned not to take for granted that the mere exposure to a given language and a given culture alone will enhance the participants’ language and cultural learning; ongoing support throughout the sojourn is recommended to enhance the learners’ involvement in the host environment, which is affected by the dispositions, motives, attitudes, and actions of the participants.

Similarly, the awareness and appreciation of their own and their host culture shows different evolving patterns. On the one hand, two of the participants display fear because they feel that “their cultural identity and value system would be compromised if they drew closer to the host culture and language” (Jackson, 2008: 212). Consequently, they respond with aversion to new identities and restrain their contact with the members of the host culture. On the other hand, the other two women decide to deepen their connections to the host culture and “open themselves up to new ideas and worldviews, and experiment with novel forms of expressions and behaviors, as long as they did not conflict with their core values” (p. 213). These participants are those who report on enhanced sociopragmatic awareness, a deeper connection to English, and closer ties across cultures, as well as more satisfaction with their progress, to the extent that they agree to being interviewed in English after their sojourn abroad. However, and despite the resistance shown by two of the participants, the four report having gained “enhanced personal growth, self-confidence, and maturity; a higher degree of independence; a broader worldview; more awareness and acceptance of cultural differences; enhanced intercultural communication/social skills; and a greater appreciation of their own culture and identity” (p. 214).

On this note, the author makes a claim for further studies where both short-term and long-term SA students are investigated, and where both quantitative and qualitative methods are combined to shed light on the sociocultural, individual, and other factors that might influence the sojourns abroad. The present study falls into this category.

2.3.2. Neoliberal subjectivities in SA

This volume connects well with the neoliberal market-related outcomes of SA that have only been tentatively explored (e.g., Courtois, 2020;

Gao & Park, 2015). In this text, neoliberalism is understood as “an ideology within language education that views language as a commodity and promotes the idea that FL learning is connected to the acquisition of wealth, social status, and professionalism” (Ennser-Kananen *et al.*, 2017: 16) that “pertains to the way that practices of economics and discursive patternings of knowledge and learning interact” (Olssen, 2006: 217). In this context, geographical mobility through SA becomes a means for language learners to cultivate their human capital (Foucault, 1997) “considering their movement from one locale to another as an investment in their potential as a neoliberal subject” (Gao & Park, 2015: 81). Alongside motivation, the construct of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) enables the researcher not only to consider the cognitive and psychological orientations of language learners, but also to critically delve into the complexity of identity and the interplay of the desires (Darvin & Norton, 2023) that determine language learners to devote time and material resources to learning a SL.

In light of the above, my understanding of SA goes beyond the traditionally confronted understandings of SA as motivated by the endeavor to achieve better employment prospects (Robertson *et al.*, 2011) vs. study abroad as a means to accumulate social and cultural capital (Waters & Brooks, 2011) showing how SA, as one of the main assets of the internationalization of higher education, is guided by both pragmatic and ideological policy rationales (Dvir & Yemini, 2017) that ultimately converge within individual identities which respond to the need of the neoliberal market in search of individuals that show both capability and willingness to transcend social, cultural, linguistic, and economic borders with ease.

Subjected to the currents of the neoliberal markets, SA, a “self-governing practice that aligns with dominant discourses promoting voluntarist attitudes to labour mobility” (Courtois, 2020: 237), traditionally associated with the elites, is discursively normalized as a desirable asset for all. This is due to temporary mobility related to SA becoming a way to forge identities that integrate and display both the participants’ capacity and eagerness to be mobile subjects in the future (Murphy-Lejeune, 2004) since the mere fact that “one has made the deliberate, planned effort to move to the place associated with valued forms of linguistic capital” (Gao & Park, 2015: 81), In this light, language competences become human capital *per se*, that is, “individual knowledge components or

skills” (Flubacher *et al.*, 2014: 4) that are ultimately exchangeable for money, in a process Heller (2010) describes as language commodification.

In a study with North-American SA students, Zemach-Bersin (2009) shows how the participants articulate SA “as having a social currency or commercial value that students can both literally and metaphorically profit from” (p.305), which predisposes learners to a certain way of thinking (Darvin & Norton, 2015) and which structures learners’ decisions to invest in or divest from a particular language with the ultimate aim to access “a community of the imagination, a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future” (Norton, 2013: 3).

Similarly, Murphy-Lejeune (2004) relies on three case studies with international students participating in three European mobility programs: Erasmus university exchanges, bilateral language assistant programs, and a French *grande école* -the Ecole Européene des Affaires de Paris —EAP international program to conclude that study abroad is a rather ambiguous enterprise in university education, whose impacts and outcomes are complex and not easy to assess.

Murphy-Lejeune’s (2004) study questions the impact of the experiences of these young sojourners in their overall biographical and learning trajectories and calls for more appropriate knowledge of the experience, as well as of the factors that push individuals outside their national borders. The study offers a compelling insight into migration and mobility as two faces of the same phenomenon, which, in the face of globalization have given birth to new migrant profiles. Among these we can find the highly skilled worker, whose migration might be temporary, and who is in search of professional added value or an individual who moves for study reasons. The European mobile student seems to prepare the way for this new type of migrant, for whom migration becomes continuous.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 comprises the research methodology of the study. Firstly, mixed methods research as the paradigm in which the study is embedded is discussed. The instruments, the procedure, and the analysis are considered. Finally, the design of the study is explained, offering a detailed account of the Erasmus program, the locations, and the participants.

As a reminder to the reader, it is important to recall that this volume aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Which social, cultural, and identity-related factors are determinant in language learning processes through SA across three different locations in Europe?

RQ2: What is the impact on foreign language development of each of these factors as reported by international university students in Finland, Romania, and Catalonia?

3.1. MIXED METHODS

Mixed methods research, which has also been called the “third research paradigm” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 15) and “third methodological movement” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003: 5), has been defined by Johnson et al (2007: 123) as:

the type of research in which a researcher or a team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.

According to Creswell & Plano Clark (2011: 5), a study that follows mixed methods research displays the following characteristics:

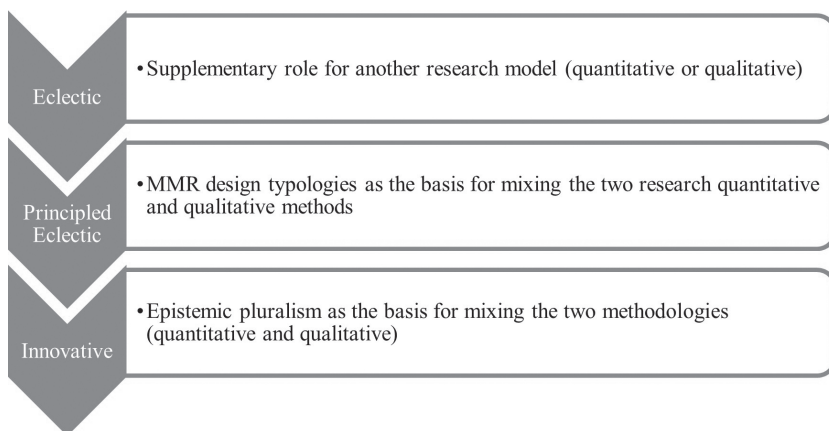
- collects and analyzes persuasively and rigorously both qualitative and quantitative data (based on research questions);

- mixes (or integrates or links) the two forms of data concurrently by combining them (or merging them), sequentially by having one build on the other, or embedding one within the other;
- gives priority to one or both forms of data (in terms of what the research emphasizes);
- use these procedures in a single study or in multiple phases of a program of study;
- frames these procedures within philosophical worldviews and theoretical lenses; and
- combines the procedures into specific research designs that direct the plan for conducting the study.

Noteworthy also are the six mixed methods research designs identified by Creswell & Plano Clark (2011): the convergent parallel, the explanatory sequential, the exploratory sequential, the embedded, the transformative, and the multiphase designs. The differences between the first four rely on the sequence of methods and on the purpose of the design, while the transformative and the multiphase design combine different sequences of the previously mentioned four. The present study follows a convergent parallel design which gives equal emphasis to both types of data and where quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses were conducted at the same time, after which the two data sets were merged, and finally further analysis and comparisons were performed. This design was used “to triangulate the methods by directly comparing and contrasting quantitative statistical results with qualitative findings for corroboration and validation purposes” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011: 77). A different model is presented by Riazi & Candlin (2014), where three categories of mixed methods research are included, as can be observed in Figure 1:

According to Riazi (2016), the first category, *eclectic*, “applies to those studies where researchers aim at expanding the scope of their research by adding some breadth or depth to a predominantly qualitative or quantitative study without necessarily mixing the two methods in principle” (p. 34). On the other hand, the *principled eclectic* category “represents a step forward compared with ‘eclectic’ in terms of consistency and design rigor and the use of principles underlying mixing methods from a pragmatic perspective” (Riazi, 2014: 38). Finally, *innovative* mixed methods research studies have a clear purpose and logic for mixing methods from

Figure 1: Visual adaptation of Riazi & Cadlin's (2014) three categories of mixed methods studies



quantitative and qualitative approaches, and “they are also able to show how this mixture of the methods is done genuinely and in response to the need of interweaving the different types of knowledge related to different aspects or dimensions of the research problem. Mixed Methods Research studies in this category therefore attend to different aspects of the research problem as they pertain to an integrated whole”. (Ibid, p. 38).

Fetters (2016) affirms that despite mixed methods appearing to be an emerging methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative methodology is nothing new. However, the novelty remains in its systematic research approach. Hashemi (2012: 206) states that even though “over the past two decades, mixed methods research has attracted particular attention in social and behavioral research and a good number of studies have addressed theoretical and methodological aspects of integrating qualitative and quantitative methods”, the integration of the two methods has seldom been approached by applied linguistics research. However, the author sees great potential in using mixed methods research in applied linguistics in that it allows for the exploration of complex systems, since a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study can be achieved by qualitatively exploring processes and quantitatively measuring outcomes. Similarly, Dörnyei (2011), drawing on Mertens (2005) states that “mixed methods have particular value when we want to examine an

issue that is embedded in a complex educational or social context” (p. 164). Riazi & Candlin (2014: 168) also claim that “(t)he systematic use of MMR to investigate language-related issues can enhance knowledge in our field, but only if we can create a research space in which this can happen” and Riazi (2016: 34) makes the point that:

In applied linguistics, when language-related problems are conceptualized to have different layers derived from different theoretical perspectives, it should be possible to use and mix quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate those different layers and produce more integrative inferences. Such mixing of methods therefore is closely related to the conceptualization stage and mirrors innovations in the way the research problem is conceptualized and would therefore be perfectly consistent with a paradigmatic orientation.

The present volume relies on a study that makes use of mixed methods research by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods at every stage. In the first place, it responds to research questions that could not be answered in a more complete way by using purely qualitative or quantitative research. Secondly, it uses two types of sampling, with a high number of participants who answered the questionnaire, and a reduced sample of telling cases included in the interviews. Mixed methods are also used at the two stages of data collection and also in the analysis which includes both statistical procedures and thematic analysis. Finally, interpretations are made, and conclusions are drawn based on results obtained from both quantitative and qualitative data and through the combination of both methods.

The main reason why this project uses mixed methods is because I have confidence in what McKim (2017) has called “the perceived value of mixed methods studies”, defined as “a methodology’s ability to make sense of the world, help readers better understand the study, increase confidence in findings, improve accuracy and completeness, and inform and contribute to overall validity” (p. 203), in line with Blommaert & van de Vijver (2013: 2):

It is the shared nature of the object (of study) that should make us realize that the views of that object from within our disciplines are necessarily partial. Different views represent different sides and features of the object, *but it is the same object*. And an object as complex as humans in society

and culture surely tolerates multiple and different views, which, together, might perhaps bring us closer to a comprehensive culture”.

On a similar note, Cots *et al.* (2008) advocate combining surveys and discourse analysis to examine the linguistic ideologies of language teachers in secondary schools, by affirming that: “discourse analysis and surveys represent two ways to understand research in social sciences: the *positivist* one, which aims at establishing connections between variables, and the *interpretative* one, more concerned with observing and describing phenomena (p. 63).¹ Furthermore, Cots & Llorca (2010: 63) combined questionnaires and discourse analysis of seminars with teachers in order to explore the construct of interculturality in education with the assumption that there is a need “to work hand in hand with all the resources that are provided by different research traditions”.

Connected to the above, in the case of this study, a mixed methods framework was chosen because I believed that a single data source was not enough to tell the whole story. Furthermore, I was interested in shedding light not only on the similarities between two types of data, but also on the paradoxes and contradictions that might arise from combining surveys and interviews. This does not indicate a lack of confidence in the validity of purely quantitative or qualitative results. However, my purpose was to achieve the most detailed picture of the phenomenon, one that would lead to understanding the impact of study abroad and the processes that conduce to the outcomes, for which I perceived mixed methods would be the best approach.

In connection to the above, Riazi & Candlin (2014: 168) seem to foresee an increase in the number of articles employing mixed methods despite the need to continue discussing the paradigm: “while we envisage that there will be increasing numbers of studies with an MMR orientation in language teaching and learning journals, nonetheless, more theoretical discussion of the paradigm and its constituents remains very much on the agenda”. More recent publications employing mixed methods research, such as for example Cots *et al.*'s (2016) and Llorca *et al.*'s (2016) study of the impact of academic mobility on intercultural competence and European identity have been encouraging in this respect.

¹ The author's translation.

3.1.1. Research instruments

To gather the data, two different instruments were used: a questionnaire, mainly composed of Likert-scale questions and a semi-structured interview. PRE and POST versions of all the research instruments were used for collecting data, at the beginning and at the end of the sojourn abroad.

3.1.1.1. *The questionnaire*

For eliciting the quantitative data for the present project, a questionnaire was designed (Appendix 1). Brown (2001: 6) has defined questionnaires as “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting among existing answers”. The popularity of questionnaires, according to Dörnyei (2003: 1) “is due to the fact that they are easy to construct, extremely versatile, and uniquely capable of gathering a large amount of information quickly in a form that is readily processable”.

For the questionnaire, Likert-scale questions (1 to 5 scales) were employed. It consisted of a section with demographic information followed by 56 questions (in the version used at the beginning of the sojourn abroad) and 68 questions (in the POST version). All the questions, except for three (1, 11, and 19) were statements to which the participants had to express their opinion by selecting a number that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Question 1 asked the students to write 5 words about the Erasmus program, question 11 had to be answered choosing YES or NO, and question 19 required the participants to choose between 2 items.

The items of the questionnaire were created drawing on different sources. First of all, I focused on a proposal for the HORIZON 2020 program *Youth mobility: opportunities, impacts, policies*, led by Prof. David Block and written by different members of the research group Cercle de Lingüística Aplicada (based at Universitat de Lleida), together with academics from other European Universities, among them Oulu University of Applied Sciences and the Bucharest Economic Studies University. The project aimed at understanding socioeconomic stratification in European societies and the impact of mobility in education, employment,

and non-institutional settings. Unfortunately, the application was not successful. However, as I previously mentioned, I was able to develop ideas for the questionnaire items by reading the proposal. Secondly, another source of inspiration was a previous questionnaire employed by Cots *et al.* (2016) and by Llurda *et al.* (2016) in order to examine the impact of Erasmus mobility on the linguistic and intercultural outcomes of Erasmus students from Catalonia who were spending a sojourn abroad in different European settings. Finally, besides the literature included above, I drew on previous questionnaires, such as those employed by Hammer *et al.* (2003) in a project on intercultural sensitivity, and Huguet & Llurda (2001) in a project on language attitudes of school children in a Spanish/Catalan bilingual context.

The questionnaire contained items dealing with the following topics, directly linked to the specific objectives of the study:

- Imagined identities and European citizenship: questions 2 to 17 and questions 22 to 32.
- Multilingualism, language learning and attitudes to languages: questions 18 to 21 and questions 46 to 56.
- Investment, expectations, and perceived outcomes of the stay at personal/academic/professional level: questions 33 to 45
- Language use, linguistic practices, and perceived language-related outcomes (added in the POST-version): questions 56 to 68.

Therefore, the only differences between the PRE and the POST versions of the questionnaire were in the different verbal tenses used to express aspects related to the students' expected experiences (future in the PRE version and past in the POST version), and the addition of 13 questions in the POST questionnaire, in which the participants were asked to reflect about their experience. The questionnaire was distributed in English in the three contexts, but the participants in the Lleida group were given the option to answer the questionnaire in English or Spanish, according to their preference. Questionnaires given to participants in the three different contexts also differed in the specific mentioning of the local context or the local language, which in the case of Lleida included references to both local languages: Catalan and Spanish, which made this particular version longer than the others, since some items dealing with the local language were duplicated to include both, Catalan and Spanish. At the

beginning of the sojourn abroad the questionnaire was distributed on paper, while at the end it was distributed online through *Google forms*. Students were contacted by email or Facebook Messenger, and they were sent a link that allowed them access to the online questionnaire.

3.1.1.2. *The interview*

The second research instrument used was a semi-structured interview (see Appendix 2). According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009: 1), “(t)he qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations.” Through interviews, “(w)e as researchers ask participants to be selective in (1) their telling, (2) their interpretation of experience, (3) their representation of themselves, and (4) the assumptions that they make about who that self is (during the telling)” (Mazzei, 2013: 735). Consequently, (w)hat emanates from such centering is a supposedly coherent narrative that represents truth about the person and their lived experiences” (ibid., p. 735). As mentioned above, the type of interview that was employed is semi-structured, in which “(a)lthough there is a set of prepared guiding questions and prompts, the format is open-ended and the interviewee is encouraged to elaborate on the issues raised in an exploratory manner” (Dörnyei, 2011: 136). Research interviews produce a substantially different type of knowledge when compared to surveys (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). For instance, Dörnyei (2003: 129) makes the point that “although questionnaires offer a versatile and highly effective means of data collection, the kinds of insight they can generate are limited by several factors (...) in that they offer little scope for explorative, in-depth analyses of complex relationships or for doing justice to the subjective variety of individual life”. It seems to me the nature of interviews might overcome these limitations.

The interview was designed to follow the same themes as in the questionnaire. The main aim was to further explore some of its questions. The interview was given shape with the aim to expand on those questions that could not be expanded on in the questionnaire. The idea was to enquire about the “why”, “how” and “what for” and to give participants space to explain their reasons, practices, expectations, hopes, and perceived outcomes, as well as the ways they imagined themselves, and what the

contribution of the Erasmus experience would be in the construction of the type of individuals they wanted to become.

The PRE interview consisted of 18 questions. However, since the design was semi-structured, the order of the questions was slightly altered, and the participants were invited to expand on their answers and add any further idea they had. This interview was conducted in person, often individually and occasionally in pairs or groups of three and lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The participants were given the following language options for the interviews: Spanish, Catalan, Romanian, or English, according to their location. However, only a few Spanish participants and one Moldavian participant agreed to be interviewed in their mother-tongue. In fact, the Moldavian participants only wanted to be interviewed in Romanian at the beginning of her sojourn abroad, and preferred Spanish for the POST-interview.

The POST-interview had 46 questions (see Appendix 3), many more than the initial version, since many questions related to the stay and to the future perspectives of the participants. At the end of the sojourn, the interviews, which lasted between 30 and 40 minutes, were conducted through Skype and audio-recorded using SkypeRecorderLite.

3.1.2. Procedure

For the design of the questionnaire, an extensive reading of the literature on language learning in study abroad was carried out, enabling the development of questions based on these readings. Afterwards, some former study abroad participants were invited to answer questions about their experience in written form. This questionnaire was answered by 26 people.

After the first version of the questionnaire was designed, with the intention of using it to collect data for the project, it was piloted with 31 people who were asked to note any comment, concern, or idea they might have. All the volunteers who agreed to participate in the pilot study had had previous mobility experience, though they were different in length and nature. The main aim of the pilot study was to ensure the items were understandable. Furthermore, the volunteers were invited to contribute by adding questions they might have considered necessary in the questionnaire. Also, the length of the questionnaire was checked at this stage. The piloting stage resulted in ambiguous words and sentences

being reformulated, instructions made clearer, and the overall appearance of the questionnaire improved.

The research was conducted during the academic year 2015/2016. Since this is a two-phase study, the data were collected at two different moments: the first being the beginning of the study abroad sojourn (between one and three weeks from the arrival of the students) and the second at its end (between one and four weeks from the return of the students to their home countries). In the first phase, the data were collected *in situ*, meaning in Oulu, Bucharest, and Lleida. In Oulu and Bucharest, the questionnaire data were mostly collected on the international student welcome day organized by the university, or by the university together with the ESN (Erasmus Student Network). In Lleida, most of the questionnaire data were collected at the end of a two-week introductory Catalan course. At the end of the sojourn abroad, the data were collected while each of the participants was in his/ home country or on holidays, since it coincided with holiday periods.

The International Office of each of the five universities was contacted a few months before the start of the academic year, and in all cases the answers were positive. However, not all of them seemed willing to cooperate to the same extent and not all of them required the same process. Fortunately, the academic year started on different dates at each of the three universities, so I could spend at least three weeks in each setting, collecting the data, and cohabiting with the students during their first days at their host universities. At the moment of collection of quantitative data (the questionnaire), the participants were informed about the study and invited to formulate any questions they had. Afterwards, they were notified about the length of the questionnaire, and the consent form, and were requested to consider volunteering to be interviewed by affirmatively answering the last question. The second phase involved contacting the volunteers for the interview through email or telephone to agree on a date and time. Once all the data from the PRE-test were obtained, they were introduced in an SPSS datasheet for statistical analysis. In the middle of the semester, those students who were interviewed received a "Thank you" card and a notebook to thank them for their participation.

The following step consisted in transforming the paper-based questionnaire into an online questionnaire for the students to be able to respond to it upon their return to their home countries. Therefore, at the end of their sojourn abroad, the participants received a link through email or *Facebook Messenger*, which gave them access to a *Google Forms* ques-

tionnaire. Once more, the Lleida group was offered the opportunity to receive the Spanish version of the questionnaire if they preferred. The answers were collected in an Excel data sheet, and transferred to the SPSS file that contained the responses obtained at the beginning of the sojourn abroad. Some of the students were also interviewed through Skype and the interviews were audio-recorded with the tool *SkypeRecorderLite*.

At the same time, since the number of Erasmus students in Lleida was quite limited, international European students arriving at the university during the second semester were contacted and invited to participate in the study upon their arrival. Therefore, this phase consisted of collecting two sets of data. On the one hand, the students who had already spent one semester abroad were sent a link through which they could access and respond to the POST online questionnaire, and some of them participated in the POST interviews performed through Skype. On the other hand, international students arriving at Lleida University for the second semester were invited to answer the PRE-questionnaire and participate in the PRE interview. Through the three previous stages, some of the data were continuously processed concurrently with the other steps.

The last step was to contact the participants who spent the whole year abroad (or the second semester in the case of Lleida students) upon their return and invite them to answer the online questionnaire and participate in the POST interviews. This took place during the summer of 2016.

3.1.3. Analysis

As indicated above, only European participants who had completed both questionnaires were included in the analysis. In the first place, descriptive statistics were employed to examine the demographic data.

For the inferential analysis, two independent variables were employed: 1) the SA experience (beginning and end) and 2) the context of the stay. The dependent variables correspond to the items included in the questionnaire, which were related to one of the following categories:

- imagined identities and European citizenship: questions 2 to 17 and questions 22 to 32
- multilingualism, language learning and attitudes to languages: questions 18 to 21 and questions 46 to 56

- investment, expectations and perceived outcomes of the stay at personal/academic/professional level: questions 33 to 45
- language use, linguistic practices, and perceived language-related outcomes (added in the POST-version): questions 56 to 68.

A Shapiro-Wilk test was run for all the items in order to see whether the distribution of the data was normal. The results indicated that the data violated the assumption of normality. Consequently, the responses have been analyzed by means of non-parametric tests. In the first place, a Mann Whitney U test was run to see whether there were any significant differences between the responses of female and male participants. Secondly, a Kruskal-Wallis test was used in order to identify any differences between the three contexts in both the PRE and POST-tests. In those cases where significant differences were detected, Pair-wise tests were employed in order to determine in which contexts there were significant differences. Finally, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to examine the evolution between the PRE and the POST-test. This test was run first for the combined sample, and in some cases, each group was considered separately.

Thematic analysis was employed for the interviews, since the aim was to deal with narratives voiced at the beginning and end of the mobility process. Thematic analysis has been identified by Block (2010) as one of three distinct ways to deal with narratives, together with structural analysis, and dialogic/performative analysis, “primarily a focus on the content of what is said, leaving to the side other aspects of narrative, such as how it is produced” (Block, 2010: 340). Since the main aim was to interpret meaning from text data, all the selected interviews were transcribed using basic transcription conventions. Initially, orthographic transcription appeared as the most feasible technique due to time limitations and the important volume of data to be processed and analyzed. However, after realizing that an orthographic transcription would situate the event of the interview and the text at considerable distance, I decided to adopt a few transcription conventions, which do not detail the nuances of the narratives but captures their essence in a better way than the orthographic transcription (see section “Transcription conventions” at the beginning of the volume).

Due to the questionnaire being designed before the interview and since the latter was meant to corroborate, validate, or show contradictions with the former, first, information related to the different themes around which the questionnaire was built was searched for in the interviews. After this

step, the transcripts were analyzed again to see if other relevant themes emerged. If this was the case, new themes were added to those of the questionnaire. Finally, the results of the quantitative and the qualitative analysis were triangulated.

3.2. CONTEXTUALIZATION

Since this study compares students from different nationalities that were enrolled in a SA period in three European contexts, it is fundamental to introduce the characteristics of the mobility scheme that allowed the students to go abroad, as well as the profiles of the participants. Similarly, a description of the intricacies of the countries and the institutions where the participants spent their SA sojourn will deepen the reader's understanding of the circumstances of the SA experience.

3.2.1. The Erasmus program

The present volume is concerned with SA within the European Union through the Erasmus Program (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) which started in 1987 with 3244 students from 11 countries (Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2013). According to the European Commission (2020), in the academic year 2019-2020, despite the mobility restrictions triggered by the COVID19 pandemic, 312.800 student mobilities were achieved and out of this total, 237.800 students went abroad to study in higher education institutions within Programme Countries (EU Member States and third countries associated to the Programme), “a sharp drop from the previous year attributable to the pandemic” (European Commission, 2020).

This mobility is made possible by the Erasmus+ Programme, which has at its core fostering sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion. Furthermore, it aims to strengthen European identity and active citizenship. According to the European Commission (2023), the specific objectives of the programme are the following:

- promote learning mobility of individuals and groups, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion and equity, excellence, creativity

and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of education and training;

- promote non-formal and informal learning mobility and active participation among young people, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of youth;
- promote learning mobility of sport staff, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of sport organisations and sport policies.

The Erasmus+ Programme includes 4 different actions: Key Action 1: Learning mobility for individuals, Key Action 2: Cooperation among organizations and institutions, Key Action 3: Support and policy development and cooperation, and Jean Monnet Actions. In particular, I am concerned with the first: Key Action 1 (Learning mobility for individuals) which is expected to “bring positive and long-lasting effects on the participants and participating organisations involved, as well as on the policy systems in which such activities are framed” (European Commission 2023). One or more of the following outcomes is expected to be achieved by pupils, students, trainees, apprentices, adult learners, and young people that participate in the mobility activities supported under this Key Action (European Commission, 2023):

- improved learning performance;
- enhanced employability and improved career prospects;
- increased sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
- increased self-empowerment and self-esteem;
- improved foreign language and digital competences;
- enhanced intercultural awareness;
- more active participation in society;
- enhanced positive interactions with people from different backgrounds;
- better awareness of the European project and the EU values;
- increased motivation for taking part in future (formal/non-formal) education or training after the mobility period abroad.

3.2.2. Location

The three settings were chosen according to the aim of examining three contexts in Europe believed to be different at the cultural, social, economic, and linguistic level. The objective was to examine whether the SA experience was shaped in a different way by the choice of context or whether the context played a substantial role.

Regarding differences between contexts, despite such differences being well-established in the collective imaginary, they are far from empirically founded. Nevertheless, I contend that they exist and operate at many levels. For instance, at a geographical level, the United Nations Statistics Division² separates the European continent into Eastern, Western, Northern, and Southern Europe. Each of the three chosen contexts belongs to a different area: Romania is situated in Eastern Europe, Finland in Northern Europe, and Catalonia belongs to Southern Europe. Furthermore, the countries also differ at the cultural and linguistic levels. For example, Catalonia and Romania were at some point part of the Roman empire, unlike Finland. This has affected the three countries both culturally and linguistically. While Finland's first official language is Finnish (a language totally unrelated to the Latin family of languages), Romanian, Catalan, and Spanish belong to the Latin family and therefore, the mutual intelligibility between them is significantly higher, especially between Spanish and Catalan, and to a lesser extent between Spanish and Romanian and Catalan and Romanian. However, despite the three being Roman languages, they also belong to three different linguistic subdivisions. While Spanish is included in the Ibero-Romance category, Catalan is included in the Occitano-Romance group, and Romanian belongs to the more distant category of Eastern-Romance languages. On the other hand, Finnish does not belong to the Indo-European language family, but to the Finnic group (which includes Estonian and a few minority languages surrounding the Baltic Sea) belonging to the Ural family of languages (which includes, for instance, Hungarian). Therefore, Finnish is a language with almost no similarities with most European languages. Romanian would be a more familiar language for many of the international students visiting Bucharest

² <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/> (Access 21st February 2023)

from a country where a Romance language is used (e.g., France, Italy, or Spain). However, when compared to the other Romance languages, the international projection and prestige of Romanian is far from that of French or Spanish. Finally, while Spanish and Catalan are similar, the colossal dimension of the former, nationally and internationally, significantly overcomes the latter, which is a minority language within Spain.

Other elements that account for differences between the three countries can be found in religion. While Finland is mainly Protestant, Romania is included in the Eastern-Orthodox group of countries, while Spain has traditionally been a Catholic country.

Finally, from an economic and political point of view, the three countries belong to the European Union. However, while Spain accessed the EU in 1986, Finland was admitted in 1995, and Romania did not enter the EU until 2007. Furthermore, while Finland and Catalonia's currency is the euro and both belong to the Schengen area, Romania is not yet in the Eurozone, neither does it belong to the Schengen zone. There follows a brief presentation of each of the three contexts.

3.2.2.1. Oulu - Finland

According to the official webpage of the city hall of Oulu³, this city of 200,000 inhabitants is known as the capital of Northern Finland and is characterized by the presence of hi-tech industry. Furthermore, English is very present in daily life, and most of the population of the city are able to understand and speak English besides Finnish and Swedish (both of them compulsory in the education system). There are two universities in the city of Oulu where the research was conducted: the University of Oulu, with approximately 13,500 students and 8 faculties covering all areas of knowledge and Oulu University of Applied Sciences, with approximately 9,000 students, offering degrees and masters in the areas of culture, natural resources, business and information, health and social care, and engineering.

The University of Oulu had 13,500 students in 2018, according to its official website⁴, which also defined it as “an international science

³ <https://www.ouka.fi/oulu/english> (Access: 10th October 2018)

⁴ <http://www.oulu.fi/university/node/34711> (Access: 14th October 2018)

university which creates innovation for the future, well-being, and knowledge through multidisciplinary research and education”. According to the same webpage, the university receives over 600 exchange students from all over the world every year. This is fostered by the fact that all faculties offer courses in English for incoming exchange students. Furthermore, since each faculty has an international coordinator, students are encouraged to contact the department’s exchange officer to convey any concerns regarding courses in English. Finally, the University of Oulu claims on its webpage that there is no need-to-know Finnish, since exchange students attend classes in English, but it also affirms there is the possibility to take Finnish language courses. By 2018, a minimum of a B2 level of English was required to be able to apply. However, in 2015, the level required in English was a B1.

The Oulu University of Applied Sciences, which combines theoretical studies with professional skills, has over 9,000 students. In the academic year 2015-2016, it received 323 international students, 209 of whom were part of the Erasmus+ program. The University offers two full degree programs in English: *International Business* and *Information Technology*; and one Master’s degree program: *Education Entrepreneurship*. Besides, all degrees and master’s programs offer some courses in English.

3.2.2.2. Bucharest - Romania

Bucharest, the capital city of Romania, is situated in the South-Eastern part of the country. According to the United Nations Statistics Division⁵, the population of Bucharest in 2016 was 1,836,000 inhabitants. With a vibrant cultural life, the city is a dynamic enclosure in Eastern Europe, where European standards can be found in affordable goods and services. The majority of the population in Bucharest speak Romanian as a first language. However, English is extensively spoken, especially among the university community.

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies defines itself as “one of the most important universities in Romania and South-Eastern Europe”⁶.

⁵ <http://data.un.org/Default.aspx> (Access: 14th October 2018)

⁶ <http://international.ase.ro/admission/about/> (Access: 14th October 2018)

With almost 22,000 students enrolled in 12 faculties, the university offers eight Bachelor programs in English (*Business Administration; Management; Marketing; Finance and Banking; Accounting and Management Information Systems; Economic Informatics; Business Administration in Trade, Tourism, Services and Quality Management; International Economics and Business*), one in French (*Business Administration*) and one in German (*Business Administration*). Furthermore, it also offers 11 master programs in English, one in French and one in German, as well as three international MBA programs, with double degrees, accredited internationally: two are taught in English (Romanian-Canadian MBA and Romanian-French MBA), and one in German. The university webpage states that each year approximately 600 degree-seeking foreign students from non-EU countries, and approximately 100 incoming students on mobility programs are welcomed by the institution.

With a total number of 31,444 students, out of whom 873 were international in 2016, Bucharest University claims to be considered “the most important institution for learning, research, and culture in Romania”⁷. It offers a total of 93 Bachelor programs, from which five are taught in English (*Business Administration, Physics, International Relations and European Studies, Pedagogy, and Political Science*), and 218 master’s programs, out of which 26 are in English and five in French.

3.2.2.3. Lleida - Catalonia

Lleida is a city in the autonomous community of Catalonia, situated in the North-Eastern corner of Spain. The city is approximately 160 kilometers from Barcelona. According to the National Catalan Institute of Statistics (IDESCAT, 2017), in 2017 it had a population of 137,327 inhabitants. The city and the area where it is situated are characterized linguistically by a cohabitation of Catalan and Spanish. According to IDESCAT (2013) 94% of the population in Catalonia could understand Catalan and 4% of inhabitants were unable to understand the language, whereas 80% were able to speak it, although the percentage of those who actually use it in their everyday interactions is undetermined. According to the same in-

⁷ <https://www.unibuc.ro/despre-ub/ub-astazi/scurta-prezentare/> (Access: 19th November 2018)

stitution, in 2013, 36% of the Catalan population identified with Catalan and used Catalan on a daily basis, while 48% identified with Spanish and 51% regularly used it. Finally, 7% of the population identified and habitually used both languages. The rest of the population identified and used other languages, such as Arabic or Romanian. This situation offers a sharp contrast with the idea of a standard Spanish city where Spanish is the dominant language that inspires many Erasmus students prior to their coming to Lleida. The bilingual environment of the city has a deep influence on the linguistic ecology at the university. Finally, the knowledge of English among the population in Lleida, despite having increased in recent years, is still limited, especially outside the university context.

With a total of 12,538 students, the University of Lleida offers 31 Bachelor programs and 54 master's programs. In the academic year 2015-2016, the institution received 306 mobility students, of whom 130 were participants in the Erasmus+ program.⁸

As for the linguistic situation at the university, the information offered on the official website has undergone certain modifications in the last years, related mainly to its understanding and description of the linguistic situation at the university. For instance, as the following extract shows, at the beginning of November 2018, the section on the official website devoted to tuition languages presented a relaxed situation, in which the relationship between Catalan and Spanish at the university appeared to be harmonious:

The two official Languages in Catalonia are Catalan and Spanish (also known as Castilian). The latter is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. Catalan belongs to the same language family as Spanish, Italian, French and Portuguese. In Catalonia, Catalan is widely spoken in public life, the mass media, trade, and business. Most Catalan people can speak both Catalan and Spanish. Both official languages are respected at the universities in Catalonia.

Teaching staff and students have the right to express themselves in the official language that they prefer. Lectures are taught in Catalan or in Spanish, depending on the lecturer, and students have the right to use the language they prefer. (...)

In general, someone who speaks Spanish will not take long to understand Catalan. Therefore, students who spend several months in Lleida

⁸ <http://www.udl.cat/ca/organs/secretaria/memoria/> (Access: 10th January 2019)

can improve their Spanish and at the same time, if they wish to do so, learn another European language such as Catalan.

However, since November 2018, increased importance has been given to the role of languages at the university, with a progression towards making more explicit the fact that Catalan is the most used language and that the instructors might not want to change the language “once the course has already started”. Finally, it is clearly stated that the university “helps students with their linguistic integration into the university community”, and students are encouraged to take a Catalan language course at one of the 150 foreign universities that offer Catalan courses all over the world.

As for the courses in English, it states only that the different faculties offer some courses taught in English, which should be consulted on the links of each faculty or with the international coordinator in each faculty.

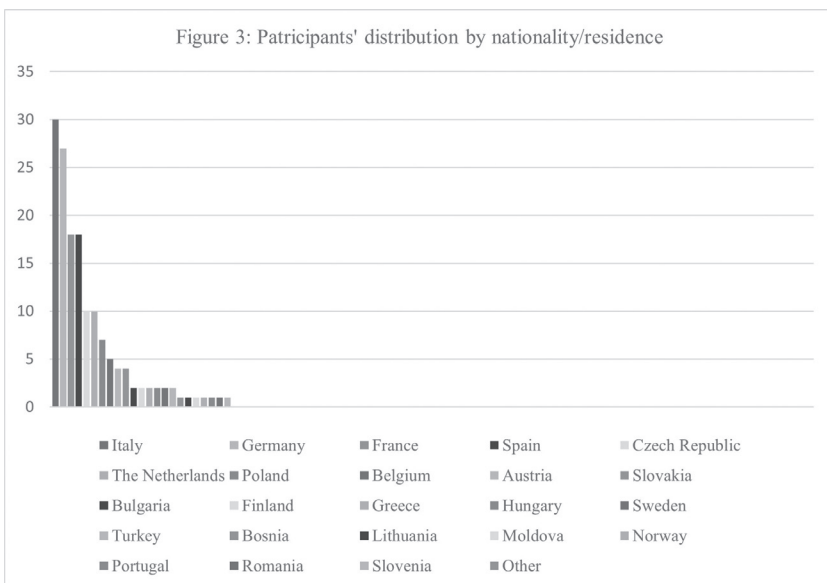
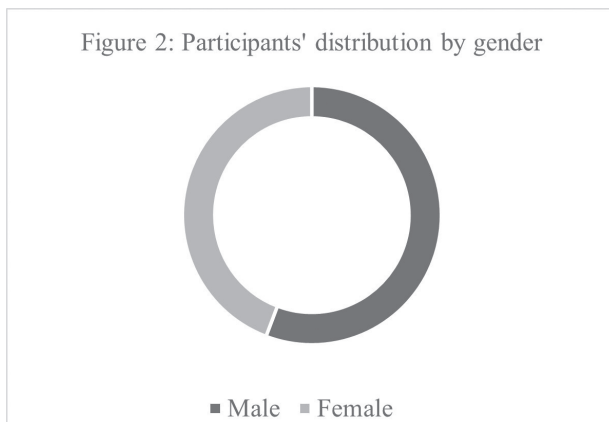
3.2.3. Participants

Since the number of participants in the quantitative and the qualitative data collection is different, this section will be divided into two sub-sections: the first describes the students who answered the questionnaire, while the second focuses on those who had answered the questionnaire and took part in the interviews.

3.2.3.1. Quantitative data

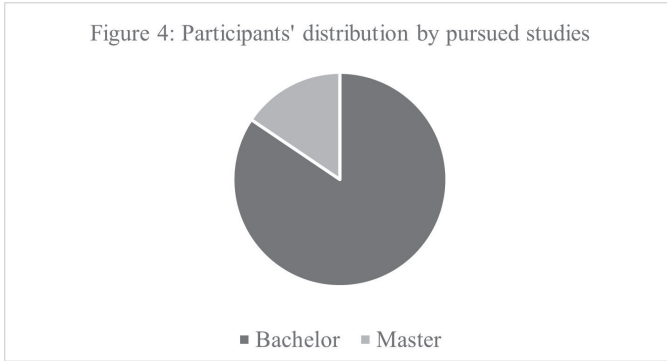
The quantitative part of the study relies on a sample of 155 participants: 80 in Oulu, 35 in Lleida, and 40 in Bucharest, European BA and MA students, divided by gender in 87 males and 68 females (Figure 2).

The mean age of the participants is 22.2 years old. The participants declared to have 26 different nationalities (Figure 3). The highest number of students comes from Italy (30), followed by Germany (27), France (18), Spain (18), the Czech Republic (10) and the Netherlands (10). The other 42 students represent Poland (7), Belgium (5), Austria (4), Slovakia (4), Bulgaria (2), Finland (2), Greece (2), Hungary (2), Sweden (2), Turkey (2), Bosnia (1), Lithuania (1), Moldova (1), Norway (1), Portugal (1), Romania (1), Slovenia (1), and Switzerland (1). Finally, 2 students

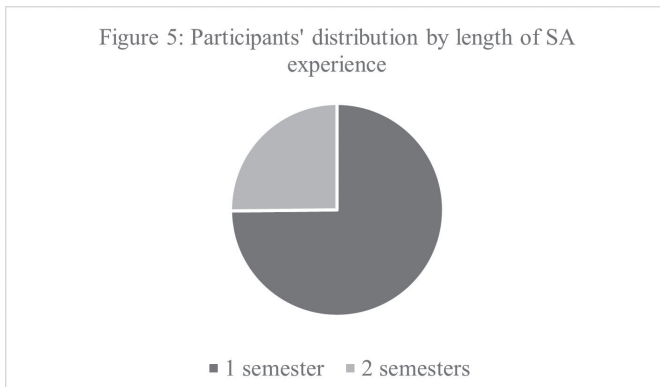


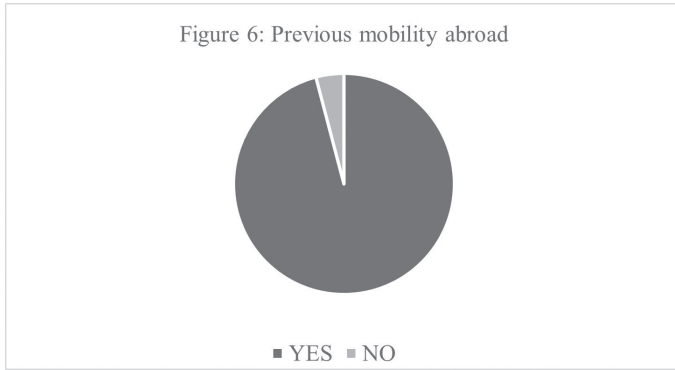
have nationalities of countries outside the EU, namely Cameroonian and Kazak. The reason why these participants were included in the sample is that they came from European countries where they were either living or pursuing a university degree, and hence were enrolled in their sojourn abroad through the Erasmus program.

In relation to students' knowledge of foreign languages, the sample appears to be characterized by a considerable degree of multilingualism, with a mean of 3.3 languages. Regarding their education level, 114 participants were enrolled in a bachelor's degree, and 41 were enrolled in a master's degree (Figure 4).

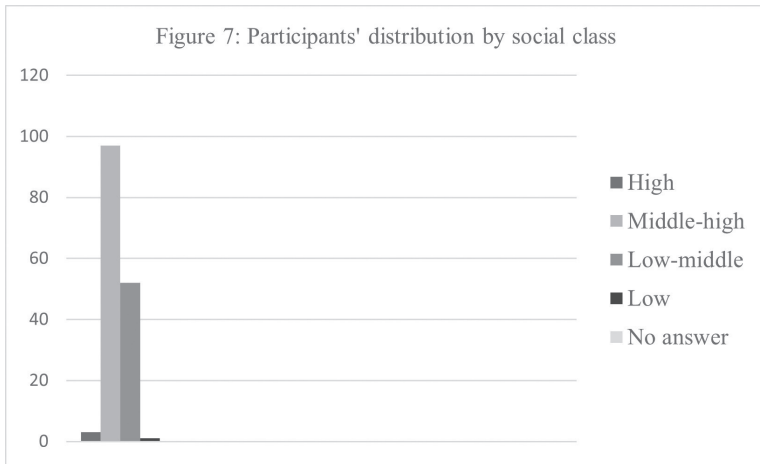


In relation to the length of their sojourn abroad, 116 participants were enrolled in one semester abroad, and 39 participants spent two semesters abroad (Figure 5). With respect to previous experiences of mobility (Figure 6), 75 participants declared having spent abroad at least one period longer than three weeks, whereas 80 participants declared no previous mobility experience of more than three weeks.



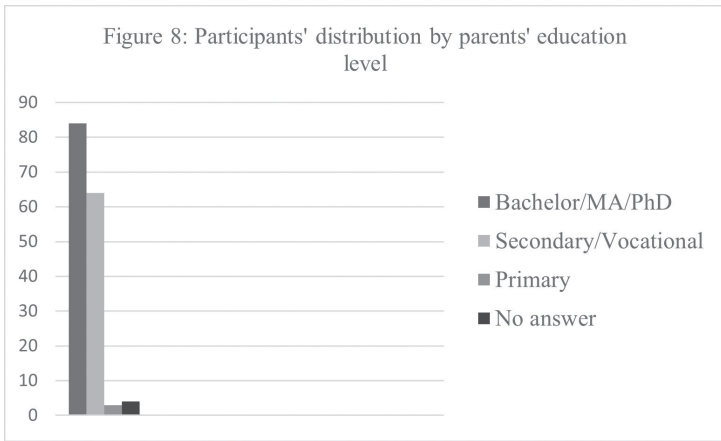


With reference to the social class of the participants (Figure 7), 97 declared belonging to the middle-high class, followed by the low-middle class, with 52 students. Finally, 3 participants reported they belonged to the high class, 1 participant to the low class, and 2 other participants did not respond to this question. Consequently, we can say that the majority of students participating in the Erasmus program declare to belong to the middle-high class. No significant differences have been encountered between the three contexts in this respect.



Regarding the level of education of their parents (Figure 8), the initial 6 categories in the questionnaire (Primary, Secondary, Vocational, Bach-

elor, Master’s, and PhD) were conflated into 3: Primary; Secondary or Vocational; and Bachelor, Master or PhD. 84 participants reported coming from families where at least one of their parents had completed a university degree, 64 participants declared at least one of their parents had completed either Secondary or Vocational training, whereas 3 participants reported none of their parents had studied further than Primary Education and 4 did not answer this question. Consequently, it can be stated that more than half of the students come from families where at least one of the parents has completed some degree of university education.



Some correlation can be established between these results and those coming from the question on social class. It makes sense to assume that most students participating in mobility programs came from families with a rather high socio-educational level, as is indicated by both their parents' educational level and their self-perceived social class.

3.2.3.2. Qualitative data

The participants selected for the semi-structured interviews were chosen from among those in the quantitative sample. In total, 120 students were interviewed at the beginning of their stay. Most of the interviews were conducted individually. However, a few students were interviewed in pairs or as a group at the beginning of their SA experience. At the end of the sojourn abroad, a total of 58 participants were interviewed through

Skype (2 of them: Jennifer and Claudia were interviewed together). These constitute almost half of the participants who were interviewed at the beginning. The drop in number is because at the onset of their sojourn abroad, the students were interviewed personally while at the end of their stay, Skype was used, requiring more preparation and better scheduling. Finally, 16 participants were chosen for the analysis in the qualitative part of the present study (5 in Lleida, 5 in Bucharest, and 6 in Oulu), attending to the following criteria: (1) balanced gender; (2) balanced geographical distribution; (3) balanced field of studies.

Consequently, the PRE and POST interviews with the participants in Table 1 (whose names were modified to preserve anonymity) were transcribed and analyzed. Important to mention is that some of the participants were interviewed in groups with other students (Federica, Kalina, Federico, and Petronela) and some others in pairs at the beginning of their stay: Jennifer and Claudia, and Sami and Jussi, and two (Jennifer and Claudia) were also interviewed together at the end of the experience.

Table 1: Participants in the qualitative data collection

Location	Name	Nationality	Gender	Age	Degree
Oulu	Jennifer C. (JC)	Spanish	Female	21	Nursing
Oulu	Diego D. (DD)	Spanish	Male	23	Construction Engineering
Oulu	Meyer L. (ML)	German	Male	21	Business Administration
Oulu	Mila J. (MJ)	Bulgaria	Female	22	English Studies
Oulu	Claudia Q. (CQ)	Spain	Female	22	Nursing
Oulu	Stefaan M. (SM)	Dutch	Male	22	Computer Science
Bucharest	Federica H. (FH)	Italian	Female	21	Business
Bucharest	Sami M. (SM)	Finnish	Male	24	Construction Engineering
Bucharest	Jussi N. (JN)	Finnish	Male	24	Construction Engineering
Bucharest	Jesús O. (JO)	Spanish	Male	22	Physics
Bucharest	Kalina N. (KN)	Bulgarian	Female	22	Political Science
Lleida	Federico B. (FB)	Italian	Male	21	Law
Lleida	Mildri L. (ML)	Norwegian	Female	25	Medicine
Lleida	Petronela S. (PS)	Polish	Female	21	Agricultural Engineering
Lleida	Radka T. (RT)	Czech	Female	23	Sports/Biology Education
Lleida	Mădălina S. (MS)	Moldovan	Female	20	Journalism

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

This section comprises the results of the study, beginning with an examination of the role of the context. Special attention is devoted to the languages encountered in each of these locations (e.g., Gallego-Balsà, 2014). A further focus is on the degree of contact with other speakers, with local communities, and the more transient communities of international students. Individual differences and the role of motivation and investment (Norton, 2013; Darwin & Norton, 2015; Duchêne, 2016) are tackled. Also covered is the relationship between studying abroad, language learning, and “employability”, with its connection to the neoliberal economy (Flubacher *et al.*, 2018; Courtois, 2020) to understand how language competences are transformed into human capital and the purposes this capital is expected to serve.

4.1. THE ROLE OF THE HOST CONTEXT

To recognize the importance of the linguistic context in the SA experience, we need to compare the expectations of the participants compared with outcomes, to obtain a complete picture of student suppositions and perceived results and the position of language-related knowledge.

4.1.1. Linguistic panorama: minor languages and *linguas francas*

A starting point for understanding the language related motivation of the students is to consider the people with whom they would like to spend their sojourn abroad. As presented in Table 2, most students wish to spend most of their time with other international students, followed by local people, then native speakers of English. It is noteworthy that the desire to spend their stay with other international students and with local people is not echoed in a desire to learn the local languages (Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan), which is rather low, as is the desire to spend their stay with people from their own countries. The participants wish to spend their time abroad with native speakers of English, even though none of the host institutions were in native English-speaking countries.

Table 2: Expectations for spending the stay¹

I want to spend/ I spent most of my stay with:								
	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
Local people	3.9	3	3.8	3.2	4.1	3.1	3.9/	3.1/
Other international students	4.2*+	4.4	4.6*	4.5	4.6+	4.6	4.4	4.5
People from my own country	2.6	3.1	2.6	3.3	2.4	3.5	2.5/	3.2/
Native speakers of English	3.4	2.2#	3.3	2.5#	3.6	1.3#	3.4/	2/

The only significant differences between the groups were in the PRE-test second item: “other international students” ($\chi^2(2)=14.347, p=.001$). The mean score for the Oulu group is significantly lower than that for both the Lleida group ($p=.013$) and the Bucharest group ($p=.003$). Significant differences were also observed regarding people with whom they expected to spend time and those with whom it was actually spent.

Regarding the item “local people”, expectations are significantly higher than outcomes ($Z=-6.826, p=.000$), while the desire to spend the stay with “people from the students’ own country” is significantly lower than the actual time spent with co-nationals ($Z=-5.563, p=.000$). Concerning the expected amount of time to be spent with “native speakers of English”, the expectations are significantly higher than the actual time reported ($Z=-8.801, p=.000$). However, differences were found between the contexts with regard to this last item ($\chi^2(2)=33.101, p=.000$): the mean score for Bucharest is significantly lower than the mean score for Oulu ($p=.000$) and Lleida ($p=.000$), which points to a significantly lower contact with native speakers of English for those students who had Bucharest as a destination than for those who chose Oulu and Lleida.

In relation to the participants’ motivation to learn languages, as can be observed in Table 3, there were significant differences between the

¹ The symbols * + / # - indicate that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items they follow.

three settings in the PRE-test with respect to two items. The first is “local language” where Finnish, Spanish, and Romanian are compared ($\chi^2(2)=36.102$, $p=.000$): mean score in the Lleida group is significantly higher than in Oulu ($p=.000$) or the Bucharest group ($p=.000$). This indicates that from the beginning the importance of the local language in Lleida, Spanish, is considerably more significant for the choice of destination than both Finnish in Oulu and Romanian in Bucharest. The second item where significant differences were encountered in the PRE-test is “other languages” ($\chi^2(2)=8.298$, $p=.016$). Pairwise post-hoc comparisons signaled that the mean score for the Bucharest group is significantly higher than the mean score for the Oulu group ($p=.006$) and the Lleida group ($p=.034$).

Table 3: Language learning motivation²

To what extent did the opportunity to learn one of the following languages motivate you to take part in this mobility program?								
	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
English	4.4	4.4/	4	3.7/#	4.5	4.3#	4.3	4.2
Local language (Finnish/Catalan/ Romanian)	2.9/	2.6/	3	2.6	3	2.6	2.9*	2.6*
Local language (Finnish/Spanish/ Romanian)	2.9*	2.6/	4.5*+	4.6/#	3+	2.6#	3.3-	3.1-
Other languages	2./*	2.3*	2.-	2.1	2.6/-	2.3	2.2	2.3

Worth mentioning also is that the mean scores for the item “English” in the Lleida, Bucharest and Oulu groups are very close to significant. Finally, no significant differences were revealed when the local languages Catalan, Finnish, and Romanian were compared. This indicates a similar motivation for learning the three local languages at the beginning of the

² The symbols + / # - * indicate that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items they follow.

stay. Taken together with the significant differences between the contexts when Spanish is introduced, clues appear regarding the economic value of languages as perceived by study abroad students.

At the end of the sojourn, when the same test was run, participant language motivation had changed, with significant differences between the groups concerning the first item, “English” ($\chi^2(2)=11.085$, $p=.004$), where the mean score for the Lleida group was significantly lower than the mean score for both the Bucharest ($p=.024$) and the Oulu group ($p=.004$).

The second significant difference was seen when comparing Finnish, Romanian and Spanish in the item “local language”, which was similar to scores at the beginning of the sojourn abroad, ($\chi^2(2)=51.753$, $p=.000$). Once more the mean score assigned to Spanish was significantly higher than the mean scores assigned to both Finnish ($p=.000$) and Romanian ($p=.000$).

Furthermore, at the end of the sojourn abroad, the perceived motivation for learning other languages had also been homogenized among the three groups. Significant differences between the answers of the PRE and the POST-tests were also revealed with regard to two items: the motivation to learn Finnish ($Z=-2.626$, $p=.009$), where the perceived motivation in Oulu is significantly lower at the end of the stay. A similar trend is observed concerning all three local languages (Catalan, Romanian, and Finnish) but in the case of Romanian and Catalan it is not significant, probably due to the reduced number of participants in these two groups.

The second item where significant differences were encountered is the motivation to learn “other languages” in the Oulu group, which was significantly higher at the end of the Erasmus stay ($Z=-2.082$, $p=.037$). Finally, when the three groups are considered together, significant differences can be observed regarding the item “local language (Finnish/ Catalan/ Romanian)”: ($Z=-3.176$, $p=.001$), with a clear descending perceived motivation. The other significant difference concerns the item “local language (Finnish/ Spanish/ Romanian)”: ($Z=-2.157$, $p=.024$) but it is clear that the lower score is motivated by the presence of Finnish and Romanian in the group, since for Spanish the tendency is reversed.

In a similar way, when it comes to language use, as represented in Table 4, in the PRE-test English is the language that most expected to use and that is reported to have been used in Oulu and Bucharest, with remarkably high scores.

Table 4: Language use - comparison between groups³

Which language do you think you'll use/have used more during your mobility stay?						
	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
Local language Finnish/ Spanish/ Romanian	2.1*+	1.9#%	4.4* /	4.9#-	2.5 /	2.5-%
Catalan			2.7+	2.2		
English	4.9*	4.8#	4.2*+	3.9#-	4.9+	4.7-
Own language	2.9*	3.1	2.4*	2.9	2.8	3.4

In the PRE-test, significant differences appeared between the groups with regard to their imagined use of English ($\chi^2(2)=26.245$, $p=.000$). The mean score for the Lleida group was significantly lower than the mean score for both Bucharest ($p=.000$) and Oulu ($p=.000$). Furthermore, in the PRE-test, there are significant differences ($\chi^2(2)=6.326$, $p=.042$) between the groups with respect to the item “local language Finnish/ Catalan/ Romanian”. Although the non-parametric Pairwise test did not detect in which groups these differences exist, the Tukey post-hoc test showed the mean score for the Lleida group ($M=2.7$, $SD=1.22$) as significantly higher than that for the Oulu group ($M=2.1$, $SD=.85$). This indicates a higher possibility of using Catalan in Lleida than Finnish in Oulu, which is not so surprising if we take into account that many students report imagining Finland as an English-speaking country, whereas those who arrived in Lleida might have already realized that Catalan is more important, despite the short time they had spent in the city. Significant differences also appeared with regard to the item “local language Finnish/ Spanish/Romanian” ($\chi^2(2)=61.818$, $p=.000$): the Lleida group assigned significantly higher scores for Spanish than the Bucharest group did for Romanian ($p=.000$) and the Oulu group for Finnish ($p=.000$). Finally, despite the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test not showing significant differences between the groups regarding students using their “own

³ The symbols * + / # - % indicate that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items they follow.

language”, the one-way ANOVA signaled significant differences ($F(2, 150) = 3.01, p < .05$) with significantly lower scores for the Lleida group ($M = 2.4, SD = 1.23$) than for the Oulu group ($M = 2.9, SD = 1.05$).

In the POST-test, significant differences were seen in the item “local language Finnish/ Spanish/ Romanian” ($\chi^2(2) = 77.084, p = .000$): the scores for the Oulu group were significantly lower than those for the Bucharest ($p = .017$) and the Lleida groups ($p = .000$) and the scores for the Bucharest group were significantly lower than those for the Lleida group ($p = .000$). This points once more to the hierarchy of the three local languages: Spanish was the language that was most extensively used among the Erasmus students in Lleida. Furthermore, it indicates that those students who had Bucharest as a destination used Romanian to a considerably higher extent than those choosing Oulu used Finnish. Significant differences were also found when English was considered ($\chi^2(2) = 26.558, p = .000$): mean score for the Lleida group was significantly lower than for both the Bucharest ($p = .005$) and the Oulu groups ($p = .000$).

Significant differences have also been found between perspectives of language use and the actual reported language use of the participants.

Table 5: Language use - comparison between beginning and end of the stay⁴

Which language do you think you'll use/have used more during your mobility stay?						
	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
Local language Finnish/ Spanish/ Romanian	2.1*	1.9*	4.4	4.9	2.5	2.5
Catalan			2.7/	2.2/		
English	4.9	4.8	4.2	3.9	4.9-	4.7-
Own language	2.9	3.1	2.4+	2.9+	2.8#	3.4#

For reasons of clarity, the same questions with their respective items have been reported in a separate table (Table 5). In it, the significant differences of the Wilcoxon test have been represented. As can be observed,

⁴ The symbols * + / # - indicate that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items they follow.

there are significant differences between the PRE and the POST-test with regard to the use of Finnish in Oulu ($Z=-2.337$, $p=.019$), the use of Catalan in Lleida ($Z=-2.059$, $p=.000$), and the use of English in Bucharest ($Z=-2.000$, $p=.046$).

Furthermore, about the imagined and the actual use of their own language, significant differences have been found in both the Lleida ($Z=-2.486$, $p=.013$) and the Bucharest groups ($Z=-2.513$, $p=.012$). The tendency is towards a significantly lower reported use of both English and the local languages and a significantly higher reported use of their own languages.

The participants' interviews show that many of the students did not choose to enroll solely in an Erasmus stay, but in an Erasmus stay in a certain place. However, since the selection process of the program implies deciding on a list of preferred destinations which depends on factors that include level of demand and is often affected by their academic marks, some of the students were not allocated to the settings they had chosen as a first option, although the countries where they finally spent their sojourn abroad were often among their choices, and in most of the cases, among their first. When asked about the reasons behind their choices, the participants expressed different incentives, goals, purposes, and expectations. In the next section, I will report on the accounts of all participants regarding destination, and then on their accounts at the conclusion of their Erasmus experience about the location of their stay.

4.1.1.1. Beginning of the sojourn abroad

It is interesting to note that at the time of the interviews the participants had already spent a few days in the host countries. However, their accounts of their destinations relied to a considerable extent on their imagination rather than on their experiences to date in those settings.

The students in the Oulu group give the impression of being motivated by the attraction of Finland and the Finnish outstanding role in education and social welfare, as well as by the high level of English proficiency of the Finnish people, and by the high standards of Finnish education, as perceived from outside.

From their discourse, both Claudia and Jennifer chose Finland as a destination because, in their imagination, Finland is an English-speaking

country. They mention that they were given different options to choose from, but none of them were perceived as English-speaking countries, apart from Estonia, which is seen as a place where English is spoken though not as extensively as in Finland. The possibility to study the whole semester in English and to be immersed in “English-speaking” Finland was the first reason that determined the two Spanish girls to go to Oulu:

CQ: *sí/ pero de lo que nos daban a elegir/ todos los países que nos daban a elegir/ en ninguno se hablaba inglés/ entonces eran Italia... (yes/ but from the choices they gave us/ all the countries we could choose/ in none was English spoken/ so then there was Italy...)*

JC: *solo Bélgica/ sí/(just Belgium/ yes/)*

CQ: *y Bélgica aun así se habla fran francés/ y ... porque teníamos Italia/ Portugal/ Estonia/ que también se habla inglés pero está peor que Finlandia/ y Bélgica/ y luego teníamos cuatro lugares diferentes de Finlandia para elegir/ y elegimos Finlandia por el inglés y porque el año pasado/ una niña de nuestra universidad también vino y vino encantada/ así que... (and even in Belgium they speak Fren French/ and... because we had Italy/ Portugal/ Estonia/ where they also speak English but it's worse than Finland/ and Belgium/ and then we had four different places in Finland to choose from/ and we chose Finland for English and because last year/ a girl from our university also came and she came back delighted/ so...)*

INTERVIEWER: *muy bien/ o sea por el inglés/ (very good/ so for English/)*

JC: *sí/(yes/)*

INTERVIEWER: *porque aquí os ofrecen un grado íntegramente en inglés/ o cómo es? (because here they offer you a full degree in English/ or how does it go?)*

CQ: *sí/ sí/ en inglés/ (yes/ yes/ in English/)*

The second reason they mention is the perceived high level of Finnish education:

JC: *sí/ la diferencia es a nivel de educación/ (yes/ the difference is in the education standards/)*

CQ: *sí/ (yes/)*

JC: *están muy avanzados/ entonces nada más con eso/ me da igual no hacer nada/ ni poner un pinchazo pero simplemente ver cómo lo hacen/* (they are very advanced/ so just for that/ I don't mind not doing anything/ not even giving a shot but simply seeing how they do it/)

CQ: *sí/* (yes)

JC: *es que es ya...* (just that is already...)

CQ: *y además que están muy avanzados en el hecho de aprender cosas nuevas/* (and also that they are very advanced with regard to learning new things/)

JC: *cosas nuevas a trabajar/* (new things to work on/)

CQ: *cosas nuevas y diferentes formas de llevar las clases/ en grupo y eso que yo creo que/ que solo con vivirlo/ ya te enriquece a nivel de educación/* (new things and different ways to manage lessons/ in group and so I think that/ that just living that/ is already enriching regarding education/)

JC: *te entran ganas de quedarte en la universidad a vivir/ no como en España que te entran ganas de irte a tu casa/ estas mirando de que termine ya la clase/* (you feel like staying in the university and living there/ not like in Spain that you feel like going home/ that you are looking forward for the lesson to finish once for all/)

Both Jennifer and Claudia feel that Finnish education is of such high quality that simply watching how things are done there will already be an enriching experience. Since they are studying a Nursing degree, they formulate their high expectations stating that even if they do no practical activity during their stay, not even giving an injection, the level of their learning will already be very high, just because Finnish education is of a very high standard *per se*. Furthermore, when the participants compare the university in Oulu with their home university, they portray the quality of education in Spain as boring when compared to the Finnish. All in all, the discourse of the two Spanish participants in Oulu gives the impression that they were lured by their imagined portrayal of Finland and its people.

In a similar way, Stefaan points out having chosen Oulu because of the quality of the games industry at the games lab of the university:

SM: *eh/ well/ it was actually because of a friend of mine went to Finland for a game lab and since this master is very wide/ I didn't know what I*

want to do/ so/ ah/ then he told me a lot of stuff about it and about the game industry here/ and I really wanted to do something with music/ composing/ sound design/ and I really would like to keep it go within the game industry/ to meet very important/ to see the certain mood and atmosphere for a game/

INTERVIEWER: *OK/ very good/ and why Finland?*

SM: *why Finland? Because the industry is really big over here/ and.../ ah/ well/ not for the weather/ (laughs)/ I guess/*

Stefaan believes that the games industry in Finland is big, and therefore, being able to spend some time in the mood and atmosphere of the place will allow him to keep working in the games industry.

Mila also highlights Finnish education as one of the most outstanding reasons to choose Finland as her destination:

INTERVIEWER: *and a:/ why Finland?*

MJ: *well/ (laughs)/ I have some personal and some more professional reasons/ ah/ I was here two years ago/ but it was only a vacation for then/ for ten days/ and I really liked it very much and I knew that I want to come back some day for longer/ and now I had the chance/ and the more professional part of the reasons is that ah/ this year I was ah/ a teacher at a private school/ English teacher/ and I just thought that that's the best opportunity to: learn some more about teaching and to incorporate the ideas that I will learn here in my job/ because all the time I'm reading articles about the educational system of Finland/ how it's the best and so on/ but seeing it in person is always something different/*

The participant recalls having visited Finland for ten days before her stay and receiving a very good impression that made her decide to come back for a longer period. At a more professional level, she remarks seeing her stay in Oulu as the best opportunity to expand her knowledge in her teaching career by personally experiencing the Finnish education system. Mila's account is different from the other participants' because her expectations are based on scientific articles portraying the Finnish education system as the best.

In the Bucharest group, the participants have different reasons for choosing Romania. For instance, Kalina states that she has elected Bucharest as a destination because she wants to meet Romanian people, to

be close to home, and to learn Romanian. The geographical proximity between Bulgaria and Romania determined her choice as well as a sort of cultural and social proximity:

KM: *ah...I want to meet Romanian people/ and to be close to home and to learn Romanian/*

KM: *a:/well...I was...the past years I've been living...I'm not from the capital of Bulgaria but I was living in Sofia/ I was studying there/ so... Romania and Bucharest is like Bulgaria/ is like Sofia/ a little bit better/ (laughs)/ so/ it's the same/ we have everything/ we have the street dogs/ we have the gypsies/ we have a...the robberies/ we have everything bad/ but here people are more smiley/ more nicer and no...I didn't expect here to be like better but I like it/*

From her account, living in Bucharest is more or less the same as living in Sofia, and by extension Romania and Bulgaria are depicted as very similar. She mentions many examples of what can be categorized as issues of concern for the two countries: street dogs, gypsies, robberies, and “everything bad”. Kalina sees neither country in a positive way. However, she stresses that Romanian people smile more and are nicer. She does not expect Romania to be better than Bulgaria, but concludes by affirming that she likes it, alluding to the comfort of being at ease with the place, probably due to its similarity to her homeland. For Kalina the similarity between her country of origin and her country of destination is determinant, while Jesús remarks that the opportunity to discover a whole new place, which he describes as completely different from where he was born, is determinant for his choice:

JO: *(...) y sobretodo porque para mí es una oportunidad muy grande de viajar estando centrado en una zona que me permite ver todo el resto de Europa... quizás... bueno Georgia y Armenia aún siguen considerándose Europa/ e:/ entonces me permite ver toda esta zona que de normal no tengo la oportunidad/ ((...) and mainly because for me it is a very big opportunity to travel being centred in an area that allows me to see all the rest of Europe... maybe... well Georgia and Armenia can still be considered Europe/ e:/ so it allows me to see all this area that I wouldn't have the opportunity to see/)*

INTERVIEWER: *y por qué Bucarest? (and why Bucharest?)*

JO: *yo sobre todo por... por lo que dice él/ de ser una capital porque yo siempre he vivido en una ciudad pequeña/ la ciudad más grande en la que he vivido tiene ochenta y pico mil habitantes y me gustaría... pues que en el día de mañana/ cuando tenga que moverme porque... supongo que me tendré que mover/ que no me sorprenda vivir en una ciudad muchísimo más grande y tal y...y eso... Bucarest también porque... por lo que decía antes/ por la z/ por la zona para viajar/ (me mainly for... for what he says/ that it is a capital because I've always lived in a small city/ the biggest city where I lived has a little bit over eighty thousands inhabitants and I would like to... that in the future/ when I would have to move because... I suppose I will have to move/ that I won't be stricken to live in a much bigger city and so and... and so... Bucharest also because... as I said before/ for the a/ for the area to travel/)*

INTERVIEWER: *fue Bucarest vuestra primera opción?* (was Bucharest your first option?)

JO: *yo... fue también mi segunda opción/ la primera era Cracovia/ básicamente porque tenía ya referencias/ luego e:/ eso/ fue la segunda porque... básicamente porque me apetecía eso/ una gran ciudad y... y un sitio no especialmente caro para poder estar sin problemas/(me... it was also my second option/ the first one was Cracow/ basically because I already had references/ then e:/ so/ it was the second because... basically because that's what I wanted/ abig city and... a city not too expensive in order to live without problems/)*

In the account of his choice of destination, Jesús reports on the opportunity to travel to an area in Europe where he had not previously been. Romania, and Eastern Europe by extension, exert a certain exotic attraction for the participant; he even mentions countries like Georgia and Armenia as possible visiting spots. Also, he regards the size of Bucharest, a capital city, as an environment that will offer certain training for the future. Therefore, this is a chance to encounter and confront differences, and avoid unpleasant surprises in the future. Finally, the participant mentions that the lower prices in Bucharest were also an incentive, since he predicts he would not have economic problems during his stay. At the end of his account, he briefly mentions Cracow as his first option, but is unconcerned that he finally went to Bucharest. In fact, Cracow and Bucharest become, in his discourse, indistinguishable from each other as a big, affordable city in Eastern Europe. Worth mentioning is also that for Jesús, the imminent need to move (and become an immigrant) in the future is important.

Federica chose Bucharest with the expectation that it would be a good place to learn English. She had the option to choose between Spain and Bucharest and she chose Bucharest because in her perspective, in Spain she would have learnt Spanish, which is not of interest to her.

FH: English/ because we speak English in Bucharest/ but in Spain we speak Spanish/

Finally, Sami and Jussi highlight that they chose Bucharest because it was the only place where they were allowed to go together. In fact, Jussi had Poland as a destination and Sami wanted to go to the UK, but things did not go as expected, as they relate in their interview:

SM: I was/ first I was ah chosen to go to UK and Jussi was ah agreed to/ how do you say this?

JN: Poland/

SM: to Poland/ yeah/

JN: and no/ we had decided long ago that we will go to the same place/

INTERVIEWER: mhm/

SM: so/ we went to the outgoing office of our university and said no this is not gonna happen/ we're going to the same place/ and they said/ well/ then you go to Romania/ uh/ then we go/ then we're here/

(...)

JN: yeah/ first of all/ we'll get a new perspective about how people live in other countries/ very different countries than Finland/

SM: yeah/ and well Bucharest is/ it's a very big city and where we live in Tampere/ there are like two hundred thousand inhabitants/ ah it's a big difference/ the distances are greater and...

INTERVIEWER: mhm/

SM: well/ the culture is always a shock/ at first but we are very open-minded here and I hope we will meet lots of locals/ and also people from other countries...

In the students' account, their main reason for choosing Bucharest was that they had decided long ago that they would embark on the Erasmus

experience together, no matter what. Both sacrificed their first destination choices in order to experience it together, which seems to be more important than the actual location. This is indicative that for some students, the Erasmus experience might be understood as an experience to be sought in itself regardless of the exact context where it takes place. However, both participants appear to be quite happy about their final destination, and aware that the Romanian culture is very different from the Finnish, which will provide them with a new perspective about how people live in a different place. In a similar way to Jesús, Jussi and Sami also foreground the size of Bucharest, a capital city, considerably larger than their home city. Finally, Sami mentions the culture shock they are experiencing at the beginning of their stay, but he is confident their open-mindedness and the opportunity to meet both locals and international students will help them overcome it.

In the Lleida group, Mildri mentions Spanish as the main incentive for her destination choice, even though she had another Spanish city, Santiago de Compostela, as a first option. In her account of how she arrived in Lleida, Mildri mentions that she did not know anything about the city:

ML: ah... the truth is that in Spain we only have two options/ it was Santiago de Compostela and Lleida/ and I applied for Santiago de Compostela/ (laughs)/ but I didn't/ they didn't accept me there but they accepted me in Lleida/ so/

(...)

ML: yeah/ I didn't know anything about Lleida before so/ it was actually just a coincidence/ (laughs)/

In a similar way, Mădălina reports on not having Lleida, but Spain as a destination:

MS: in primul rând pentru ca eu cred că cumva/ nu știu cum/ poate că in altă viață m-am născut in Spania sau ceva de genul sau într-o țară in care se vorbește spaniola/ pentru că voiam foarte tare sa merg într-o țară in care se vorbește spaniola/ avusesem pe lista mea/ erau doua optiuni/ A Coruña si Lleida/ ah o prietena de-a mea a ales A Coruña si mie mi-a rămas Lleida si eram fericita cu asta pentru că vin in Spania/ (in the first place because I think that somehow/ I don't know why/ maybe in another life I was born in Spain or something like that or in a country where Spanish is spoken/ because I wanted very much to go to a country

where Spanish is spoken/ I had on my list/ there were two options/ A Coruña and Lleida/ ah a friend of mine chose A Coruña and I was left with Lleida and I was happy with it because I was going to Spain/)

From the beginning of the interview, Mădălina displays some sort of fascination with Spain and the Spanish language. As Mildri, Mădălina chose another Spanish city, A Coruña, as a first destination, but she was equally happy when she was assigned Lleida, because she knew she was going to Spain.

Petronela, the Polish participant in Lleida, states that she had no choice:

PT: *I didn't have choice too /(laughs)/*

Finally, Radka, the Czech participant, who had Lleida as her first option, brings to the fore a very different reason:

RT: *well/ actually in my university/ or in my/ in my faculty I could choose two universities from Spain/ and Lleida was much more open for English speaking students/ so and I didn't learn Spanish before/ well I just started so... (laughs)/ yeah/ yeah/ it was more open for English speaking people/*

For Radka, Lleida was seen as a more open place for English-speaking students, even though she does not mention how she reached this conclusion. It is possible that Radka was asked for a certain level of Spanish when she applied for the sojourn abroad while Lleida did not ask for it.

4.1.1.2. End of the sojourn abroad

At the end of the sojourn abroad, the participants were asked two questions regarding the place where they stayed. One was related to how they imagined the setting before arriving there and the extent to which their expectations were accomplished. The other question asked whether they felt welcome. There follows an examination of the answers provided by the participants and a brief summary contrasting their accounts at the beginning and at the end of the sojourn.

In the Oulu group, Claudia and Jennifer recall the darkness in Finland, and that they could find no places where they could have a coffee and a

chat. Serious limitations were imposed by the high prices in Oulu, regarded as negative aspects. Claudia highlights that her Erasmus scholarship arrived one day before her stay was over, requiring her to self-finance her whole stay in Oulu, affecting her ability to fully enjoy it, which she blames on the authorities:

CQ: *sí/ sí/ la verdad es que yo también lo aguanté porque dije buf/ no sé/ pensábamos que eran seis meses/ y al final nos quedamos en cinco/ yo creo que nada más por eso lo pude aguantar/ porque sino a mí me dan los choques/ porque esto de la noche/ a mí me agobia mucho el hecho de que no haya bares donde ir a tomarte un desayuno/ un café/ una terracita... (yes/ yes/ the truth is that I bore it cause I said buf/ I don't know/ we thought it would be six months and in the end it was five/ I think that was the only reason I could bear it/ otherwise I would have had a shock/ cause this thing of the night/ it stresses me out a lot the fact that there are no bars to have breakfast/ coffee/ a terrace)*

(...)

JC: *pero por ejemplo un sitio en el que vayas/ te pidas tú una cerveza/ o un café/ no? y te sientes a hablar con alguien y empieces a hablar y tal/ mmm lo hay/ no? puedes ir/ pero luego te miran mal como “vete ya/ qué haces aquí hablando? vete/” (but for example a place where you can go/ ask for a beer/ a coffee/ right/ and sit and chat with someone and you start to chat and so on/ mmm there isn't any/ right? you can go/ but then they look at you in a bad way like “go away/ what are you doing chatting here? go away/”)*

CQ: *“vete que tenemos más clientes”/ y es en plan “pues nada/ pues nos vamos sabes que...” y también es que te gastas doce euros en dos cafés/ entonces es una burrada/ entonces también una parte de las que nos limitó demasiado a nosotras por ejemplo es que a mí la beca me llegó un día antes de irme/ en dici - en enero/ entonces... fatal/ esta es una cosa que está muy mal organizada por parte de/ por lo menos de la universidad de las Palmas de Gran Canaria/ mmm... de qué me vale irme de Erasmus si al final no lo voy a poder disfrutar al cien por cien porque tú no me das esa beca que me estás diciendo que me vas a dar? sí es verdad que te dicen que te la dan al cabo de dos meses? (“go away cause we have more clients”/ and it's like “well then/ we are leaving you know...” and the also that you spend twelve euros on two coffees/ it's nonsense/ then another thing that limited us too much was for example that my scholarship arrived one day before I left/ in Dece – in January*

so... awful/ this is something very badly organized by/ at least by the university of las Palmas de Gran Canaria/ mmm...why is it worth it going on Erasmus if in the end I won't be able to fully enjoy it because you are not giving me that scholarship you say you'll give me? if it's true that they give it after two months?

The participants emphasize that the students were kind to them. However, they also stress that they felt they were not well treated, nor did they feel valued during their practicum in the hospital:

CQ: mmm cuando los conoces/ por ejemplo las estudiantes/ las más jóvenes/ sí/ si es ver/ todas las estudiantes fueron súper amables con nosotras/ pero por ejemplo mmm había algunas enfermeras que... uff/ y por los médicos/ que también me sentí un poco...no muy bien... tratada o valorada/ como para así decirlo/ y desp/ después... (mmm when you know them/ for example the students/ the youngest/ yes/ it's true/ all the students were super kind with us/ but for example mmm there were some nurses that...uff/ and for the doctors/ I also felt a little...not very well...treated or valued/ to put it that way/ and then...)

JC: no/ en la universidad/ eh tampoco me sentí...en el momento de las prácticas tampoco me sentí bien porque eh/ me asignaron un rotatorio que era por consultas de otorrinolaringología/ e yo estoy en cuarto de enfermería y aquí mi me dan prácticas para yo estar en una planta haciendo cosas de enfermería/ no para estar en consulta/ eh dándole el material al/ al... (no/ in the university/ eh I didn't feel... at the moment of the practicum I didn't feel well cause eh/ I was assigned a workshift that was for otorhinolaryngology consultations/ and I'm in the fourth year of nursing and here I have a practicum which implies that I am on a section doing things related to nursing/ not being in a consultation/ eh giving material to/ to...)

Similarly, regarding their university, the two students complained that the schedules were very difficult to follow, and the instructors were not very approachable. Finally, they report that the university staff were very rude and that they had to confront many problems during their stay. The healthcare system is also described as awful:

CQ: esa/ mmm casi nos suspenden porque para mí desde mi punto de vista tienen una gran cómo se dice? una gran organización con los Erasmus/ eh encima no/ no nos valoran como nos tienen que valorar/

muchos de “ay sí coming/ coming”/ pero después no me importas una mierda/ sabes? porque las clases son a la misma hora/ tú te tienes que buscar la vida/ la del curso viene y te dice que puedes faltar dos veces/ y la otra te dice que no puedes faltar ningún día/ y coinciden las clases/ pues cómo lo hacemos?(that one/ mmm they almost fail us because from my point of view they have a big how do you say? a big organization with the Erasmus/ and on top of that they don’t/ don’t value us as they should/ a lot of “ay yes coming/ coming”/ but then I don’t give a penny on you/ you know/ cause lessons are at the same time/ you have to manage it/ the teacher comes and tells you can skip twice/ and the other one says you can’t skip any day/ and lessons coincide/ so how do we do it?)

(...)

CQ: sí/ y además lo que hablábamos nosotras/ que son muy maleducados porque te están (yes/ and then what we were saying/ they are very rude cause they are...)

JC: ah sí/ (oh yes/)

CQ: tú les estás hablando/ y ellos hablan contigo caminando/ sabes/ y dicen “ya ya”/ y siguen caminando/ y tu “pero es que mira/ es que quiero contarte/ quiero hablar contigo”/ (you are talking to them/ and they are talking to you while walking/ you know/ and they say “OK OK”/ and they keep walking/ and you “but look/ I want to explain you/ I want to talk to you”/)

(...)

CQ: hay que afrontar muchos problemas/ muchos/ muchos/ (one has to face many problems/ many/ many/)

JC: no si después es... (and then after there is...)

CQ: y en cuanto al sistema sanitario... (regarding healthcare...)

JC: eso/ eso/ (exactly/ exactly/)

CQ: fatal/ fatal/ (awful/awful/)

Overall, it seems that for Jennifer and Claudia their stratospheric expectations with regard to their stay were not accomplished. They show that they were very disappointed by what they encountered in Oulu, from issues related to the weather, or the perceived lack of bars or cafeterias, to problems with prices and what they describe as rude behavior by the university and the hospital staff. All in all, their feeling of not being

well-treated nor valued in the places they inhabited during their sojourn abroad led the two participants to the conclusion that Spain is a better place to live. Therefore, when asked in what ways the Spanish and the Finnish cultures are different, their answer is totally oriented towards the disappointment caused by the coldness of the Finnish people and their lack of ability in managing what they call “basic cultural level”:

CQ: *buah/ totalmente/ totalmente/ es que vamos a ver/ nosotros somos extrovertidos/ sonreímos por la calle/ decimos adiós/ por lo menos en Canarias/ en los pueblos/* (buah/ totally/ totally/ let’s see/ we are extroverted/ we smile on the street, we say bye, at least in Canarias, in villages/)

JC: *cuéntale lo del paciente cuando estaba llorando con su mujer y...* (tell her about the patient when he was crying with his wife and...)

CQ: *ah/ sí/ sí/ es que yo sinceramente/ yo en los cuidados básicos me me fui muy decepcionada por parte de los fineses/ porque una cosa es que tú seas frío y otra cosa es ser hijo de puta/* (ah/ yes/ yes/ me sincerely/ I was very disappointed about the basic cures by the Finns/ because one thing is to be cold and the other one is to be a son of a bitch/)

(...)

JC: *horrible/ horrible/ yo creo que en lo básico/ en lo básico... a nivel cultural/* (awful/ awful/ I think that on the basic/ on the basic... at a cultural level/)

CQ: *es que los pacientes duermen en el/ en la habi – en el despacho de la directora porque no hay habitaciones/ o en el pasillo cambiando pañales cagados de diarrea/ e yo decía esto es/ esto no puede ser/ yo me cogía cada rebote con la enfermera o con el tutor/ digo/ es que vamos/ es que España dirán/ pero es que España es una reliquia/ porque agüita/* (patients sleep in the/ in the ro - in the office of the director because there are no rooms/ or on the corridor changing napkins with diarrhea/ and I said this is / this cannot be/ I got really angry with the nurse or with the supervisor/ I said/ let’s see/ they’ll speak about Spain/ but Spain is a gem/ because gosh/)

It is hard to know whether the participants’ description of the situation in the hospital is the result of a crisis in the Finnish healthcare system at that time, the usual situation of hospitals in Finland or a biased perspective on their part. Whichever may be the case, the participants return with the certainty that the Finns are close to inhumane and Spain is a much

better place. They associate the poor conditions in the hospital with a cultural trait of the Finns which is to be cold and lacking empathy, even though, at some points they are presented as working under very adverse conditions which could trigger such lack of empathy towards their patients. Jennifer and Claudia are, by far, the participants that show the biggest contrast between their high expectations at the beginning and a significant lack of enthusiasm at the end of their stay, which may indicate unrealistic expectations.

Stefaan stresses that he expected a different experience. Even though he is not able to name in what way, he emphasizes that he expected to be in the middle of nowhere and Oulu was quite a big city, also that the Finns were more introverted than he expected, and the education was not as good as he initially thought:

SM: ah/ I expected it to be...different/ but it's hard to describe what I expected to be different/ ah I expected... yeah I don't know/ I really expected to end up in the middle of nowhere/ it was the middle of nowhere but still a quite big city/ ah/ Finnish people/ I already knew what they would be like/ sort of/ but still they were a bit more shy than I expected/ ah... and I expected the education to be a little bit better/

The coldness of the Finnish people is also mentioned by Diego even though he expresses a very positive feeling with regard to the treatment he received by the university staff. His only concern is that he could not make more than a couple of Finnish friends, which he attributes to the coldness of the locals:

DD: sí/ por la universidad la verdad es que sí/ muchísimo/ o sea/ todos los profesores/ la...todo el equipo de... de internacional/ no? de relaciones internacionales eran geniales la verdad/ y por el tema de la/ bueno de la residencia que teníamos/ los managers y eso/ también genial/ luego/ lo único que con la gente local de allí/ como allí son muy fríos la verdad/ no hicimos muchos amigos/ un par de amigos o amigas y...pero...(yes/ by the university actually yes/ a lot/ I mean/ all the teachers/ the...all the staff from the international/ right? from the international relations were great actually/ and regarding the issue/ well of the residence we had/ the managers and so/ also great/ then/ the only thing with the local people there/ since they are really very cold/ we didn't make many friends/ a couple of friends and...but...)

Unlike the Finnish experience of these participants, Mila expresses her expectations of a great time in a country with a high quality of life and an opportunity to find new friends, which she says is what happened:

MJ: well/ I had expectations to have a really good time/ to live in a country with a higher quality of life/ to enjoy it/ this all happened/ to find new friends/ yes/

Further, Mila remarks that she had been made very welcome by the society in Oulu, where she felt at home. Surprisingly, Mila mentions that everybody was willing to help her and every person she asked on the street for a favor offered help:

MJ: yes/ very much/ I didn't feel any/ anything against me/ or yeah/ nothing/ nothing maybe/ I felt/ I felt very welcome/ I felt at home and everybody was willing to help me/ very single person on the street that I asked something helped me/ so...

Finally, Meyer remarks that he did not have high expectations with regard to Oulu, and from the university he expected better grades than in Germany. Both these assumptions were accomplished, and the experience is described as good overall:

ML: I was really looking forward to it/ like ah/ I'm/ I mean I knew I was going to Oulu which was in my expectation not the biggest city in the world and it/ it appeared to be true/ e:h/ but I/ I/ I always felt like as long as you are with the right people/ you can have a really good time and that's what actually ah/ what actually happened/ so we had really good friends there and ah yeah ... yeah/ I/ I/ I thought/ I thought like university wise because I was there for studying actually/ ah/ I thought that I would have like better grades than I would get in Germany and this also turned out to be true/ like ... way better grades/ (laughs)/ which is good for my/ for my grades but eh/ yeah/ yeah but overall a good experience/ what I expected and what turned out to be true/

Meyer also points out that it is usually said that Finnish people are very introverted, which turned out to be true:

ML: yeah/ yeah definitely/ I mean a:h/ like there is this cliché that Finnish people are like super introverts/ not really outgoing/ I mean/ this is kind of

true but I had the/ the experiences that when you like step towards somebody and like let it be the supermarket cashier/ let it be ah/ in the fast-food restaurants or some random people on the street/ they are always like really nice and their English like most of the times is like on point/ it's really good/ and yeah I never had the feeling like I couldn't ask something from anybody/ or like somebody wouldn't be wanting to talk to me or something/

However, like Mila, he also accentuates that people are really helpful and their English is very good, so he appears to be rather satisfied with how Finnish people have treated him.

In the Bucharest group, Federica stresses that she changed her idea about Romanian people for the better and realized that they are very friendly and good students. She also brings to the fore Italian people's negative conception of Romanians:

FH: ah/ I think Bucharest is a beautiful city/ and the people is very/ very good/ they help you if you have a problem/ in Italy often the Italian people have not good idea about Romanian people/

INTERVIEWER: mhm/ and has this idea changed?

FH: ah yes/ my idea changed because the Romanian people is very friendly/ and they have a good student/ a good people/

Sami, who declares he had no expectations but hoped the experience was going to be a life-changing one declares his satisfaction with the overall experience:

SM: my hopes/ I had absolutely no expectations/ in the culture and the country really but/ I (...) I was hoping that it's gonna be a life-changing experience/ and it was/ in good/ always in good/

Sami also seems to be happy with the treatment he received from the institution even though he said he had to struggle with the different ways to deal with time in Romania compared to Finland:

SM: ahm yes they/they welcomed us/ very warmly and/ well/ like I said the difference in in understanding of the time/ is different/ then it was difficult for me to understand at first/ but I got used to it/

Similarly, Jussi affirms that he felt welcomed by the local society. In his words, though, being welcomed meant that the local people showed interest about where he was from, why he went to Romania, and how things work in Finland:

JN: *yeah/ for sure/*

(...)

JN: *well/ yeah/ many people were interested/ a:/ like/ why we came there/ where're we from/ what is like in Finland and stuff like that so/ we felt welcome/*

Jesús also seems to be quite satisfied with the place, which for him served, in fact, as a basis from where he could discover other places as well as to improve his English:

JO: *pues...la verda:d/ lo que te decía/ tenía la intención de viajar mucho/ aprender otros/ el inglés y mejorarlo/ o sea/ yo tenía ya/ sabía más o menos hablar y quería mejorarlo/ quería...bueno/ aprobar todas/ no quería liarla porque no podía yo/ que acabo ya la carrera/ y bueno yo creo que se cumplieron/ e incluso la de viajar se... la superé porque pensaba que iba a viajar menos de lo que lo hice/ bueno y dentro de esos viajes/ claro/ todo el...conocer otros/ otros entornos/ (well...actually/ what I was telling you/ I had the intention to travel a lot/ learn other/ English and improve it/ I already had/ I could speak more or less and I wanted to improve it/ I wanted...well/ to pass all subjects/ I didn't want to make a mess cause I couldn't/ I'm finishing my degree already/ and well I think they were accomplished/ also the one about travelling was... I overcame it cause I thought I would travel less than I did/ well and within those trips/ clearly/ all the...getting to know other/ other places/)*

The participant also emphasizes that he felt welcomed by Romanian society and remarks that he did not perceive any negative predisposition:

JO: *sí/ sí/ sí/ totalmente/ o sea/ nunca tuve ningún tipo de:/ no noté ningún tipo de predisposición negativa/ (yes/ yes/ yes/ totally/ I mean/ I never had any type of/ I didn't notice any type of negative predisposition/)*

Finally, Kalina points out that she deliberately avoided having any expectations with regard to her stay in Bucharest so that she would not be

disappointed. Therefore, she describes the experience as unexpectedly good and interesting:

KN: *well/ I really had no expectations/ because I didn't want to be disappointed/ but when I went there a:h/ if I had any/ that was like way beyond them/ I definitely didn't expect this to be that good and that interesting/ and that new/ I definitely didn't expect that/*

The participant also declares having felt much more welcomed by the society in Bucharest than she expected she would be:

KN: *yes/ yeah/ a lot/ way more than I was thinking I would be/*

In the Lleida group, Federico, in a similar way to Kalina explains that he did not have many expectations before coming to Lleida, even though he imagined the experience would be quite powerful:

FB: *mmm/ ehe/ bueno/ no sé/ no tenía muchísimas expectativas porque siempre intento de ir sin...sin expectativas/ pero... sí/ pensaba que sería estado una experiencia muy...muy fuerte/ y sobre todo por lo que afecta a la autonomía/ el vivir a solo/ y así/ (mmm/ ehe/ well/ I don't know/ I didn't have many expectations because I always try to go without...without expectations/ but...yes/ I thought it would be an experience very... very strong/ and especially regarding autonomy/ living alone/ and so on/)*

Further, the participant states he has felt very welcome in Lleida society:

FB: *sí/ sí bastante bien/ (yes/ yes quite well/)*

Mildri affirms that she had few expectations before travelling to Lleida because she did not have the time to think about them:

ML: *a:h to be honest I didn't have that much expectations/ it was a little bit like ah spontaneous because first I thought I couldn't go because/ yeah there was some problem with my subjects in my country/ to make them fit with my subjects in Lleida/ so it was kind of a little rush/ and at the end so I didn't have time to/ build that much expectations/ but it's nice because ... yeah/ (laughs/)*

Moreover, the participant affirms that she felt welcomed in Lleida, and emphasizes that her flatmates and people in general were nice:

ML: yes/ for example/ in my apartment they were very nice to me and class people were nice/ maybe not everyone was so open to get to know me like after class/ but people were nice and yeah/

However, when it comes to the treatment she received from the institution in Lleida, Mildri highlights that some professors refused to speak Spanish and she was confronted with the question of why she had chosen Lleida as a destination if she did not speak Catalan:

ML: ah... usually yes/ but for example when the professors refused to speak Spanish/ or they asked me why I come to Lleida when I don't speak Catalan/ I didn't feel that welcome/ (laughs)/

Mădălina reports that she did imagine how things would evolve but, as usual, things never go the expected way, and she explains that she did not expect to miss her family and friends so little and to meet a lot of good people from whom she received a lot of help:

MS: creo que cada vez que estamos planeando un viaje o una movilidad siempre estamos pensando que/ estamos imaginando como van a evaluar las cosas/ y nunca es exactamente como lo imaginamos algo/ es normal/ no? yo pensaba que/ esperaba que/ yo pensaba me iban a pasar muchas cosas bonitas y eso sí fue cierto/ pero yo pensaba que iba a extrañar más a mi familia y a mis amigos y la verdad no fue tan XXX/ porque a lo mejor porque me lo pasé muy bien/ que sí que los extrañaba pero no: no tanto/ y no/ no esperaba/ la verdad no esperaba que iba a encontrar tantas personas con un corazón tan bueno y que me ayudaran tanto como lo hicieron/ y estoy muy agradecido/ agradecida por eso la verdad/ (I think each time we are planning a trip or a mobility we are always thinking that/ we are imagining how things will evolve/ and it is never exactly how we imagined it/ it's normal/ right? I thought/ I expected that/ I thought a lot of nice things will happen to me and that was true/ but I thought I would miss my family and my friends more and actually it was not so XXX/ because maybe I had a lot of fun/ I mean I missed them but no: not that much/ and no/ I didn't expect/ actually I didn't expect to find so many people with such a good heart and that they would help me as much as they did/ and I'm very thankful/ thankful for that to be honest/)

With regard to her stay in Lleida, Madalina is quite happy about how she was treated, even though she highlights that she did not have much contact with Catalan people:

MS: *si/yo diría que sí/bueno/ desde el principio nos dijeron que los catalanes en la universidad no iban a ser muy sociables desde el principio/ o sea no iban a venir y decirte “hola/ cómo estás? yo soy/ tu cómo te llamas? de dónde vienes?” sabes? e yo eso lo noté/ pero ya que hablé con ellos/ no me parecieron nada mala onda o así/ fue de muy buena onda/ y: y pero es que no tuve mucho contacto con ellos/ me entiendes? y sí/ me senti bien recibida especialmente por la por la oficina de relaciones internacionales de Lleida que me ayudaron mucho/ pero no tuve mucho contacto con los catalanes/ (yes/ I would say yes/ well/ from the beginning we were told Catalans in the university would not be very sociable from the beginning/ I mean they wouldn't come and tell you “hi/how are you/ I'm/ what's your name? where are you from?” you know/ and this I noticed/ but as soon as I talked to them/ I didn't find them weird or something like that/ it was very cool/ and...and but the thing is I didn't have much contact with them/ do you understand? and yes/ I felt very welcome by by the office of international relations in Lleida who helped me a lot/ but I didn't have much contact with Catalans/)*

Petronela reports she felt scared because she heard Spanish people would not want to use English at all:

PT: *all the experience/ I was so scared/ (laughs) because I knew it/ I heard before that Spanish people they don't want to use English at all/ so I was so scared/ and it was the first time when I was flying by plane/ (laughs)/ that's why/ (laughs)/*

Finally, Radka comments that she felt somehow ignored by her teachers since they did not seem to care about her being an Erasmus student, nor did she receive any material in English:

RT: *well a:/ I expected a:/ that in the university...of course I didn't expect that/ that the classes would be in English/ I didn't expect it/ but I expected that teachers will/ would come to me and say “hi/ Radka/ you are an Erasmus student/ so:/ you will have this a:/ materials which are in English/ and you will have to: final test in English/ of course/ and if you have any questions/feel free to ask and...” I/ I thought they would be more open for Erasmus students/ but actually they were not so: (laughs)/*

However, despite the lack of warmth she perceived in her university, Radka was quite satisfied with the treatment she received in Lleida: especially from the international relations office:

RT: *mmmm/ yeah/ I would say so/ no/ nobody was mean to me or anything/ yeah/*

(...)

RT: *mmmm/ yeah/ a:/ international students' office made really good job/ and they/ they prepared really/ really nice intros/ it/ it was mixed with intensive Catalan course and a:/ other small ones events when we were discovering Lleida/ and other people/ and yeah/ it was really nice/ then it was a little bit harder on my university/ at INEF/ because yeah/ as I said/ they really wasn't/ weren't that warm as ... (laughs)/ as I expected but...*

All in all, it seems that the context and its linguistic landscape play an important role when it comes to deciding what kind of Erasmus experience one would like to have, and most especially, the investment one is willing to make and the benefits to be expected from each place. However, the accounts given by the students at the end of their sojourn give the impression that the initially imagined contexts and what they eventually turned out could be considerably different, which could lead to both positive and negative feelings towards the respective settings and the people that inhabit them.

In the Oulu group, expectations are very high at the onset of the sojourn. Finland is praised for its outstanding role in education, its social welfare, as well as the high standard of English. Finland is described as an English-speaking country in some interviews, while the existence of the Finnish language is worryingly ignored. The lure of Finland is so high that just being a passive watcher and learning from that seems to be enough, and in some cases, the value of the home countries of the participants is undermined when compared to Finland. However, it is precisely the Finnish context that appears to have deceived the participants the most. The disappointment is so substantial that, in some cases, the participants criticize issues like darkness, high prices, lack of places for coffee, adverse conditions at work, lack of empathy and coldness of the Finns, and even standards of education, which seem to be lower than expected. Certainly, there are different degrees of satisfaction among

the participants, ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied, but in general, it appears that the initial expectations by Oulu students are quite different from the actual experiences they have been through during their sojourn abroad.

Bucharest, on the other hand, appears to follow the opposite trend. At the beginning, it is generally described as an affordable city which might prove good for learning English and provides the chance to challenge oneself and prepare for future unpleasant surprises. In the accounts of the participants, Bucharest and Romania become an exotic destination where some participants declare going through culture shock at the beginning. Interestingly, while four of the five participants in Bucharest have chosen the destination for its exoticism and difference, the participant from Bulgaria declares having chosen Bucharest because the similarity between the city and her home city promised a comfortable stay. At the end of the experience, the sojourn is described as surprisingly positive, and the participants remark the friendliness and kindness of Romanian people, and even a change in their preconceived ideas about Romania. The stay in Bucharest exceeded the students' expectations, which was not that hard taking into account that the city was probably more feared than anything else at the beginning.

Finally, Lleida, which becomes Spain in the discourses of the students, is clearly imagined as a place that would offer a good opportunity to learn Spanish, and in some cases, as a place that is open to English-speaking students. The most significant expectation with regard to Lleida is probably its imagined linguistic landscape, whose description is adorned with fascination. At the end of the sojourn abroad, it seems that the stay in Lleida has proved to be quite positive, except for the significant presence of Catalan at the university and what is described as the refusal by some instructors to speak any other language but Catalan, also the lack of English at the university and the reduced contact with local people. Interestingly, in this group, some participants declare they did not have many expectations at the beginning, which in some cases was due to the conscious desire not to be disappointed.

Interestingly, some participants do not seem to be concerned about the context of the sojourn abroad because there are other important elements of more importance, such as, for example, being able to share the experience with a friend. In some cases, the Erasmus experience might be seen as an experience to be sought, regardless of the context.

However, this is rather an exception to the rule by which the majority of students pick a context according to the objectives (often linguistic) they believe it might satisfy.

The above results reveal an interesting pattern. High expectations are correlated to rather disappointing results, while low expectations lead to surprising satisfaction, and an apparent lack of expectations might also be related to a positive outcome.

4.1.2. Language attitudes and beliefs

As can be observed in the previous section, language related expectations are among the most outstanding of the students' Erasmus experience. In the following lines, the responses of the participants with respect to language investment (the extent to which the participants are eager to devote time and material resources to learning a given language), their linguistic expectations and the perceived language-related outcomes of the experience will be presented. However, these cannot be understood without considering the attitudes and the perceptions of the students in relation to the role of languages in Europe, which is, as reported by the participants, the most plausible context where they see themselves living in the future.

When it comes to considering multilingualism in Europe, the participants give considerable importance to the need for every European citizen to know at least two foreign languages. More moderate scores are attributed to the idea of giving equal official recognition to all languages in Europe, as well as to having a common official language in Europe.

Furthermore, as indicated in Table 6, there are significant differences ($\chi^2(2)=15.228, p=.000$) with regard to the first item: "every European citizen should know at least two foreign languages" in which the mean score for Oulu is significantly lower than the mean score for both the Lleida ($p=.036$) and the Bucharest groups ($p=.001$). Moreover, with respect to the second item: "it would be a good idea to have a common official language in Europe", significant differences were found among the groups ($\chi^2(2)=7.872, p=.020$). The Lleida group scored significantly higher than the Bucharest group ($p=.020$). Finally, in relation to the third item "all languages in Europe should have equal official recognition", significant differences appeared between the groups ($\chi^2(2)=7.184, p=.028$),

with the mean score for the Bucharest group being significantly higher than the Oulu one ($p=.039$).

Table 6: Languages in Europe⁵

	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
Every European citizen should know at least two foreign languages.	3.5*+	3.6	4.1*	3.8	4.4+	4	3.8	3.7
It would be a good idea to have a common official language in Europe.	3.3	3.2	3.6*	3.3	2.6*	2.8	3.2	3.1
All languages in Europe should have equal official recognition.	3.2*	3.5	3.6	3.8	3.8*	3.7	3.4	3.6

With regard to the participants' attitudes towards languages in Europe overall the same scores are maintained through the stay, with no significant differences between the PRE and the POST-test. Furthermore, while there were some significant differences between the contexts at the beginning of the sojourn abroad, such differences did not appear in the POST-test, which may indicate a homogenization effect of the sojourn abroad.

Table 7 shows that students in the three groups allocate considerable importance to English as a tool for bringing Europeans together, and this importance seems to be significantly higher at the end of the sojourn abroad ($Z=-1.960$, $p=.050$). However, when the three groups are considered separately, the significant differences are located only in the Bucharest group ($Z=-2.101$, $p=.036$). This indicates that for some reasons those students

⁵ The symbols +* indicate that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items they follow.

who had the Romanian capital as a destination appreciate to a considerably higher extent the role of English in keeping European people united.

Table 7: Perceived role of English in Europe⁶

	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
English is an important tool for bringing the Europeans together.	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.3	4.1	4.5	4.4*	4.5*

Finally, when it comes to expectations and attitudes with regard to languages (Table 8), generally, there are very positive attitudes towards English across the three contexts, at the beginning and at the end of the sojourn abroad. On the other hand, attitudes and expectations concerning three of the local languages (Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan) are more moderate, and when compared to English, their importance becomes even lower. This tendency is maintained throughout the stay. The Spanish language stands out from the other local languages.

Significant differences between the groups were encountered with respect to five of the nine items, and all differences involve Lleida vs. the other two locations, which suggest that the sole language that accounts for such differences is Spanish:

- I'll never use Finnish/Spanish/Romanian, so it's useless to learn it: ($\chi^2(2)=22.931$, $p=.000$). Mean score for the Lleida group is significantly higher than the ones for both Oulu ($p=.000$) and Bucharest ($p=.045$).
- We should all use Finnish/Spanish/Romanian frequently: ($\chi^2(2)=21.632$, $p=.000$). Mean score for the Lleida group is significantly higher than the mean score for both the Oulu ($p=.000$) and the Bucharest group ($p=.018$).

⁶ The symbols *+ / # - % indicate that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items they follow.

Table 8: Linguistic attitudes and language expectations – comparison of contexts (PRE and POST)⁷

	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
I'll never use Finnish/Spanish/Romanian, so it's/ it was useless to learn it. (REVERSED)	3.9*	3.4/	4.7*+	4.7/#	4.2+	3.7#
Catalan	3.9	3.4	3.6	3.2	4.2	3.7
We should all use/ have used Finnish/Spanish/Romanian frequently.	3.1*	3/%	4.1*+	4.1/#	3.4+	3.5#%
Catalan	3.1	3	2.9	2.9	3.4	3.5
Learning Finnish/Spanish/Romanian is/ was more important than learning English.	2*	1.9/	3.1*+	3.4/#	2.2+	1.9#
Finnish/Catalan/Romanian	2	1.9	1.5/	2	2.2/	1.9
I like or I would like to speak Finnish/Spanish/Romanian.	3.9*	3.5#	4.8*+	4.8#%	4.2+	3.9%
Catalan	3.9	3.5	3.4/	2.9-	4.2/	3.9-
I like listening to people speaking Finnish/Spanish/Romanian.	3.8*	3.7/	4.6*+	4.9/#	3.9+	3.8#
Catalan	3.8*	3.7%	3.3*/	2.8%-	3.9/	3.8-
I will never use English, so it's/ was useless to learn it. (REVERSED)	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.8	5
We should all try/ have tried to use English frequently.	4.5	4.6*	4.5	4.1*+	4.4	4.9+
I like or I would like to speak English.	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.9
I like listening to people speaking English.	4.5	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.5	4.7

⁷ The symbols *+ / # - % indicate that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items they follow.

- Learning Finnish/Spanish/Romanian is more important than learning English: ($\chi^2(2)=26.041$, $p=.000$). Mean score for the Lleida group is significantly higher than the mean score for both the Oulu ($p=.000$) and the Bucharest group ($p=.001$).
- Learning Finnish/Catalan/Romanian is more important than learning English: ($\chi^2(2)=9.259$, $p=.000$). Mean score for the Lleida group is significantly lower than the one for the Bucharest group ($p=.008$). This indicates that the interest to learn Catalan in Lleida is not just low, but significantly lower than the interest to learn Romanian in Bucharest.
- I like or I would like to speak Finnish/Spanish/Romanian: ($\chi^2(2)=26.435$, $p=.000$). Mean score for the Lleida group is significantly higher than the one for both the Bucharest group ($p=.007$) and the Oulu group ($p=.000$).
- I like or I would like to speak Finnish/ Catalan/ Romanian: ($\chi^2(2)=10.392$, $p=.006$). Mean score for the Lleida group is significantly lower than the mean score for the Bucharest group ($p=.004$).
- I like listening to people speaking Finnish/Spanish/Romanian: ($\chi^2(2)=22.377$, $p=.000$). Mean score for the Lleida group is significantly higher than the one in the Oulu group ($p=.000$) and the Bucharest group ($p=.000$).
- I like listening to people speaking Finnish/Catalan/Romanian: ($\chi^2(2)=6.155$, $p=.046$). Despite the fact the non-parametrical Pairwise test did not show between which groups there were differences, the Tukey HSD post-hoc test showed a significantly lower mean score for pleasure listening to people speaking Catalan ($M=3.3$, $SD=1.25$) with respect to Finnish ($M=3.8$, $SD=.95$) and Romanian ($M=3.9$, $SD=.94$).
- We should all try/ have tried to use English frequently: ($\chi^2(2)=19.918$, $p=.000$). Mean score for Lleida significantly lower than both the mean score for Oulu ($p=.009$) and Bucharest ($p=.000$)

Finally, as previously mentioned, the participants showed very positive attitudes and rather ambitious expectations with regard to the English language. The only significant difference between the contexts in relation to English is for the item “We should all try/ have tried to use English frequently: ($\chi^2(2)=19.918$, $p=.000$), where the mean score for Lleida is significantly lower than both the mean score for Oulu ($p=.009$) and Bu-

charest ($p=.000$). In the POST-test, the following significant differences between the groups appeared:

- I will never use Finnish/ Spanish/ Romanian, so it was useless to learn it: ($\chi^2(2)=34.144$, $p=.000$). Mean score for Lleida significantly higher than the score for both Oulu ($p=.000$) and Bucharest ($p=.000$).
- We should all have used Finnish/ Spanish/ Romanian frequently: ($\chi^2(2)=26.156$, $p=.000$). Mean score for Lleida was significantly higher than the one for both Oulu ($p=.000$) and Bucharest ($p=.039$). Also, despite the fact the non-parametric post-hoc Pairwise test just indicated a tendency in this respect, the Tukey HSD post-hoc test signaled that the mean score for Bucharest ($M=3.5$, $SD=1.12$) is significantly higher than mean score for Oulu ($M=3$, $SD=1.14$).
- Learning Finnish/Spanish/Romanian was more important than learning English: ($\chi^2(2)=29.120$, $p=.000$). Mean score for Lleida significantly higher than mean score for both Oulu ($p=.000$) and Bucharest ($p=.000$).
- I would like to speak Finnish/ Spanish/ Romanian: ($\chi^2(2)=34.957$, $p=.000$). Mean score for Lleida was significantly higher than mean score for both Oulu ($p=.000$) and Bucharest ($p=.001$).
- I would like to speak Finnish/ Catalan/ Romanian: ($\chi^2(2)=10.093$, $p=.006$). Mean score for Lleida significantly lower than mean score for Bucharest ($p=.004$).
- I like listening to people speaking Finnish/ Spanish/ Romanian: ($\chi^2(2)=34.475$, $p=.000$). Mean score for Lleida significantly higher than the mean score for both Oulu ($p=.000$) and Bucharest ($p=.000$).
- I like listening to people speaking Finnish/ Catalan/ Romanian: ($\chi^2(2)=11.788$, $p=.003$). Mean score for Lleida significantly lower than mean score for both Oulu ($p=.008$) and Bucharest ($p=.005$).
- We should all have tried to use English frequently: ($\chi^2(2)=19.918$, $p=.000$). Mean score for Lleida significantly lower than both mean score for Oulu ($p=.000$) and Bucharest ($p=.000$).

Overall, it appears that again, Spanish is playing a substantially different role from that played by all the other local languages. In fact, the power of Spanish equals the power of English in the Lleida group. This may account

for the reason why, in some cases, Catalan is assigned significantly lower scores than Finnish and Romanian. This animosity towards Catalan can be perceived most especially when it comes to a possible wish to learn Catalan, and even the mere fact of listening to people speaking Catalan.

Table 9 includes the same items as in Table 8, with an indication of the results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The following differences have been encountered between the PRE and the POST-tests:

- I'll never use Finnish/Spanish/Romanian, so it's/ was useless to learn it: Oulu ($Z=-2.826$, $p=.005$), Bucharest ($Z=-2.184$, $p=.029$).
- Learning Catalan was more important than learning English: ($Z=-2.380$, $p=.017$)
- I like or I would like to speak Finnish/ Spanish/ Romanian: Oulu ($Z=-3.283$, $p=.001$). Bucharest ($Z=-2.184$, $p=.029$).
- I like listening to people speaking Spanish: $Z=2.111$, $p=.035$.
- I like listening to people speaking Catalan: $Z=-2.220$, $p=.026$.
- We should all try/ have tried to use English frequently. Lleida ($Z=-2.035$, $p=.042$), Bucharest ($Z=-2.961$, $p=.003$).
- I like/ would like to speak English: Bucharest ($Z=-2.209$, $p=.025$)

In light of these results, the reader may argue that, with regard to the first question: "I'll never use Finnish/Spanish/Romanian, so it's/ was useless to learn it", at the end of the sojourn abroad, significantly more positive attitudes are reported by the students in Oulu towards Finnish, and by the students in Bucharest towards Romanian. Nevertheless, the reverse trend can be observed regarding Catalan in Lleida, even though the difference is not significant. Spanish, on the other hand, maintains the same high score. Interestingly, when it comes to the importance of learning Catalan as opposed to English, and despite the score remaining very low in the POST-test, it is significantly higher than in the PRE-test. However, if we take into account also the results of the first item with regard to Catalan, and the significantly lower score to the item "I like listening to people speaking Catalan", we might interpret the increase in the perceived importance of the need to learn Catalan when compared to the need to learn English in Lleida as an outcome of the realization that the Catalan language had a considerable weight for the local people in Lleida, and therefore, the participants might have realized it was more important than they initially thought. However, this situation may have led to an increased animosity towards the Catalan language.

Table 9: Linguistic attitudes and language expectations – comparison beginning and end of the SA experience⁸

	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
I'll never use Finnish/Spanish/Romanian, so it's/ was useless to learn it. (REVERSED) Catalan	3.9*	3.4*	4.7	4.7	4.2/	3.7/
We should all use/ have used Finnish/Spanish/Romanian frequently. Catalan	3.1	3	4.1	4.1	3.4	3.5
Learning Finnish/Spanish/Romanian is/ was more important than learning English. Catalan	2	1.9	3.1	3.4	2.2	1.9
I like or I would like to speak Finnish/Spanish/Romanian. Catalan	3.9#	3.5#	4.8	4.8	4.2%	3.9%
I like listening to people speaking Finnish/Spanish/Romanian. Catalan	3.8	3.7	4.6*	4.9*	3.9	3.8
I will never use English, so it's useless to learn it.(REVERSED)	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.8	5
We should all try/ have tried to use English frequently.	4.5	4.6	4.5+	4.1+	4.4-	4.9-
I like or I would like to speak English.	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.6	4.6*	4.9*
I like listening to people speaking English.	4.5	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.5*	4.7*

⁸ The symbols + / # - % indicate that there are significant differences (p < .05) between the items they follow.

In fact, more negative feelings towards the local languages Finnish and Romanian also become apparent in the POST-test, where the participants assign significantly lower scores than in the PRE-test (both in the Oulu and the Bucharest group) to the item “I like or I would like to speak Finnish/ Spanish/ Romanian”. Finally, with respect to English, the students in Lleida assign a significantly lower score to the item “We should all have tried to use English frequently”, while the ones in Bucharest do the opposite, assigning a significantly higher score to the same item. A possible interpretation could be that the Lleida group might perceive they did not learn as much Spanish as they had expected to, and using English might have interfered with their use of Spanish. On the other hand, the students in Bucharest might also think that their English level may not have improved to the extent they expected. If we take into account the reported time the students spent with people from their own countries, using one’s first language might be understood as a factor limiting the use of English, which the participants could regret at the end of their sojourn abroad.

A more in-depth understanding of the linguistic panoramas that the participants found in their respective host contexts abroad, as well as their level of investment, the practices they engage in, and the perceived language-related results of the experience is offered by the interview data.

4.1.2.1. Beginning of the sojourn abroad

At the beginning of the sojourn abroad, in the Oulu group, the three Spanish participants appear to be rather certain that their English proficiency will increase significantly. For instance, Diego hopes to finish the sojourn abroad with practically perfect English:

DD: *espero salir de aquí con el inglés prácticamente/ no perfecto/ per...*
(I hope to get out of here with practically / not perfect English/ but...)

In a similar way, Jennifer and Claudia affirm that they would like to be much more prepared in the language (referring to English) for the future:

JC: *y: a nivel de idioma/ formarme mucho más para salir preparada y el día de mañana salir bien preparada/ (and: on a language level/ to train myself much more in order to get out from here being ready/ and being well prepared for the future/)*

INTERVIEWER: *muy bien/ (very well/)*

CQ: *es verdad/ lo del idioma también/ (it's true/ also the language issue/)*

INTERVIEWER: *cuando decís idioma/ a que idioma os referís? (when you say language/ to which language do you refer?)*

CQ: *al inglés/ (laughs)/ (to English/ (laughs)/)*

JC: *al inglés/ (to English/)*

Meyer does not mention language as a key factor in his choice of context, but when asked about the role of languages in his sojourn abroad, he states that his English might improve because the situation requires him to use the language:

ML: *yeah/ I think they will improve a lot because I really don't have another opportunity than speaking English here/ of course to my German fellows I speak German/ but only when I'm alone with them/ and I'm not very often alone with Germans so ah/ of course you don't speak all the time with native English speakers/ but even though with English and ah/ yeah/ this is just learning by doing/ you know? and...*

Similarly, Stefaan reports that he will practice oral English and despite the fact that he does not have a clear linguistic objective for his stay, he is invested in learning some other foreign languages for fun:

SM: *yeah/ yeah/ my English will get way better since I don't talk English this often normally/ and X I'm learning some Finnish/ and some Korean as well/*

INTERVIEWER: *OK/ you're learning both Finnish and Korean right now?*

SM: *yeah now I'm learning/ I'm hanging out with Korean guys/*

INTERVIEWER: *OK/*

SM: *and also Spanish guys and I'm trying to pick up ah/*

INTERVIEWER: *OK/ so you would like to learn their languages?*

SM: *yeah/ yeah/ the basics would be nice/*

INTERVIEWER: *OK/ was that one of your aims when you enrolled in this mobility program?*

SM: *no/ not at all since I don't like languages/ (laughs) but/ but it's fun to learn from them/*

In the Bucharest group Sami and Jussi build a discourse in which learning English intermeshes with many other sorts of learning, such as learning about the Romanian people's lives, learning how to deal with problems and finally learning some Romanian, too. It is in their discourse, more than any of the other participants, where language learning seems to be deeply ingrained in the process of gaining knowledge in a very wide variety of aspects.

JN: *and/ of course we learn their/ about their lives and learn English and how/ how to deal with problems we haven't probably dealt with before/ (...)*

SM: *and/ and maybe learn some Romanian/ too/*

Jesús has a set of expectations with regard to language learning that we could define as rather relaxed:

JO: *e:/ yo... simplemente perfeccionar el inglés todo lo que pueda y aprender rumano a:/ a nivel/ no me voy a comer la cabeza/ en el sentido de... no me voy a estar estudiando por las noches/ pero sí el poder hablar con la gente si tengo que volver aquí o... pues yo que sé/ serle útil a alguien/ en ese sentido/ sí que me gustaría y luego/ más allá de esos dos idiomas/ no tengo ni... a día de hoy aprender aquí dentro de este... del Erasmus y el programa de movilidad... no/ no tengo... no digo que no quiero/ pero no es mi... mi objetivo principal aprender francés o italiano/ y tal... yo al volver sí que... tengo... de hecho voy a ir a sacarme el B1 de francés pero aquí no/ (e:/ me... simply perfecting English as much as I can and learn Romanian to:/ on a level/ I'm not going to rack my brain/ in the sense that... I will not be studying at night/ but for being able to talk to people if I have to come back here or... well I don't know/ being useful to someone/ in that sense/ I would like it and then/ beyond those two languages/ I do not even have... at this very moment to learn here within this... within the Erasmus and the mobility program... I don't / I don't have... I'm not saying that I do not want / but it's not my... my main objective learning French or Italian/ and such... on my return yes... I have... in fact I will try to get the French B1 but not here/)*

The only language that Jesús seems to be concerned about perfecting as much as he can is English. With respect to Romanian, there are some traces of a desire to rather become a user of the language, at a basic level, but he does not seem to be eager to invest much in that. Apart from these

two languages, Jesús reports lack of interest in learning any other for the time being, but he expresses his intention to get an official certificate in French after his return from Bucharest.

In a much more straightforward way, Federica, the Italian participant in Bucharest, states clearly that she came to Bucharest to learn English because it is very important for her future:

FH: I come in Bucharest because I want to learn English/ because for my future is very important/

This is the first reason she mentions when she explains the determinants for her decision to study abroad, and in fact, she alludes to Spain as a possible option for her sojourn, which she refused because she predicted it would not be a good context for learning English. In Federica's imagination, Bucharest is a good place to learn English. She does not mention with whom she expects to communicate in this language, or by what means she imagines this learning will happen, but she seems to have an intuitive idea of the opportunities for using ELF and learning English.

In the Lleida group, the presence of Spanish creates important divergences with respect to the language expectations in the Oulu and the Bucharest group. As in the results from the questionnaires, the participants seem to be much more concerned with learning Spanish than English, or any other language. In fact, Spanish appears as one of the main attractions when it comes to choosing this context. For instance, Federico sees his sojourn abroad as an opportunity to know a new language, certainly referring to Spanish:

FB: because it's an opportunity to knew/ to... knew a new language/ in... for trying to live independent/

Similarly, Petronela, when asked about the languages she would like to learn or improve in Lleida, states that she expects to learn Spanish, but she also adds that her English might improve because the Erasmus provides the chance to meet a lot of people and talk to them:

PT: Spanish/

INTERVIEWER: Spanish? OK / e: what about English?

PT: (laughs)/ here we can improve/ we can practice

Mildri reports on a long relationship with Spanish that played an important role when she decided to enroll in a sojourn abroad in Lleida:

ML: ah... first of all I/ I learned some Spanish and I was a lot/ a lot of times in Spain when I was little/ and I learned a little Spanish at school/ so I've always wanted to: get better at Spanish/ so the language was maybe the first ah motivation/ and also I/ I/ I'm studying for six years in the same place and I/ and I'm a little restless/

Apart from reporting Spanish as her first motivation for studying abroad, Mildri also stresses the fact that she has always wanted to get better at Spanish, since she visited the country many times as a child and she also learnt the language at school. From her account, it seems that Mildri's desire to go to Spain was born much before her decision to enroll in the Erasmus program. However, her relationship with the languages she encounters in Lleida is far from being straightforward. In fact, her desire to learn Spanish, which actually pushed her to unsuccessfully apply for her semester abroad in Santiago de Compostela is truncated both by the presence of Catalan in Lleida and by her fear of losing opportunities to learn in her classes because of her limited Spanish level:

ML: I hope I will feel more secure about my Spanish/ when I leave/ and I hope I/ I'll get the time to travel a little bit around in Spain/ and I hope that the courses I take here/ even if I take it in Spanish or Catalan/ that I will learn as much as I would if I studied it in English/ that I'm not missing anything from my career either/

With regard to Catalan, the participant says that even though she wants to learn a little, she does not have the time to do any courses, but she expects to learn it somewhat passively from her lessons in Catalan. Therefore, Mildri is not too invested in learning Catalan, or at least, not to the same extent she is in learning Spanish, for which she is taking a B2 course:

ML: ah/ yes/ I'm doing the language course here in Rectorado/ the B2 Spanish course/ and also I want to learn a little bit Catalan/ but right now I don't have time to do any course/ but I have my classes in Catalan so I learn maybe a little bit every day/ but not systematically/

Mildri's account of her relationship with Catalan is a constant in the discourse of many other participants in Lleida. At the beginning of their sojourn abroad, and after being offered a short Catalan course, the students who had recently arrived in Lleida keep their high expectations with regard to their learning of Spanish besides the unexpectedly high presence of Catalan in Lleida. This is the reason why, most of the time, the participants maintain a neutral position towards Catalan at the beginning, with no highly negative feelings nor any special interest in learning the language. As they get immersed in their sojourn abroad, their relationship to the Catalan language will also be reformulated.

4.1.2.2. *End of the sojourn abroad*

At the end of the sojourn, in the Oulu group, Claudia and Jennifer perceive that their stay in Oulu has contributed somehow to improving their level of English, which they exemplify by explaining that during their practicum, they were able to communicate in English with foreign patients and they even became a reference for the other nurses who called them when they needed some translation:

JC: *pues...a nivel profesional/ eh yo creo que te abre muchas puertas/ como dijo Claudia/ aparte del idioma que...es que yo llegué y llegué nula de inglés/ y al regresar me tocó en un centro de salud en el que vienen bastantes turistas/ y la verdad es que me he sentido súper bien porque me puedo comunicar con ellos/ y es que ellos se sienten bien/* (so...at a professional level/ eh/ I think it opens you many doors/ as Claudia said/ apart from the language that...I mean I arrived and my English was non-existent/ and on my return I was assigned a hospital were many tourists come/ and certainly I felt super well because I can communicate with them/ and then they feel well/)

CQ: *si/ y además vienen las enfermeras a buscarte...*(yes/ and also the nurses come to look for you/)

JC: *"me puedes traducir?"* ("can you translate?")

CQ: *"ay/ por favor/ tradúceme/ que yo no me entero de nada/ no sé qué/" y tú vas allí con tu/ con tu English y... (laughs)/("ay/ please/ translate for me/ cause I don't understand anything/ and so on/" and you go there/ with your English and... (laughs)/*

JC: *e ya luego/ cuando termine la carrera y si nos vamos no sé a Inglaterra o a otro sitio/ pues ya más o menos tenemos una base/ que ya es algo/ (and then after/ when I graduate and we'll go I don't know in England or somewhere else/ then more or less we'll have a basis/ which is already something/)*

From their discourse, one has the feeling that the two participants understand that their stay has contributed to opening many doors at a professional level, but the only reason they bring to the fore is that this happened through an increase in their level of English. The relationship between professional growth and learning English seems to be so strong that there is no need for them to explain it. It just opens doors. Surprisingly enough, while at the beginning learning from the Finnish culture and ways was perceived as a means to improve at a professional level, at the end of their stay, English language appears as the highest asset. However, Jennifer's closing sentence, in which she refers to having acquired a basis in English which will serve when they go to England or somewhere else gives the impression that they still feel their English level is not enough but Finland has helped them progress and reach a level from which to continue learning in the UK, which is regarded as a place that will enable them to learn more.

Concerning the Finnish language, none of the two participants seemed to have learnt much. However, their attitudes towards the language point in different directions. While both of them agree that it is a complicated language, Jennifer expresses that she would like to learn it. Claudia, on the other hand, brings to the fore that Finnish is useless, and she remarks that she would have liked to learn another type of language. Actually, the participant stresses that Finnish has no value since it is useful only in Finland and she highlights the fact that it limits the Finns because it is not spoken anywhere else and it does not resemble any other languages. As an argument, Claudia explains that Spanish can be used in many different locations:

JC: *el finés es más de escribir es más de hablar/ es de practicarlo/ porque es bastante complicado/ no? pero después... a mí la verdad me gustaría aprender más finés/ es muy complicado para mí pienso yo pero/ pero sí es un idioma que me gustaría aprenderlo/ la verdad que sí/ me gusta/ (Finnish is more for writing it's more for speaking/ it is for practicing/)*

because it's quite complicated/ right? but then...I would surely like to learn more Finnish/ it's very complicated for me I think but/ but it's a language I would like to learn/ to say the truth yes/ I like it/)

CQ: *ay pues a mí no/ yo lo que aprendí/ lo aprendí/ mi madre siempre me dice "guárdatelo"/ sí es verdad/ lo que aprendí/ lo aprendí/ pero tampoco sirve para nada/ sabes? me quedaré con lo básico e ya está/ pero me gustaría haber aprendido otro tipo de idioma/ pero el finés es que solo te sirve para Finlandia/ es que es lo que dicen ellos/ yo tenía un paciente que me decía "ay qué suerte porque yo no puedo viajar porque solamente sé hablar finés"/ sabes? y no sabe hablar inglés/ entonces eso es una cosa que delimita mucho a los fineses porque nosotros somos españoles/ hablamos español pero podemos irnos a Sudamérica que hablan español/ a Italia más o menos entendemos/ pero es que finés es finés y no hay más/ (ay I wouldn't/ what I learnt/ it's learnt/ my mother always says "keep it"/ yeah it's true/ what I learnt/ I learnt/ but it doesn't serve for anything/ you know? I will keep the basics and that's it/ but I would have liked to learn another type of language/ but Finnish is just useful in Finland/ it is what they say/ I had a patient who told me "ay what a fortune cause I can't travel cause I can just speak Finnish"/ you know? and he can't speak English/ so that's something that limits the Finns a lot because we are Spanish/ we speak Spanish but we can go to South America where they speak Spanish/ in Italy we can more or less understand/ but Finnish is Finnish and there's nothing else/"*

In a similar way, Meyer, who does not remark having learnt English in Oulu, brings to the fore the fact that he only learnt Finnish at a very basic level because it is very complex and the effort is "not worth it":

ML: *ah/ ah/ I learnt Finnish/ I do/ I took the basic Finnish I / but that was like really basic/ basic because it was Finnish/ it was like...ah and then/ not really/ not really anything else/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/ alright/ and why would you say you didn't learn Finnish better?*

ML: *ahh... cause it was extremely hard and then I compared like OK there are five million people in this world speaking like this fucking hard language/ so the effort is maybe not really worth it/ it's maybe not so OK to say/ but it's just like how I felt/*

Diego, on the other hand seems to have improved his English in Oulu and remarks that he gained better knowledge of everyday English:

DD: *sí/ yo/ yo creo que sí porque cuando llegué tenía un nivel normal/ básico/ tirando para bajo/ pero más sobretodo de academia/ no hablaba/ no tenía yo nivel de inglés de hablar con los amigos y tal/ y allí prácticamente ocho meses hablando todo con inglés/ es que tenía que mejorar sí o sí/ y a lo m...(yes/ I think I did cause when I arrived I had a regular level/ basic/ rather low/ but mostly from academia/ I didn't speak/ I didn't have an English level to talk with friends and so on/ and there practically eight months speaking everything in English/ I had to improve yes or yes/ and may...)*

With regard to Finnish, the participant also expresses he has not learnt it besides the basic language course offered by the university.

DD: *no/ no porque hice el cursillo/ un cursillo básico que daba la universidad y... genial/ no? pero eran dos meses/ y después los otros meses pues casi que no lo volví a utilizar/ porque es que realmente no llegué a aprender a/ a comunicarme sino a decir pues las cuatro cosas/ no? que si no si/ a lo mejor estoy allí más tiempo y conozco más finlandeses y eso/ entonces sí hubiese mejorado/ pero/ al no tener gente con quien hablar...(no/ no cause I took the course/ a basic course offered by the university and...great/ right? but it was two months/ and then the other months I almost never used it again/ cause actually I didn't learn to/ to communicate but to say a couple of things/ right/ if not yes/ maybe if I stay there longer and I meet more Finns and so/ then I would have improved/ but/ since I didn't have people to speak with...)*

As a reason, Diego mentions his little contact with Finnish people and a lack of need due to the good level of English among the locals:

DD: *yo creo que básicamente porqué tuve poco contacto con los finlandeses/ yyyy... mmm... no me hacía falta realmente/ allí todo el mundo hablaba inglés desde... bueno desde la universidad hasta una persona que vendía chicles en la calle/ (I think basically cause I had little contact with the Finns/ and...mmm...I didn't really need it/ there everybody spoke English from...well from the university to someone selling chewing gum in the street/)*

Mila, whose undergraduate studies are in English teaching, does not mention having improved her level of English. However, although she has not managed to learn Finnish well, she seems to have been considerably

invested in learning the local language. Mila explains that this was due to her desire to fit into Finnish society:

MJ: ah...maybe because ah/ like everybody was speaking so well English that I/ you didn't need to strive so much learning Finnish/ and most of the exchange students didn't learn Finnish/ I studied it because I/ I enjoy learning languages and especially when I'm living in this country/ I want somehow to fit in the society/ so maybe if they didn't spo/ speak any English/ I would learn it better/ but it was so convenient that they were so educated in English so...

Finally, Stefaan, who does not stress having learnt English in Finland, brings to the fore very similar reasons:

SM: because it's impossible to learn/ it's it's there's nothing in the language that I can recognise/ and next to it all Finnish people speak excellent English/ so I didn't really see why I would/

The participant also remarks that Finnish is complex and so different that he cannot recognize any words in the language. This, together with the excellent English level of the Finns, made him conclude there was no reason to learn the local language.

In the Bucharest group, Federica, who declares an improvement in her English, explains that she also learnt some Romanian, even though she mentions that she prefers French to Romanian:

FH: ah/ yes/ I did some Romanian courses in Bucharest/ in my university and I:/ I have a level A2 of Romanian/ but I want learn before French/ and after Romanian/

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/ OK/*

FH: *if I can/*

Sami, who at the beginning did not show much interest in improving his English while in Bucharest, now explains that in fact his English became different because he developed some strategies for conversation in English with Spanish and French speakers. Therefore, the participant declares that, through this adaptation strategy, he has learnt to see through the eyes of Spanish and French people, and he is able to adapt his English naturally for them and to shift to the regular English he speaks with the rest of speakers:

SM: *oh/ well I've been working on my own/ English/ a lot/ I'm I'm trying to sound like some/ native speaker but I I don't think I do/ enough/ but in Romania there were so many Spanish and French...that/ and for them/ it might be a little difficult to to speak the/ native-like English/ and I think/ it changed my English too a little bit/ I I started talking a little bit/ I don't wanna say worse English but/ different English/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/*

SM: *I think they speak very good English but/ it's difficult difficult X/*

INTERVIEWER: *so it changed your yours as well?*

SM: *a little bit (laughs)/*

INTERVIEWER: *towards what/*

SM: *towards the/ the Spanish French-like English/ but not so much/ not so mu/ only with like grammar/ but/ only with them/ you know/ when I speak to: other people/ I still speak this one/*

INTERVIEWER: *so you developed strategies in another kind of English/ or in speaking English with a certain group of people right?*

SM: *yeah yeah/ kind of/ so it's kind of part of the adaptation/ I think it's easier to see through their eyes/ when when I speak the same way it comes naturally for me/ I don't know why/*

Concerning Romanian, Sami explains he learnt very little and the reason he gives is that the Romanian lessons coincided with his party time:

SM: *we we would have had this language course and I I was gonna go there but/ ah/ it took place on Thursday evenings and and you know it's not the perfect time/ because we had all the parties then/*

Jussi, who does not directly refer to having improved his English level, explains a similar story. According to the participant, he developed receptive (listening) strategies when he did not understand some people who were not speaking clearly enough:

JN: *ah/ some/ especially French people they have so strange accent/ it's/ at first it was difficult to/ understand/ but a:/ in the beginning more difficult than in the end/ because everyone improved their English/ and you/ you know a:/ kind of like got used to it/ easier to listen/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/ got used to English in general? or got used to this kind of different English? or very personal English?*

JN: *different English/ yeah/ like their accents and/ stuff like that/ if someone is not speaking very clearly/ you can still understand them/ you kind of fill in/ fill in the gaps/ you can't understand/*

Jussi also explains it was not possible to learn more Romanian because of the language courses coinciding with other courses and because they were mostly in contact with other Erasmus students with whom English was used:

JN: *and a:/ I would have wanted to learn more more Romanian/ but the/ courses were not/ kind of like not possible/ because of the other courses and stuff like that/*

(...)

JN: *a:/ I think first of all that the:/ that we couldn't/well/ it could have been possible to go on their language course/ from X/ Romania/ but we thought that it was/ you know/ how to say it/ it could difficult things too much/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/*

JN: *and a:/ the other reason is that we were hanging around a lot of/ time with the:/ Erasmus people/ so the English was the: main thing/*

Jesús, who explains having used mostly English in his daily life in Bucharest, remarks he has not learnt much Romanian because of laziness and also because the people he related to spoke English:

JO: *pues porque...la primera...bueno/ vamos a ser sinceros/ lo primero es vagancia/ e:/ y porque no tenía tanto contacto con gente con la que necesitara el rumano/ por ejemplo yo con todo/ en el ámbito académico/ prácticamente dos tres personas no sabían hablar inglés/ y... claro/ para... tanto para ellos como para mí/ es más cómodo hablar en un idioma en el que ellos me van a entender porque no...bueno porque voy a saber hablarlo/ y ellos también/ y claro/ la no necesidad hizo/ hizo bastante en este sentido/ no aprender/ (well because...firstly...well/ let's be honest/ firstly is laziness/ e:/ and because I didn't have much contact with people with whom I needed Romanian/ for instance me with everything/ in the academic environments/ practically two three people couldn't speak English/ and...clearly/ for...both for them and for me/*

it's more comfortable to speak a language they will understand me cause if not...well cause I would be able to speak it/ and clearly/ the lack of need did/ did a lot in this sense/ not learning/)

Finally, Kalina, who declares having used English most of the time but does not refer to it as one of the highest assets of her experience, explains the following:

KN: *a:h/ well for me it was easier to communicate with a:h/ Italian people and with Romanian people/ with their language/ because Italian people in general they speak slower/ so they are easier to understand when they pronounce words and a:h/ Romanian people they have the s... exactly the same sounds as we have in Bulgaria/ so they were saying base to the words as I was saying them with some very few exceptions/ a:h/ for Spanish and Greek people/ I have a little bit of difficulties understanding them/ but after like three hours and two beers XXX/ I get used to them/ one people were annoying until the end for me/ they were really difficult to understand them/*

Similarly to Jussi and Sami, Kalina has developed certain communication strategies for conversation with speakers of English with different linguistic backgrounds. In fact, she can identify different accents in English and she states that Romanian and Italian people were easy to understand when they spoke in English, while more patience was needed for Greeks and Spaniards.

In the Lleida group, similarly to the accounts of the participants regarding their language-related expectations, the outcomes they report are also different from those in the other two groups. In fact, one has the feeling that the overall linguistic experience they have been through is substantially different from the ones in Oulu and Bucharest.

For instance, Federico remarks that he learnt very little English in Lleida since the majority of the people he talked to were Spanish. However, immediately after, he realizes that in fact, he did not talk to Spanish people but to Spanish speakers. In Lleida, many of the participants return having learnt or improved their Spanish upon their return. However, the Spanish they speak is closer to a Latin-American variety than to peninsular Spanish they would expect to learn in Lleida. In his account about the way he learnt Spanish, Federico sheds light on what actually happened. It is through the international students from Mexico that he actually learnt the language:

FB: *poco porqué por...la mayoría/ la mayoría de la personas con la... que hablaba eran español/ español hablantes/* (little cause for...the majority/ the majority of people that I...that I spoke were Spanish/ Spanish speakers/)

(...)

FB: *e:h/ fue también una coincidencia porque me encontré a vivir con cuatro mejicanos/ entonces/* (laughs)/ *he tenido que aprender/(e:h/* it was also a coincidence because I found myself living with four Mexicans/ so/ (laughs)/ I had to learn/)

Concerning Catalan, Federico reports having only taken the initial introductory course upon arrival, because he thought that learning Catalan alongside Spanish was difficult and confusing and remarks that he also likes Spanish better. When asked about the reasons behind his statement, the participant affirms he likes how Spanish sounds:

FB: (laughs)/ *catalán...he hecho el curso A1 pero...luego...era un poco difícil aprender también el catalán además del español/ y hacia un poco de confusión/ y además/ me gusta más el español/* (laughs)/ Catalan...I did the A1 course but...then...it was a little bit difficult to learn also Catalan besides Spanish/ and it was a little bit confusing/ and also/ I like Spanish better/)

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/ vale/ y por qué te gusta más el español?* (mhm/ OK/ and why do you like Spanish better?)

FB: *no sé/* (I don't know/)

INTERVIEWER: *Federico/*

FB: *come suena/ no?* (how it sounds/ right?)

Mildri explains she thinks her English got worse because she started thinking in Spanish:

ML: *a:h/ no/ I don't think so/* (laughs)/ *maybe it got worse because I started thinking in Spanish X/* (laughs)/

With regard to Spanish, which is the language she initially wanted to learn, the participant explains that she could not learn much Spanish from her lessons because teachers spoke Catalan and some of them refused

to speak Spanish. Mildri also explains that even though she lived with some Spanish people, and she tried to speak Spanish with them, they still spoke a lot of Catalan:

ML: a:h/ there were a few problems because/ ah/ because the teachers would speak in Catalan/ and some of them would change if you aske/d but some of them refused to change so I didn't learn that much Spanish from classes/ ah but I lived with some Spanish people/ they also spoke a lot of Catalan but I try/ I got to speak some with them but I/ I should have probably practiced more because when I was out with my friends/ we were speaking English/ so/ (laughs)...

Regarding Catalan, the participant remarks improvement in her Spanish and she had learnt some Catalan even though she declares not really being able to speak this language. She adds that she was focused on Spanish because it is a language she may use later in her life:

ML: I improved Spanish/ and since I didn't know any Catalan/ I probably improved my Catalan also/ (laughs)/ but yeah/ I don't really speak Catalan/ but I can understand and I can read and...

(...)

ML: ah... it was mainly because I was focusing on Spanish/ because that's the one I can use later/ and also... if I learn a language/ I want to know/ I/ I like the grammar of the languages so I would have to go to a class to take it from the beginning/ I/ I'm not good at learning like just from... picking up random/ so I would really have to put more effort into it if I wanted to learn it so...

Mădălina, who speaks Spanish with a strong Mexican accent at the end of her stay, brings to the fore that she did not improve her English, but she learnt Spanish from her Mexican flatmate and best friend:

MS: sí/ yo espero mucho que he mejorado mi español/ eso porque/ ay no no no/ eso se debe porque/ (laughs)/ no no no porque he vivido con una mexicana/ no? entonces como era mi mejor amiga pues hablábamos siempre en español/ y me ayudaba/ mi inglés no ha mejorado/ yo creo/ porque no sé porque/ porque no he comunicado a lo mejor tanto con tantas personas en inglés/ pero también he aprendido algunas palabras en catalán y por lo menos he empezado a entender lo que me dicen

los profesores en las/ en los/ cómo se dice? clases/ en las clases/sí?(yes/ I hope very much that I improved my Spanish/ that is because/ ay no no no/ that is due because/ (laughs) no no no because I lived with a Mexican/ no? so since she was my best friend then we always spoke Spanish/ and she helped me/ I didn't improve my English/ I think/ because I don't know why/ because I didn't communicate maybe with so many people in English/ but I also learnt some words in Catalan and at least I started to understand what teachers tell me in the/ in the/ how do you say? classes/ in the classes/ right?)

Regarding Catalan, the participant explains that despite being willing to learn Catalan better, she did not learn much because she was not integrated into any group of Catalan people. Her group of friends were all within the Erasmus group:

MS: porque estando en el grupo Erasmus/ bueno en el grupo Erasmus no se habla mucho el catalán/ se habla más como el inglés y el español/ no? y entonces el catalán solo lo lo escuchaba a la universidad y... me hubiera gustado conocer más/ pero era el único/ mi único contacto con el catalán porque no me he integrado tanto en un grupo de catalanes/ sino más que en el grupo Erasmus/ (because being in the Erasmus group/ well in the Erasmus group Catalan is not spoken much/ English and Spanish are more spoken/ right? and then Catalan I just hear it it in the university and...I would have liked to learn more/ but it was my only/ my only contact with Catalan cause I did not integrate much in a group of Catalans/ but more in the Erasmus group/)

Petronela remarks that she believes she has improved her English but that the presence of Spanish in Lleida was bigger than the presence of English:

PT: yes (laughs)/ I think yes but there were...there was more...Spanish/

With regard to Catalan, the participant declares she can say some words but not many because it is difficult:

PT: (laughs)/ I can say some words but not a lot/

INTERVIEWER: how...

PT: because it's difficult/

Furthermore, when she reflects upon the reasons why she did not learn Catalan better, the participant explains that from the beginning, she knew about the presence of Catalan in Lleida but did not care much about it and she believes that Spanish was more useful than Catalan, and easier to learn:

PT: *I knew it/ yes/ of course/ I had this knowledge but I didn't care at all about this language / (laughs)/*

(...)

PT: *because for me I think was more useful Spanish than Catalan/ and maybe more also easy to learn/ yes/ it's more easy/*

Finally, Radka brings to the fore what seems to be a slightly different relationship with the languages she encountered in Lleida. While she says she improved her English, she also learnt Spanish and the basics of Catalan:

RT: *yeah/ I think actually I improved even my English because I had to work with many English/ English materials so at least reading/ reading texts I/ I/ I saw I did some improvement in this/ and then I learnt also Spanish/ I/ I had only some basis before I came to Spain and I enrolled to a Spanish course/ it was really useful/ and I also got some basis of Catalan language because I didn't have a clue about Catalan before/ so/ yeah (laughs)/*

Concerning Catalan, the participant explains that she was surprised by the fact that Spanish was not the first language in Catalonia:

RT: *mhm/ yeah/ of course/ I did but...I was actually surprised because I/ I...for example/ I thought that a: Catalan language would be something a:/ which would use old people or...I don't know/ but I thought that Spanish would/ would be the first language in Catalonia/ whi: which is not/ so I was quite surprised by this (laughs)/*

(...)

RT: *well for me it was...it was more difficult because I don't speak Catalan/ well/ I can understand a little/ but I don't speak really good/ so for me it was quite difficult/ but...in general I don't think it's bad/ well/ it's OK for me/ and now/ actually when I/ well/ yeah/ you mentioned this*

that I/ I don't feel Catalan people are Spanish people/ I just saw it like any cul/ culture in within Spa/ within Spain/

It is interesting to note that despite Catalan making Radka's stay more difficult, she does not think the presence of Catalan was a bad thing and explains that she understood that Catalan people are different from Spanish people.

All in all, the linguistic expectations of the participants at the beginning of their stay are closely related to the contexts they had chosen for the Erasmus experience. In Oulu, the students with a low or intermediate level expected to see a significant improvement in their English, while those who already have a good level expected to refine it by using it more often. English is also mentioned as a possible aim of the stay by those students who chose Bucharest. However, they did not refer to this objective as straightforwardly as the participants in Finland; linguistic and cultural learning sometimes become one and the same thing. A very different scenario is found in Lleida, where the participants refer to Spanish as the language they would like to learn, and also their greatest concern is that they might not be able to learn enough or to cope with the language in their lessons at the university. None of the other local languages (Finnish, Romanian, or Catalan) is given the same importance. However, attitudes towards the local languages Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan, which are very similar, are also neutral at the beginning of the sojourn abroad.

At the end of the sojourn, the participants in Oulu had improved their English. However, in some cases, they were not satisfied yet by the level acquired. In spite of this, some participants were able to report that their English level had opened some professional doors for them. On the other hand, Bucharest seems to have provided a good environment for improving English as a lingua franca. Many participants mentioned that their English improved because they were able to develop communication strategies that enabled them to cope with its use among non-native speakers.

Students who chose Lleida improved their Spanish. However, they did so by communicating with international students from Latin America, an unexpected element. Therefore, the limited contact with the local community in Lleida did not impede the participants from pursuing their linguistic aims. Finally, attitudes towards the local languages changed,

especially in relation to Finnish and Catalan. More negative feelings are displayed towards Finnish, which is described as a difficult language, not worth the effort, and useless. Similarly, Catalan is defined as difficult, and as a limitation to learning Spanish, which appears “easier to learn” and which is “better sounding”. The attitudes towards Romanian are not as negative as those towards Finnish and Catalan. However, no interest at all is shown in this local language.

4.2. SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND LINGUISTIC CONTACT

Following the linguistic panorama and the language attitudes and beliefs of the students, delving into the expected and the resulting degree of satisfaction with the social, cultural, and linguistic contact, will enable the reader to understand how it shapes the experience abroad.

4.2.1. Local communities

An appropriate starting point for an assessment of the contact between the participants and the communities that they access will be to discern student awareness regarding their sense of belonging to the spaces they inhabit. Overall, students abroad feel strongly that they can choose how to develop their identities. They also report knowing themselves and their geographical space well, with a general feeling that their identities are well-established, that is, without the need to be constantly negotiated in society (Table 10). However, the experience might have affected the overall perceptions of the participants regarding their identity and sense of belonging. The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed significant differences in relation to the second item “My identity is complex and sometimes contradictory with regard to the places where I live, my cultures and my languages” ($Z = -2.471, p < .05$). These outcomes signal an overall evolution towards perceiving a more highly complex and contradictory identity following the sojourn abroad, where the distinction between places, cultures, and languages become more pluralistic, probably suggesting a more hybrid, multi-faceted identity as a result of the Erasmus experience.

Table 10: Identity and sense of belonging⁹

	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
I know well who I am and to which geographical space I belong to.	3.8	3.6	4.1	3.9	4	3.9	3.9	3.8
My identity is complex and sometimes contradictory with regard to the places where I live, my cultures and my languages.	3.1	3.4	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.1*	3.4*

Likewise, as depicted in Table 11, when it comes to the perceived effect of the sojourn abroad on their sense of belonging after they had completed their period abroad, the total score the participants allocate to the first item: “I belong to more than one space” is considerably high, indicating a noteworthy affiliation to more than one space as a possible result of the Erasmus experience.

Table 11: Sense of belonging after the sojourn abroad¹⁰

This mobility stay made me feel that:				
	Oulu	Lleida	Bucharest	Total
I belong to more than one space.	4*	4.2	4.5*	4.1
I belong to my country.	2.8	3.2	3.2	3

This result reinforces the previous one, which shows an increase in identity complexity, and the sense of belonging to more than one place because

⁹ The symbol * indicates that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items it follows.

¹⁰ The symbol * indicates that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items it follows.

of the experience. There were significant differences between the three groups ($\chi^2(2)=7.527$, $p<.05$). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons signaled significant differences between the Oulu and the Bucharest groups ($p=.03$). This points to a perception that the sojourn abroad triggered a significantly more accentuated sense of belonging to multiple spaces in those students who were enrolled in Bucharest than in those who chose Oulu.

Similarly, as shown in Table 12, when it comes to their own experience with cultural difference, the participants allocate high importance to their decision-making skills having expanded to encompass multiple cultural viewpoints. Furthermore, the students identify themselves substantially as people who can maintain their values and behave in culturally appropriate ways in any context. In the PRE-test, no significant differences were encountered between the three contexts regarding any item, indicating that participants across the three settings have a similar profile at the beginning of the sojourn abroad.

Table 12: Self-perception regarding cultural differences¹¹

	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
My life experience enables me to be successful in any cultural context.	3.6	3.7	3.3	3.8	3.3	3.6	3.4*	3.7*
I can maintain my values and also behave in culturally appropriate ways in any context.	3.9	4.2	3.8	4	4	4.3	3.9*	4.2*
I can look at any situation from a variety of cultural points of view.	3.5	3.9	3.7	3.9	3.7	4	3.6*	3.9*
My decision-making skills are expanded by having multiple cultural viewpoints.	4	3.8/	4.1	4.1	4.3	4.4/	4.1	4

¹¹ The symbols * / indicate that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items they follow.

However, overall significant differences between the PRE and POST-test with regard to three different items have been revealed. The first one is “My life experience enables me to be successful in any cultural context” ($Z=-2.744$, $p=.006$), which points overall to a significantly higher perception of being successful in any cultural context at the end of the sojourn abroad. The second item is “I can maintain my values and also behave in culturally appropriate ways in any context” ($Z=-2.948$, $p=.003$). This indicates again, a similarly high overall perception of success in any cultural context at the end of the sojourn abroad. Finally, the third item where significant differences were encountered is “I can look at any situation from a variety of cultural points of view” ($Z=-3.134$, $p=.002$), signaling, once more, an overall significantly higher perception of access to multiple cultural viewpoints at the end of the Erasmus experience.

Finally, while almost no significant differences between the three settings were found in the PRE-test, one significant difference was revealed with respect to the item “My decision-making skills are expanded by having multiple cultural viewpoints” ($\chi^2(2)=11.706$, $p=.003$). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons signaled significant differences between Oulu and Bucharest ($p=.002$), indicating that those participants who spent their stay in Bucharest were significantly more affected by the experience about their multiple cultural viewpoints than those who spent their sojourn abroad in Finland.

Furthermore, on the topic of how the students perceive themselves with respect to the community of their sojourn abroad, the highest total score, as represented in Table 13, is assigned to the category of “traveler”.

In the PRE-test, a significant difference between the groups was found with regard to the category “immigrant” ($\chi^2(2)=14.124$, $p=.001$): the Oulu group’s score was significantly higher than that for the Bucharest group ($p=.001$), indicating that at the beginning of the sojourn abroad, those students who chose Finland as a destination identify to a higher extent with the category “immigrant” than those who chose Romania. This difference, which does not appear in the POST-test, might exist for two reasons: one may be that in general, Finland is seen as a country that receives immigrants while Romania could be regarded more as a country that sends immigrants. The second hypothesis is that those students who chose Bucharest as a destination are more inclined to feel at home in the world than those who chose Oulu.

Table 13: Self-perception regarding the community of the sojourn abroad¹²

How do you perceive yourself with regard to the local community in which your stay will take place:								
	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
An immigrant	2.6*	2.1	2	2.2	1.7*	2.1	2.2	2.1
A local	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.7	1.9	2.5	2.1#	2.4#
A traveler	4	3.9	4	4	4.3	4	4.1	4
A stranger	2.9	2.5	3	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.9#	2.6#

Also, significant differences between the PRE and the POST-test with respect to two items have been revealed. The first one is the item “local” ($Z=-2.699$, $p=.007$), which indicates that overall, the participants felt like a local to a significantly higher extent at the end of their sojourn abroad than at its beginning. Furthermore, significant differences were found with regard to the item “stranger” ($Z=-2.392$, $p=.017$), signaling that at the end of their sojourn abroad, the students perceived themselves as strangers in their host communities to a significantly lower extent than at the beginning.

Referring to the perspective of living in different places in the future, as presented in Table 14, the idea of living in any European country surpasses the idea of living anywhere else both in the PRE and in the POST-test. In fact, the expectation of living in any European country is even higher than that of living in one’s own country.

In the PRE-test, significant differences have been found with respect to the third item: “living in any occidental country” ($\chi^2(2)=10.978$), with the Oulu group scoring significantly lower than the Bucharest group ($p=.006$), and almost significantly lower than the Lleida group. Therefore, the results give the impression that the group who had the lowest predisposition towards living in any occidental country chose Finland as a destination.

¹² The symbols * # - indicate that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items they follow.

Table 14: Future mobility perspectives¹³

In the future, I see myself living:								
	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
In my country	3.6	3.6#	3.7	3.6-	3.3	3.1#-	3.5	3.5
In any European country	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.9	4	3.9	3.8	3.8
In any occidental country	2.8*	3/	3.3	3.5/	3.4*	3.5/	3.1	3.2
In any place of the world	3.1	2.9*	3.1	3.5*	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.1

No significant differences between the beginning and the end of the Erasmus stay were encountered. However, while in the PRE-test, there was a single significant difference with regard to the item “living in any occidental country”, in the POST-test, there were significant differences between the contexts concerning three of the four items. With respect to the item “own country” ($\chi^2(2)=6.451$, $p=.040$), the mean score for Oulu is significantly higher than the mean score for Bucharest ($p=.020$) and for Lleida ($p=.033$). This signals that at the end of the sojourn, for those students who spent their stay in Oulu, the intention to live in their own country in the future is significantly higher than for those in Bucharest and Lleida. The second item in which significant differences appeared in the POST-test was “any occidental country” ($\chi^2(2)=9.858$, $p=.007$). The mean score for Oulu is significantly lower than the mean score for both Lleida ($p=.030$) and Bucharest ($p=.035$), indicating that at the end of the sojourn abroad, the participants in Oulu envisioned themselves living in any occidental country to a significantly lesser extent than those in Bucharest and Lleida. Finally, significant differences were also found with respect to the item “any place of the world” ($\chi^2(2)=6.478$, $p=.039$). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons showed the mean score for Oulu to be significantly lower than for Lleida ($p=.045$), highlighting that at the end of their Erasmus experience, those participants who had Finland as a

¹³ The symbols * / # indicate that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items they follow.

destination pictured themselves in any country of the world to a significantly lesser extent than those who chose Lleida.

In fact, the only item where there are no significant differences between the groups both in the PRE and the POST-test is the possibility to live in any European country. This might be understood as an indicator that European youth participating in the Erasmus program, overall, do consider mobility inside the EU as a future option.

4.2.2. Transient communities

The participants were asked to rate how much they felt they belonged to their town/city/province, their country, Europe, and the world. As represented in Table 15, sense of belonging to Europe is the lowest among the four categories, both in the PRE and in the POST-test, a surprising fact if we compare it with the high possibility of living in any European country in the future, and which might indicate a discrepancy between participant sense of belonging and how they see possibilities for their future. This may signal a certain divergence between the participants' sense of belonging and the possibilities of the social structures through which they navigate, foresee themselves be able to navigate.

Table 15: Sense of belonging to different places

How much do you feel you belong to:								
	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
Your town/city/ province	3.6	3.6	3.9	3.5	4	3.9	3.8	3.6
Your country	3.7	3.6	3.6	3.9	3.2	3.1	3.8	3.8
Europe	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.6
The world	3.8	3.9	3.7	3.8	4.1	3.9	3.9	3.9

No significant differences were encountered between the three contexts, either at the beginning, nor at the end of the sojourn abroad. Furthermore, the overall scores assigned to the four categories are almost the same in the PRE and the POST-test, which might suggest that overall, the sojourn abroad does not have an impact on the sense of belonging to

any of the four places that appear in the table. If we recall the discourse of the EU which praises the Erasmus program as one of the engines to promote European identity, the results of the POST-test with regard to sense of belonging to Europe at the end of the Erasmus experience are not very encouraging.

By the same token, when it comes to identification with different groups of people based on the languages they speak (Table 16), the highest score, both at the beginning and at the end of the sojourn is attributed to people with whom the first language is shared, followed by people who speak English, and finally, European people, no matter their language.

Table 16: Identification with speakers of different languages

To what extent do you identify with:								
	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
People who speak your first language.	3.9	3.9	3.9	4	4.1	4.1	4	4
People who speak English.	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.5	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.6
European people, no matter their language.	3.1	3.2	3.5	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.3	3.3

No significant differences were found between the PRE and POST-test or between any of the three groups, but the Oulu group indicates a lower identification with “European people, no matter their language” than the Lleida and Bucharest groups. Interestingly, speaking English gives the impression playing a more important role than sharing a European identity, when it comes to group identification.

4.2.3. Beginning and end of the sojourn abroad

With regard to the participants’ sense of belonging at the beginning of the sojourn abroad, in Oulu, Jennifer mentions “her land”, which seems to be both her village and the island of Gran Canaria, but immediately after states that she does not mind living anywhere else, opening the

possibility for what will be a constant in her discourse tightly connected to the idea of imminent future mobility. The things that tie Jennifer to “her land” are beautiful childhood memories and friends:

JC: *de mi tierra/ pero sí sé que mi casa es donde yo voy porque/ no me importa vivir en cualquier lado la verdad/* (from my land/ but I do know that my home is where I go because/ I don’t mind living in any place, to be sincere/)

(...)

INTERVIEWER: *cuando dices que eres de tu tierra/ Jennifer/ qué quieres decir? tu pueblo o tu...* (when you say you are from your land/ Jennifer/ what do you mean? your village or your...)

JC: *sí/ en plan de que nací allí/ me crie allí cuando era pequeña/ tengo mis bonitos recuerdos allí/ mis amigos...* (yes/ in the sense that I was born there/ I grew up there when I was a kid/ I have my beautiful memories there/ my friends/)

(...)

JC: *Gran Canaria/ XX/ no? porque no solo tengo amigos en mi pueblo/ no? entonces mis recuerdos bonitos de mi infancia/ que es una etapa bonita/ los tengo allí/ pero poco más/* (Gran Canaria/ XX/ no? because I don’t just have friends in my village/ right? so my beautiful childhood memories/ which is a nice period/ they are there/ but little more than that/)

At the end of her stay, Jennifer’s discourse shows little change. She adopts the same position of someone who knows where she belongs but is open to living somewhere else. About the impact of the Erasmus program, she highlights that it teaches you how to live by yourself in a foreign city and ultimately, is a sort of training for jobseeking in the future. Once more, in Jennifer’s narrative, the imminent need to move for job reasons is clear:

JC: *no sé/ me siento de allá donde voy/ no sé/* (I don’t know/ I feel from those places where I go/ I don’t know/)

(...)

JC: *el Erasmus yo creo que lo que te enseña es a/ a saber cómo moverte cuando realmente te vayas a mover de verdad a trabajar a otro sitio/* (I think the Erasmus teaches you to/ to know how to move when you’ll really move to work somewhere else/)

(...)

JC: *decir aprendes a hacerlo tú/ tú sola las cosas/ por ti misma/ a irte a una ciudad/ a vivir allí/ aprender allí a comprar/ no saber en dónde pero vas y compras/ eso/ a eso/ básicamente/ pienso yo/ (I mean you learn to do it yourself/ things alone/ by yourself/ going to a city/ living there/ learning to buy there/ not knowing where but you go and buy/ that/ basically/ I think/)*

Meyer (ML) connects his sense of belonging to Germany, but he states that he would not say he is super German:

ML: *ah/ yeah of course/of course I'm German and I feel like belonging to Germany ah/ but it's not like that I'm... part/ patriot/ ah can't think of the word/ I don't know/*

INTERVIEWER: *yeah/ patriotic/ maybe?*

ML: *OK/ yeah patriotic ah... and I'm not like I feel/ I feel attached to a special part of Germany because I'm from the north and then I moved to the south and then I moved farther up to the south and then I went back to the north again/ now I'm in Finland/ so I'm from Germany and I'm from Europe but I wouldn't say that I'm like ah/ super German or /"hey I'm from Europe"/ I wouldn't...yeah/*

From his discourse, despite reporting being connected to a national state, Meyer converges with Jennifer in their high capacity to adapt to new settings when it comes to mobility.

At the end of his stay, Meyer, like Jennifer, does not appear to have substantially changed his narrative. He still feels he belongs, firstly to his home area in Germany, then to Germany itself, and he would not say he is a citizen of the EU. With respect to the impact of the Erasmus experience, he affirms that it does not change his sense of belonging:

ML: *mmm/ maybe like... I come from home/ like/ like Germany/ like maybe the part where of Germany where I come from/ ah/ but/ not... of course/ yeah of course I'm German so also as a German but nothing more than that actually/ so I wouldn't say hey I'm a citizen of the European Union or like al...*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/ alright/ and do you think that a mobility program can have any effects on your sense of belonging?*

ML: *ahh/ not really/ I think... ah I mean you are alike to/ alike to get to know other places and I also I was living in other places also for like more than one year/ two year/ or whatever but like where I come from and where I belong to is still like home for me/*

The other four participants in Oulu report feeling a sense of belonging to the world in the first instance at the beginning of their stay. For example, Claudia, one of the Spanish participants states the following:

CQ: *no/ yo creo que yo soy del mundo/ sí/ no/ y además/ yo siempre le digo a mi madre mándate a mudar a otro lado porque yo no voy a vivir aquí/(laughs)/ me encanta Tenerife pero... no veo que yo vaya a vivir en Tenerife hasta dentro de muchos años/ porque sé que mi futuro no está allí/ o puede que no es la isla/ o puede que fuera de España/ pero sé que Tenerife no/ porque no tengo salida yo allí/ y... yo creo que pertenecemos al mundo y que sí... no sé/ (no/ I believe I am from the world/ yes/ and also/ I always tell my mum go to live in another place because I'm not going to live here anymore/ (laughs)/ I love Tenerife but... I don't see myself living in Tenerife for many years/ because I know my future is not there/ or maybe it's not the island/ or maybe it's outside Spain/ but I know that not in Tenerife/ because there are no opportunities for me there/ and... I believe we belong to the world and that yeah... I don't know/)*

(...)

CQ: *pero no/ que si hay que emigrar/ pues se emigra y ya se volverá/ (but no/ if we have to emigrate/ then we emigrate and we will come back some day/)*

Claudia affirms that she belongs to the world, and even though she likes Tenerife, she has made up her mind to the fact that she is not going to live there in the following years because of the lack of opportunities, probably in relation to the employment market. Like the other Spanish female participant in Finland, the need to move, to emigrate, is a constant in Claudia's discourse and it surfaces even when no related information is elicited. However, at the end of her stay, Claudia states that she feels Spanish, and Canarian:

CQ: *a ver/ yo me siento española/ y soy canaria/ pero también tengo: familia de todos lados/ entonces a mi me encanta Canarias y Andalucía/ es que... pero... (let's see/ I feel Spanish/ and I'm Canarian/ but I also have: family from everywhere/ so I love Canarias and Andalucía/ it's... but...)*

Regarding the impact of SA on her sense of belonging, Claudia affirms that she does not know how it might affect how she feels about belonging to a particular place but she thinks it may give her an open mind and a reduced fear of going to different places in the future:

CQ: *no sé si en el sentido de pertenecer a algún sitio/ pero en el sentido de tener mentalidad abierta de irte a otro sitio/ (...) pero mmm quizás el hecho de no tener miedo de ir allá donde el futuro te depare/ (I don't know if on your sense of belonging to somewhere/ but in the sense that you have the open-mind to go somewhere else/ (...) but mmm maybe the fact that you are not afraid to go where the future awaits for you/)*

Similarly, Diego (DD), declares the following:

DD: *pues... a mí me gusta decir que... el mundo ahora poco a poco va a la unión todo/ (well... I like saying that... the world now advances towards a union little by little/)*

INTERVIEWER: *vale/ (OK/)*

DD: *o sea no me gustan las separaciones y tal/ entonces yo diría primero pues soy del mundo/ luego de Europa / de España/ y de Ceuta/ pero obviamente tengo más raíces en Ceuta porque tengo allí más con/ más... mi familia es de allí/ y todos mis amigos de allí/ luego de España en general porque me puedo X/ y ya pues Europa y tal pero... (I mean I don't like separations and so/ then I would say firstly I'm from the world/ then from Europe/ from Spain/ from Ceuta/ but obviously I have more roots in Ceuta because there I have more with/ more... my family are from there/ and all my friends from there/ then from Spain in general because I can X/ and then well Europe and so but...)*

INTERVIEWER: *vale/ pero más de Europa que del mundo/ o/ o/ o dirías que lo mismo/ que... (OK/ but more from Europe than from the world/ or/ or/ or you would say that the same/ that...)*

DD: *no/ no/ del mundo sí/ (no/ no/ from the world yes/)*

From his response, Diego identifies first as belonging to the world, since his perception is that nowadays the world is unifying. However, as he expands on it, he mentions different categories of belonging which he orders from first to last: world, Europe, Spain, and Ceuta. However, and despite this order, he finally states that he has more ties in Ceuta than

anywhere else. Again, in the same way as Jennifer, Diego brings to the fore family and friends as things that root him to his home city.

At the end of his sojourn abroad, Diego explains his feeling that as time goes by, he becomes less and less worried about his sense of belonging, and he shows awareness that before he was more conscious of belonging to his city, his province, country, and continent:

DD: *si/ porque estoy allí en medio entre dos/ mmm y no sé/ ahora mismo también estoy un poco cambiando en... como que yo me/ perte/ pertenezco a todo y no pertenezco a nada/ sabes? soy yo y punto/ y yo vivo pues... y lo que hay/ pero... no sé/ antes sí era más/ soy de Ceuta/ andaluz/ y después de Andalucía y de España/ y de Europa/ pero no sé/ ahora cada vez voy más/ me da igual todo/ me da igual eso en verdad/(yes/ because I am there in the middle of two/ mmm and I don't know/ right now I'm changing a little bit in... the way I be/belo/ belong to everything and I don't belong to anything/ you know/ it's me and enough/ and then I live... and this is the situation/ but... I don't kno/ before I was more/ I'm from Ceuta/ Andalusian/ and after Andalusia and from Spain/ and from Europe/ but I don't know/ now each time I go more/ I don't care at all/ I don't care about that actually/)*

With regard to the effect of the program on his sense of belonging, Diego emphasizes the importance of experiencing cultural and social difference:

DD: *puede ser porque a ver hay muchos/ o se/ allí a lo mejor estando allí decía coño pues en Ceuta era esto era así/ y te gustaba más o te gustaba menos/ entonces veías como diferentes cambios/ pero realmente lo que es así decirte ahora me siento más o me siento menos/ yo creo que no/ pero sí darte cuenta de las cosas/ decir eso en España es de tal manera/ aquí no/ me gustaba más en España/ pero bueno/ estoy aquí y aquí me gusta esto más/ (it could be because let's see there are many/ or/ there maybe being there I said damn this in Ceuta was this was this way/ and you liked it more or you liked it less/ so you saw like different changes/ but really about telling you if I feel more or I feel less/ I don't think so/ but you do realize things/ saying this in Spain is that way/ here it's not/ I liked it more in Spain/ but well/ I am here and here I like this more/)*

As Diego does, at the beginning of his stay, Stefaan states that he knows he is Dutch and he identifies with some things that he defines as typically Dutch, like whining and complaining, but shortly after he affirms that

he does not feel bound to his country. His reason is that he really likes different cultures and while he sees that borders exist for practical reasons; he believes that it would be better if they didn't exist at all. Finally, he considers that having fun with someone is more important than sharing a certain nationality:

SM: *no/ actually not at all/ a:h/ I/ I know I'm Dutch/ and I'm ah whining like a Dutch/ I'm complaining like a Dutch/ but I don't really feel like I'm Dutch/ I'm not really country bound/ (laughs)/ at all/*

INTERVIEWER: *OK/ ah/ do you think there is any reason that makes you feel that way?*

SM: *a: h/ well/ yeah/ I guess there's plenty of reasons but the main reason is ah/ because ah/ I really like different cultures/ and you can learn from them/ and I think borders are just there to/ I don't know/ for practical reasons/ but I think it would be better to not have them at all/ so...I can just have more fun with a German or whatever/ person/ than a Dutch person/*

At the end of his experience, Stefaan claims to be proud of his home city and of being Dutch, something which he does not mention in his interview at the beginning of his stay. However, he still affirms that he does not feel he belongs to the Netherlands:

SM: *no/ no/ I feel/ it sounds like a hippie answer but I feel like I belong to the world/ I don't feel bound to any place or region/ of course I'm proud of of my home city and to be Dutch/ but I don't feel like I specifically belong there/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/ and what makes you feel this way? like what makes you feel like you belong/ you can belong everywhere/ like you belong to the world?*

SM: *people are just people/ they're nice/ and there's so many new things you can learn from everyone/ and as long as you just learn a little bit about their culture and just adapt yourself/ ah they will most likely accept you/*

When reflecting about the impact of the sojourn abroad, Stefaan affirms that it shows people that the world is not so scary and that cultural differences are not as big as they appear in the news, which might trigger viewpoint changes in a lot of cases:

SM: *ah/ yeah/ I think it does/ I think it shows a lot of people that the world is not so scary and that people just... ah there there are some cultural differences but it's not just as big as the news would say/ and yeah/ I think it really changes your view on a lot of cases/*

At the beginning of her stay, Mila, the Bulgarian participant states that she certainly does not belong to Bulgaria, and adds that she does not think she belongs anywhere because in today's world, one belongs to the world, there is freedom of movement, and there are no borders in Europe. When it comes to the reasons why she feels this way, Mila affirms that she does not like to be put in a frame which she expands by stating that she does not like being Bulgarian, nor an immigrant. From Mila's discourse, one has the impression that the terms Bulgarian and immigrant have almost the same meaning. The participant ends her statement by pointing out that freedom of movement and travelling are very important, and that she does not want to live in Europe for her whole life, and although she has not yet decided where, she declares the intention to travel and discover other countries:

MJ: *no/ definitely not/ and I don't know but I don't belong in Bulgaria for sure/ but I don't think I don't belong to anywhere/ in today's world/ you belong to the world/ you can go wherever you want/ especially in Europe there are no borders/ you can just decide and go wherever you want/ and start a life there/ (laughs)/*

INTERVIEWER: *OK/ and what makes you feel this way? what makes you feel that you belong to the world?*

MJ: *ah/ it's just/ I don't like ah/ ah/ being put in/ a frame/ in some kind of frame/ ah I don't like being Bulgarian/ I don't like being an immigrant/ I just/ I just feel that the world is ours and ah people should be able to do/ what they want/ and to go wherever they want because/ it's very important that you travel/ that you explore different cultures/ I don't even want to stay in Europe for my whole life/ I don't know where I wanna live but I know that I want to travel a lot/ in other continents/ in other countries/*

In the POST interview, Mila says, as in her PRE interview, that she has never felt that she belongs to Bulgaria. However, at the end of her stay she foregrounds the idea that she sees Europe as home, while at the same time having met people from everywhere leads her to think that people everywhere are very much alike:

MJ: *well/ not really/ like I have always/ I have never felt like I belong to Bulgaria/ ah/ maybe I felt more that I belong let's say to Europe/ I just feel/ Europe somehow as a home/ but at the same time now that I met so many people like from Africa/ from Asia/ from everywhere/ I think that the/ the continent or the country doesn't matter/ when you meet so many people/ when you see that they are so alike you and you just tell yourself that we are not different in any way/ just that we speak different languages and we live in a different point in the world/ but it's all the same/ so I don't think...*

Concerning the impact of the sojourn abroad, Mila affirms that she feels more attached to Finland than to Bulgaria and points out that there are many things that she does not like in her home country:

MJ: *ah/ well/ maybe yeah definitely I feel more attached to Finland than never now and I was just talking yesterday with another girl who went on exchange in Spain/ by the way/ and we were talking that we don't have like/ we don't have any sense of home anymore/ like there are so many places that you can call home that/ (laughs)/ I don't know which is home but definitely I feel... that I belong more to Finland like now/ (laughs)/*

INTERVIEWER: *than to Bulgaria?*

MJ: *yes/ definitely there are so many things that I don't like here and of course there are stuff like that everywhere but because it's my country and I really like/ I don't know/ I don't know... I'm maybe more...how to say it? words escaped me/ (laughs)/ I'm more critical maybe towards the things here since I've been here all my life/*

Furthermore, like Diego, Mila feels she does not have a sense of home anymore, while at the same time being aware that there are multiple places you can call home.

In the Bucharest group, Federica states clearly that she feels Italian, without further elaborating on her answer:

FH: *I am Italian/ (laughs)/*

However, at the end of her stay, her sense of belonging is not expressed in such a straightforward way as at the beginning, and she explains that she belongs to her country but also to Europe:

FH: *ahhh I belong to my country/ of course/ but also Europ/ Euro/ Europe/*

Furthermore, when reflecting about the impact of the mobility program on her identity, the participant states that her point of view has changed because she has lost her fear of living in a different country, and that even though her Italian identity is the same as before the program, the sojourn abroad has helped her to feel more European through contact with people from different countries from which she learnt to see the world from other points of view:

FH: *ah/ yes/ I think this mobility changed my point view because now I can try to stay in another country and I didn't ah/ ah...one moment/*

INTERVIEWER: *yes/*

FH: *mmm/ I don't know in English/ I didn't a:h/ wait/*

INTERVIEWER: *maybe you can say in Italian/*

FH: *paura/*

INTERVIEWER: *oh/ OK/ fear/*

(...)

FH: *eh/ I think it's the same/ I feel Italian as before the mobility/ but I think the mobility helped me to feel more European/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/ right/ OK/ why/ Francesca/ why this mobility made you feel more European?*

FH: *because I met a lot of people from other countries/ such as France/ Spain/ Belgium/ and other parts of the world/ and this experience told me that the...the other person/ the other people are important because help you to know the/ the world in another point view/*

At the beginning of their sojourn, the two Finnish participants report feeling a sense of attachment to their city, Tampere. The things that tie Jussi to his city are, as in Jennifer's and Diego's discourses, related to his childhood, and the long time spent there. However, Jussi envisions that his sojourn abroad might change this aspect and he might not struggle when it comes to moving to another city or to another country. Finally, about his sense of belonging to Europe, Jussi states that he belongs to western countries, which he defines as developed countries:

JN: *definitely yeah/ I/ I belong in Tampere/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/*

JN: *but/ it's maybe because I/ I have always lived in Tampere/ gone to school in Tampere/ but this might change things/ mmm ... I've always been drawn to that certain city/ but after this trip/ it might not matter to move to another city or other country/*

(...)

INTERVIEWER: *and what about your feeling of belonging to Europe?*

JN: *Europe/ well/ I think belong in western countries/ like...*

INTERVIEWER: *mmm/*

JN: *developed countries/*

At the end of the sojourn abroad, Jussi declares that even though he knows he belongs to Finland, he feels that going somewhere else is easier, because some barriers have been broken, at least with regard to countries inside Europe:

JN: *a:/ I know I belong in Finland/ but not like/ a: before it was like/ I want to like get a job from my own city/ and buy a house from my own city town/ Tampere/ and stuff like that/ so it kind of broke some barriers/ it's easier to go/ mmm/ but maybe inside Europe because:/ I have never been outside Europe/ so it's kind/ kind of like weird area/ gray area for me/*

Furthermore, he affirms that, with Erasmus, he has learnt that if you feel accepted, then you can call any place home. His account is like that of Stefaan, one of the participants in Oulu:

JN: *my sense of belonging... yeah I guess you/ a:/you can belong anywhere/ if there's/ these certain things you know like/ friends/ family/ like/ if you feel accepted somewhere/ maybe you can call/ any place home/*

INTERVIEWER: *and that's something you learnt with the Erasmus?*

JN: *yeah/*

In a similar way, Sami, reports feeling attachment to his city before anything else at the onset of his sojourn abroad:

SM: *ah/ yeah/ I was born in Tampere and I've always always there/ and I'm very genuinely Tamperian/ I don't know if you say it like that but yeah/*

I'm very Finnish/ but ah with/ with the experience with different cultures so far/ I've become more like international but definitely like Finnish/

In fact, he defines himself as “genuinely Tamperian” and states that despite experiencing different cultures and becoming more international, he would define himself as Finnish. However, at the end of his sojourn abroad, Sami offers a quite different narrative of belonging and states that he feels European, and he has not felt like a Finn for a long time. His European identity is related to the ease of travel around Europe and the commonalities among Europeans which make adaptation to a different European country easier than in the case of other continents:

SM: hm...if I if I have to choose I would say I feel European/ it's been quite a long time that I haven't felt like a Finn/ and I I don't consider myself as a Finnish person/ but yeah I I feel European/

INTERVIEWER: what makes you feel European/ Sami? Sami/

SM: yeah/ it's good/ ah/ what makes me feel European it's that it's very easy to travel around Europe/ and we we still have some things in common although Finnish people are slow and/ not so talkative/ but we/ it's easy for us to react and adapt into different cultures and I think these European cultures are closer to us than well/ Asian and and/ other/

When reflecting on the impact of the Erasmus program on his sense of belonging, Sami expresses having spent a lot of time with Romanian, French, and Spanish people, defined in his terms as Latin cultures, and he characterizes them as emotionally very different to Finns. This has made him more emotionally open:

SM: ahm/ yeah yeah/ I I spent a lot of time with Romanians and ah French and Spanish/ all Latin cultures and/ as you know/ they are very different emotionally to Finnish/ and ah I think it has made me a little bit more Latin (laughs)/ ah/ not X much though because here in Finland we really stay with schedules and if we agree on something it stands very/ you know/ like written in the stone/ and/ that's maybe something that's difficult for me to understand but/ their use of time/ mostly/ it's something different/

INTERVIEWER: mhm/

SM: but emotionally maybe I I have become more/ open/

At the beginning of his stay, Jesús declares that despite being aware of his birthplace, city, and country, he does not feel different for being from a given country. He also affirms being very much at ease with open borders in Europe. Even though Jesús does not literally express his sense of belonging to Europe, Europe and the European Union are the first emerging categories in his discourse:

JO: yo para eso soy muy... para esto sí que... de hecho se me vio en el test/ soy muy/ estoy muy a gusto con el hecho de las fronteras abiertas dentro de Europa/ bueno/ en la Unión Europea porque al fin y al cabo yo puedo tener una identidad o sea/ me siento realmente... sé de donde soy/ sé donde nací/ sé e:/ dónde está mi ciudad/ sé dónde está mi país/ pero yo no me siento diferente por ser de un país u otro/ no me siento mejor o peor/ yo soy español pero seguramente si fuera francés me sentiría la misma persona/ y que en ese sentido/ no tengo un/ un sentimiento de que... yo soy lo que soy por ser de un sitio/ (me for that I'm very... for that I actually... in fact it was obvious in the test/ I'm very/ very pleased by open borders in Europe/ well/ in the EU/ because in the end I can have an identity I mean/ I feel really... I know where I am from/ where I was born/ I know e:/ where my city is/ where my country is/ but I do not feel different for being from a country or another/ I don't feel better nor worse/ I am Spanish but surely if I was French, I would feel like the same person/ and in this sense/ I don't have a/ feeling that I... am what I am for being from a certain place/)

In his POST interview, Jesús brings back the same identity narrative and affirms that he is not determined by random names assigned to groups of people (referring to national groups), but by the context. However, when he is asked if he would define himself in any way, the participant states that it is the Galician culture that has the biggest effect on him. In fact, from Jesús' discourse, he became aware of his Galician identity through his sojourn abroad by becoming aware that what is said about Galician people is true:

JO: o sea/yo soy consciente de donde he nacido/ de... soy consciente que nací en mi ciudad/ en qué provincia está/ en que comunidad autónoma está/ en qué país y en qué continente/ yo de eso soy muy consciente/ pero si hay algo que yo no he querido que me defina nunca es la gente de mi alrededor en el sentido de...te lo explico con el tema Cataluña/ a mí/ económicamente me pare/ o sea/ yo no tengo nada/ una idea

social acerca de si deben tener derecho a decidir o no/ o sea/ no tengo una opinión formada/ pero yo sé que a mí que estén o no formando parte de España/ a mí no me hace un español diferente/ igual que no me hace una persona diferente/ a mí no me influye si ellos se llaman de una forma u otra/ igual que no me influye si yo me llamo gallego o no/ me influye por el ambiente/ por el... por el... por el contexto/ pero no me influye decir “me llamo así”/ (so/ I’m aware about where I was born/ about...I’m aware I was born in my city/ in what province it is/ in what autonomous community/ in what country and on what continent/ I’m very aware about that/ but if there’s something I never wanted to be defined by is people around me in the sense... I explain it with the Catalan case/ for me/ economically I th/ I mean/ I have nothing/ a social idea about if they should have the right to vote or not/ I mean/ I do not have a formed opinion/ but I know that for me if they belong or not to Spain/ that does not make me a different Spaniard/ in the same way it doesn’t make me a different person/ it does not influence me that they are called in one way or another/ in the same way I’m not influenced by being called Galician or not/ it impacts me because of the environment/ because of...of the...because of the context/ but saying “I’m called this way” doesn’t influence me/)

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/ vale/ de acuerdo/ entonces tú no te definirías de ninguna manera? (mhm/ OK/ alright/ so you wouldn’t define yourself in any way?)*

JO: *no/ si tuviera que decir qué cultura tiene más efecto sobre mí/ yo diría que la gallega/ (no/ if I had to say what culture has more impact on me/ I would say the Galician/)*

(...)

JO: *no es que/ no es que me... considere más gallego que otra cosa/ sabes/ pero yo creo que tiene más efecto sobre mi personalidad porque te das cuenta sobre ciertas cosas que se dicen sobre nosotros que son ciertas/ el hecho de dar las respuestas totalmente ambiguas/ de pregun/ responder con preguntas/ la total indecisión/ eso es/ eso es totalmente cierto/ el... decir... sabes un tipo de actitud de... aquí la respuesta más dada es decir cuando te preguntan si crees que algo va a pasar/ decir “malo será”/ es una frase que escuchas como veinte veces al día/ yo creo que en ese tipo de cosas/ en cómo es la gente/ yo creo que es lo... yo creo que eso es lo que tiene más impacto sobre mí/ (it’s not/ it’s not that I...consider myself more Galician than anything/ you know/ but I think it has a bigger impact on my personality because you become aware about certain things that are*

said about us that are true/ the fact of giving totally ambiguous answers/ of question/ answering with questions/ the total indecision/ that is/ that is totally true/ the...saying...you know a type of attitude of...here the most given answer is saying when you are asked if you think something will happen/ saying "bad it will be"/ this is a sentence that you hear like twenty times a day/ I think this type of questions/ in how people are/ I think it is that...I think this is what has a bigger impact on me/)

Furthermore, when Jesús gives an account of the impact of his participation in the program on his sense of belonging, he brings back the idea of becoming aware of different things: good, different, and bad. The participant exemplifies that despite not being patriotic, he became proud of Spain when he realized that in Romania the attitude towards, for example, black people or homosexuals is not as open as in Spain. Finally, Jesús turns the spotlight on the importance of learning other points of view from different places as a factor that impacts on how one feels with respect to the place he or she comes from:

JO: sí/ porque te puedes dar cuenta de lo que te decía antes/ te puedes dar cuenta de las cosas buenas/ de las cosas diferentes/ y de las cosas malas/ te puedes dar cuenta de esto/ yo por ejemplo/ yo nunca he creído especialmente en el tema patriotismo/ pero me he sentido orgulloso de España en el sentido de/ pues nosotros/ lo normal es que tú le preguntes a una persona aleatoria por la calle y que respete a los homosexuales/ o que... haya una persona negra por allí y nadie le vaya a decir nada/ como es lógico/ y... bueno/ tampoco es que lo haya visto en Rumania/ pero como que la actitud es diferente/ eso te puede hacer sentir más orgulloso/ luego puedes aprender otros puntos de vista de otros lugares/ y eso sí que creo que tiene una influencia muy alta en cómo te sientes tú/ respecto a de dónde eres/(yes/ because you become aware about what I told you before/ you can become aware about the good things/ about the different things/ and about the bad things/ you can become aware about that/ and for example/ I've never especially believed in the topic of patriotism/ but I felt proud of Spain in the sense that/ well we/ the normal thing is that you ask a random person on the street and that this person respects homosexuals/ or that... there is a black person around and nobody tells him or her anything/ as it is logical/ and...well/ it's not that I've seen it in Romania/ but it seems that the attitude is different/ that can make you feel more proud/ then you can learn points of view from other places/ and I think that has a very big influence on how you feel/)

Kalina reports belonging to the Planet Earth, and expresses her wish to live everywhere at the beginning of her sojourn:

KN: *I don't know...I believe to:/ I actually belong to the planet Earth and that's it/ I don't know/ I want to live everywhere/ with everyone/ (laughs)/ not in that sense/ not in that sense/*

At the end of her stay, Kalina's narrative is different and for some reason she does not talk about the Earth, and instead she expresses belonging to warm countries:

KN: *I think I belong to the warm countries/ (laughs)*

(...)

KN: *the hot one/ the warm one/with a warm weather/ I think I belong there/*

INTERVIEWER: *a:/ to warm countries (laughs)/ OK/ and what makes you feel this way?*

KN: *I really don't like the cold/ I really don't like it/ and as I'm used to it here/ to have four seasons/ I can't a:/ I can't ignore none of the four seasons/ I want all of them/ if I'm moving somewhere/ it must be like here/ or better/*

When reflecting about the impact of the Erasmus program on her sense of belonging, the participant regards it as a way to determine if she wants to live abroad or in Bulgaria, though she does not seem to have reached a final answer to this question:

KN: *yes/ definitely/ that way I learnt if I want to live abroad/ or if I want to live in Bulgaria/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/*

KN: *so I decided that I want both/ most of time in Bulgaria and some other times in other countries/*

Ultimately, the experience has brought to her a more situated perspective in her sense of belonging, from a very general statement referring to the whole Earth, to a more pragmatic combination of her home country and other places that are not too cold but also have a variety of seasons.

In the Lleida group, at the onset of her sojourn abroad, Petronela expresses that it is difficult to say where she feels she belongs, but decides she belongs to a country:

PT: *from a country/*

At the end of her stay, she has a different perspective and states that she feels that she belongs more to Europe, as she has never been to countries outside Europe (to which she gives the term “abroad”) so she cannot say she can live in the whole world:

PT: *I think to the Europe more/ because I never been abroad/ so I can't say this/ that I'm/ that I live in all the world/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/*

PT: *I don't know their culture/ whatever/*

When reflecting upon the impact of the sojourn abroad, she feels that it did have an impact since she is able to speak better English and Spanish and she knows more about biotechnology, a positive outcome for her since it is not her major:

PT: *yes/ of course/ mm...I know more English/ Spanish/ and also the practices were/were so/ and I know more about biotechnology/ there were not strictly my subjects/ and I know more something about biotechnology/ and maybe in the future I will choose the studies about this/*

At the beginning of her stay, Mildri, the Norwegian participant, reports that she likes Norway, and she believes she might return to Norway at some point. However, the student admits having the feeling that she needs to explore more places, and she thinks she might fit for instance in Spain because she likes the Spanish lifestyle. In fact, Mildri's attraction for Spain and the Spanish culture is a constant in her interview:

ML: *ah...actually I/ I like/ I like Norway and I probably wanna end up in Norway at some time/ but right now I'm/ I wanna explore a little bit more/ I don't feel like I need to go to Norway right now because I think I would/ I think I would be/ I think I would fit in for example in Spain/ I would like the lifestyle they have here but...*

At the end of her stay, Mildri's discourse shows little change, and she feels as Norwegian as before. However, she declares she also feels she could belong to many other places in the world:

ML: I feel like I belong to Norway/ I'm from Norway and the people from Norway have... maybe they have the same background/ the same cultures and the same way of thinking I think/ but also I think I would feel like I could belong if I was other places in the world also/ like it's not only in Norway that I would feel that I have a place/

With regard to the impact of the Erasmus stay, Mildri stresses that maybe it affected her sense of belonging through having met people from different cultures, leading her to understand that people are similar in many ways, and ultimately to believe that she could easily feel that she belonged to other places and not just to Norway. However, Mildri finishes her statement by affirming that she is Norwegian and that such feeling has remained unchanged:

ML: ah... I don't know/ like/ like I said I think maybe I would/ I met a lot of people from different cultures/ and I realized we are very similar in many ways/ and I think/ I think/ like I said that I could easily feel like I belong ah other places too/ if I tried/ but ah still I think that I come from Norway/ I'm Norwegian/ I don't think that changed that much/

At the start of her sojourn abroad, Mădălina, the Moldovan participant asserts that she feels attached to Moldova because she has spent her entire life there. She highlights a need to tell people who might be mistaken about her origins that she comes from Moldova. However, Mădălina also mentions feeling European and at the same time, not as a matter of choice but of circumstance, she feels connected to soviet customs and traditions:

MS: ah/ probabil ca apartin/ (laughs)/ probleme de identitate/ ah ma simt foarte legată de Moldova/ e adevărat/ cat de mult as încerca sa zic ca nu/ nu pot pentru că mi-am petrecut toata viața acolo/ si nu... așa ca de fiecare dată când cineva ma întrebă de unde/ daca tot... am aceeași problema/ daca cineva nu știe/ si spune ca sunt de undeva de pe aici/ nu/ eu sunt din Moldova/ îmi pare rău/ trebuie să știi/ si mă simt cumva foarte europeana/ cumva din zona asta/ europeana si in același timp cumva cu mai mult... nu pentru că aș fi vrut eu dar pentru că așa

au fost... circumstanțele/ cu o... obiceiuri si tradiții mai mult legate de partea asta sovietică din Rusia pentru ca involuntar de acolo vin/ asta nu înseamnă ca mie mi-ar plăcea eventual dar așa a fost sa fie/ (ah/ probably I belong/ (laughs)/ identity problems/ ah I feel very attached to Moldova/ it's true/ no matter how much I'd try to say it's not true/ I can't because I've spent my entire life there/ and no...so every time someone asks me from where/ if I just have the same problem/ if someone doesn't know/ and they think I'm from somewhere around here/ no/ I'm from Moldova/ I'm sorry/ you have to know/ and I somehow feel very European/ somewhere from this area/ European and at the same time somehow with more... not because I wanted but because those were... the circumstances/ with a...customs and traditions tied more to this soviet part of Russia because involuntarily I come from there/ it does not mean that I eventually like it but this is how it was meant to be/)

In Mădălina's discourse, identities are distributed somehow in a circular way, where Moldova, with customs and traditions that she connects to the historical attachment to Russia, is in the middle, and the European identity is situated on an outer circle. Interestingly, Mădălina's account of her Moldovan identity being circumstantial, and not something that she eventually likes, but something that was meant to be, connects her discourse to that of Mila, the Bulgarian participant in Oulu, who somehow portrays national identity as a burden.

A different story is told by the participant at the end of her stay. Mădălina states that she still feels identified with Moldova, but she also identifies with the whole world:

MS: ha/ me acuerdo que me hiciste la misma pregunta al principio y te dije que me identificaba con Moldavia creo/ ahora/ no sé por qué/ me sigo identificando con Moldavia creo pero como que me siento más, me identifico también con con el mundo entero/ o sea no solo/ aunque/ me entiendes? que que no me identifico necesariamente con España o con algo así/ pero con el mundo/ no/ no sé/ me siento más así/ (ha/ I remember you asked me the same question at the beginning and I told you that I identified with Moldova I think/ now/ I don't know because/ I still feel identified with Moldova I think but it's like I feel more, I feel identified also with the whole world/ I mean not just/ even though/ do you understand me? I do not feel identified necessarily with Spain or something like that/ but with the world/ no/ I don't know/ I feel more that way/)

Concerning the impact of the program on her identity, Mădălina feels that it does have an impact because meeting people from different countries contributes to an understanding that differences are not that important, leading to more love and tolerance towards the others, which is the actual impact of the program in her case:

MS: *sí/ yo creo que sí/ porque de pronto conoces a personas de diferentes países XX y empiezas a entender que las diferencias no son lo más y que en realidad/ que nos tenemos que aceptar/ y nos tenemos que tolerar exactamente como estamos y empezamos a amarnos y a querernos más/ por eso creo que también influyó mi caso/ digo/ sí/ (yes/ I believe it does/ because suddenly you meet people from different countries XX and you start to understand that differences are not the most important and that in reality/ that we have to accept each other/ and we have to tolerate each other as we are and we start to love each other and love each other more/ it is for that that it had an influence in my case/ I think/ yes/)*

All in all, it seems that Mădălina's horizon has been expanded through her Erasmus stay. While at the beginning she felt Moldovan and connected to the soviet part of Europe as a matter of circumstance, at the end of her stay she feels both Moldovan and a citizen of the world, an identity that is no longer a matter of circumstance but a matter of choice.

At the start of his stay in Lleida, Federico states clearly that he feels he belongs to Europe:

FB: *no/ for me just Europe/ no not the whole world/*

However, at the conclusion of his stay, he highlights that his participation in the Erasmus program has made him feel more attached to his country, but most especially to the world, a position he now declares he has always had:

FB: *mmm/ e:h/ el Erasmus me...ha hecho sentir más parte de mi país también/ pero sobretodo del mundo/ yo siempre me he considerado como un ciu/ un ciudadano del mundo /(mmm/ e:h/ the Erasmus has...made me feel more a part of my country also/ but mostly of the world/ I've always considered myself as a cit/ a citizen of the world/)*

Concerning the impact of the experience, Federico declares that by getting to know other cultures, he has felt that he belongs a little bit to each of the countries he has come to know, probably referring to the people from different countries he met during his stay in Lleida:

FB: *en...bueno/ conociendo muchas otras culturas me ha hecho sentir pertenecer un poco a todos los países que he conocido/ (in...well/ knowing many other cultures made me feel I belong a little to every country I knew/)*

Radka, the Czech participant affirms at the beginning that she feels more European than Czech:

RT: *like if I feel I belong to Czech or to:/ well/ hmm more than Czech I think I belong to Europe/ I don't feel like Czech/ X/ (laughs)/*

At the end of the sojourn abroad, Radka seems more convinced about the fact that she belongs to Prague, even though she does not like it nor does she feel proud of the Czech culture:

RT: *well yeah/ I feel I belong to Prague/ but I'm not really...I don't like the culture Czech at all/ well/ yeah / of course/ but I'm not really proud of it/ I don't feel like proud of it/*

With regard to the possible impact of the sojourn abroad on her sense of belonging, Radka is the only participant that brings to the fore the issue of Catalonia and the fact that speaking to Catalan people and listening to multiple points of view may help her open her mind to understanding the reasoning of other people.

RT: *mmm yeah/ I think so because I spoke to... to many people in Catalonia/ and yeah I saw their point of view and yeah/ and I actually in general/ I think if you travel you/ you will get so many points of view/ and then you won't be that/ that strict/ you will consider many reasons and yeah/*

At the beginning of the sojourn abroad, in the Oulu group we can establish three different patterns of representation. In the first place, Jennifer and Meyer refer to either a national state or a more reduced entity, like a city, when they construct their narratives of belonging. The other four partic-

ipants: Claudia, Diego, Mila, and Stefaan define themselves as “citizens of the world”, even though they provide different reasons. Claudia is concerned with the reduced possibilities for young people in her country and in her city, and she relates a sense of belonging to the world with human migration, which she foresees she will undertake. Diego and Stefaan embody the representative European young university-educated citizen for whom borders are disturbing. Finally, Mila embraces the identity of a world citizen and one of the reasons is that she does not like the Bulgarian identity assigned to her. In Mila’s discourse, the puzzling aspect is that the first thing she states when asked about her sense of belonging is that she certainly does not identify with Bulgaria. This lack of connection with her city or country of origin is exclusively found in Mila’s discourse.

At the end of the sojourn abroad, we can see that for some participants, the study abroad experience has had an impact on their identities. However, the result is not the acquisition of a new identity, but a destabilization and hybridization of their identities. Therefore, it can be claimed that the way they understand their relationship to the world, and how they see possibilities for the future (Norton, 2013: 45) has been altered by the Erasmus experience. At the same time, some participants do not seem to have undergone major changes in this respect. However, the recurrent pattern for all of them is that they claim that through the sojourn abroad, they have been confronted with difference, which gives them awareness about how things work in different places. The degree of difference between people might not be as significant as they had thought, which leads to losing the fear of moving in the future, fear of the world, and the fear of being alone.

Like the Oulu group, at the beginning of the sojourn abroad, the Bucharest group position themselves in different ways regarding their sense of belonging. On the one hand, Federica refers straightforwardly to her Italian identity, while Sami and Jussi identify themselves as “Tamperian”, while Jesús and Kalina report on being citizens of the world. Once more, the sense of a European identity is not evident in the participants’ interviews.

However, at the end of their sojourn abroad, all the participants feel differently with regard to who they are and where they belong. Federica reports feeling as Italian as before but having acquired a European identity she did not initially identify with. Sami and Jussi no longer feel like Tamperians, and while Jussi declares that he still feels quite Finnish, Sami highlights the fact he had not felt like a Finn for a long time. Both partici-

pants show a quite open attitude towards moving and towards a European identity. On the other hand, it seems that Jesús has become more aware of his Galician identity through the program while Kalina feels that now she can decide where she wants to live in the future, and, surprisingly, it is in her country, Bulgaria, where she declares she wants to be most of the time.

Once more, at the onset of their sojourn abroad, the accounts of the students in Lleida differ from each other. Petronela, Mildri, and Mădălina display a certain degree of identification with their countries of origin, even though in Mildri's discourse, the chance to live somewhere else also appears, and in Mădălina's discourse, European identity is also mentioned. On the other hand, both Federico and Radka report on a sense of belonging to Europe.

Like the participants in the other two groups, the students in Lleida also report a different impact on their sense of belonging as a result of their stay. While Mildri, Federico, and Radka come back with an increased sense of belonging to their countries, Petronela and Mădălina have somehow adopted a wider identity, which Petronela describes as European and Mădălina uses the term world-citizen.

From the accounts of all participants on their sense of belonging at the beginning of their sojourn abroad, two outstanding aspects are important to mention here. The first is the fact that most of the participants either identify with their town/city or they express a certain feeling of belonging to the world, or to live in and explore different places. The number of students who identify with their country or with Europe is more limited at the beginning of their Erasmus sojourn abroad.

Secondly, from the students' reports on their sense of belonging at the beginning of their stay, one gets the impression that some participants do not feel identified with their countries because of what they perceive as adverse conditions, constraining social and/ or political structures or a society where they do not fit. It is hard to know if these feelings of adversity towards their countries already existed before they began their sojourn abroad, or if they were a result of the confrontation with difference, and often with what they may have perceived as a better socioeconomic situation than that in their home countries, experienced in the few days from their arrival to the time of the interviews. A further interpretation could be that they adopted the circulating discourses which portray their countries of origin as poor, backward, and with fewer opportunities. This might be the reason behind Mila's equalization of the term Bulgarian

with the term immigrant, which she does not want to adopt as an identity. Despite the complexity of establishing a direct connection between the negative predispositions of the participants and the socioeconomic contexts in their countries of origin, it is important to mention that the participants that show this attitude belong to the Eastern-European bloc.

At the end of the sojourn abroad, a clear and almost universal evolution in the way the participants position themselves regarding their sense of belonging can be observed. However, the progression is not always in the same direction. Nevertheless, there seem to be three recurrent patterns: some participants become more aware that they belong to their respective countries or to their region, others come back with an increased sense of being European, and finally, a considerable number of the participants experience a strong feeling of being citizens of the world. In none of the cases do the participants report having lost their previous identities, but instead they claim to have added new ones, or have become aware of others. In all cases, it is confrontation of difference that triggers change in the identities of the participants. In some instances, change brings a feeling of similarity and unity with other groups of people (European or whole world) and in other instances, it triggers a feeling of belonging to the place where the participants were born, usually by means of identities that are assigned to them by third people or a feeling of pride in how certain things are in their countries of origin. Finally, probably the most outstanding fact that comes out from the participants' interviews at the end of their sojourn abroad is a considerably increased willingness to become mobile, discover new places and new cultures. From their words, the most outstanding impact of the Erasmus experience is that they lost the fear of moving to a place where everything is foreign, either through having been able to successfully live with difference and learn from it, having improved their level of foreign languages, or having acquired new and looser identities that allow them to identify with extended categories, and to be able to feel at home in multiple places.

4.3. IDENTITY-RELATED FACTORS: MOTIVATION, INVESTMENT, AND NEOLIBERAL RATIONALES

This section discusses student expectations with respect to their Erasmus sojourn to clarify their level of investment in the various aspects of their experience abroad, and their reasons. This will reveal how expectations

are framed at the beginning, and the part that language plays in student investment, to establish how desire for study abroad reveals personal goals and perceived advantages. From this it will be possible to establish patterns of expectation, forms of investment, and how each is weighed. The objective is to measure student anticipation, and most importantly, the role of languages and language learning in the Erasmus experience.

There will also follow a discussion of the perceived degree of accomplishment of the initial expectations at the end of the sojourn abroad. This will enable us to compare similarities in the pre and post narrations, and thus to identify the relationship between the discourse adhered to by the participants and its actual impact, as perceived by the students. Language learning and language attitudes will always be discussed as part of the broader meaning of the Erasmus stay as a complex social experience.

In highlighting individual differences and the role of motivation and investment (Norton, 2013; Darwin & Norton, 2015; Duchêne, 2016), the connection between SA, language learning, and the concept of “employability” (Flubacher *et al.*, 2018; Courtois, 2020) will also help to reveal an understanding of how language competences are transformed into human capital and the purposes this capital is expected to serve.

4.3.1. Motivation and investment

As can be observed in Table 16, on the whole the participants have high expectations for their sojourn abroad. The highest are related to knowledge of other cultures, and knowledge of English, followed by two personal goals, such as autonomy and self-confidence. Acceptance of other cultures and knowledge of other languages follows shortly after.

When comparing the results obtained by the students in the three different contexts, significant differences were shown between the groups concerning the items “knowledge of English” ($\chi^2(2)=11.027$, $p=.004$), “knowledge of other languages” ($\chi^2(2)=27.020$, $p=.000$), and “acceptance of other cultures” ($\chi^2(2)=15.362$, $p=.000$). Regarding the item “knowledge of English”, significant differences were found between the Lleida and the Oulu groups ($p=.009$) on the one hand, and between the Lleida and the Bucharest groups, on the other ($p=.008$). Furthermore, in relation to the item “knowledge of other languages”, the mean score for the Oulu group is significantly lower than the mean score for the Lleida

($p=.000$) and Bucharest groups ($p=.002$). Finally, the Oulu group scored significantly lower than the Bucharest group ($p=.001$) and was close to scoring significantly lower than the Lleida group with respect to the item “acceptance of other cultures”.

Table 16: General expectations from the mobility experience¹⁴

This mobility experience will have/ has had an influence on my:								
	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
Knowledge of English	4.6*	4.2/	4.1**	3.4/-	4.7+	4.3-	4.5#	4#
Knowledge of other cultures	4.5	4.4/	4.6	4.7/	4.7	4.5	4.6	4.5
Autonomy	4.3	4.1/-	4.6	4.5-	4.4	4.6/	4.4	4.3
Self-confidence	4.2	4	4.6	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.2
Knowledge of other languages	3.5*	3.6/	4.6*	4.5/-	4.3*	3.9-	3.9	3.9
Acceptance of other cultures	3.9+	3.8/	4.4	4.3/	4.5+	4.2	4.2	4

These differences are indicative of a certain disparity in expectations between the three groups. While all participants have high expectations from their experience abroad, the Oulu and the Bucharest groups show most interest in English and the Lleida group shows higher expectations when it comes to learning other languages, thus clearly showing divergent linguistic goals from the Oulu and Bucharest groups. Finally, the significantly lower score as to a potential improvement in their degree of acceptance of other cultures in the Oulu group is intriguing, indicating reduced interest in cultural learning as an asset to be obtained from the experience by those students compared with those who chose Bucharest.

As for the fulfilment of expectations from the mobility experience, again, the scores assigned to all the items in the POST-test are lower than

¹⁴ The symbols * + / # - indicate that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items they follow.

those in the PRE-test (Table 16). The overall score for the item “knowledge of English” was significantly lower at the end of the sojourn abroad ($Z=-5.175$, $p=.000$). However, significant differences between the contexts in the POST-test have also been revealed with respect to all six items: “knowledge of English” ($\chi^2(2)=9.560$, $p=.008$), “knowledge of other cultures” ($\chi^2(2)=6.020$, $p=.049$), “autonomy” ($\chi^2(2)=10.609$, $p=.005$), “self-confidence” ($\chi^2(2)=9.299$, $p=.010$), “knowledge of other languages” ($\chi^2(2)=20.790$, $p=.000$) and “acceptance of other cultures” ($\chi^2(2)=8.792$, $p=.012$). Concerning the first, “knowledge of English”, the mean score for Lleida is significantly lower than the mean score for Oulu ($p=.014$) and Bucharest ($p=.020$), signaling that those students who studied in Lleida gained significantly less knowledge of English than those in Oulu and/or Bucharest. With regard to the second item, “knowledge of other cultures”, the mean score for Oulu is significantly lower than the mean score for Lleida ($p=.043$). This finding suggests that those participants who spent their time in the Catalan city see an increase in their knowledge of other cultures as a result of their experience, to a significantly higher extent than those who spent their sojourn abroad in the Finnish city. Likewise, with regard to “autonomy”, post-hoc comparisons revealed that the mean score for Oulu is significantly lower than the mean score for both Lleida ($p=.031$) and Bucharest ($p=.019$). Again, it is the Oulu participants who are less positive than their Lleida and Bucharest counterparts about the effects of their experience on their autonomy. Regarding “self-confidence”, the mean score for Oulu is significantly lower than the mean score for Bucharest ($p=.026$); again the perceived impact on self-confidence for the students who spent their stay in Finland is significantly lower than that perceived by the students in Romania.

In relation to “knowledge of other languages”, the mean score for Lleida was significantly higher than the mean score for both Oulu ($p=.000$) and Bucharest ($p=.005$). Those students who had Lleida as a destination gained significantly greater knowledge of foreign languages other than English than those in Oulu and Bucharest. This might be due to contact with Spanish and Catalan being difficult to avoid, and also desirable in the case of the former. Finally, concerning “acceptance of other cultures”, the mean score for Oulu is significantly lower than the mean score for Lleida ($p=.031$). It is noteworthy that the Oulu group already showed lower expectations of improvement with regard to acceptance of other cultures from the beginning, and as might be expected, the outcome is low.

4.3.2. Neoliberal rationales

Personal and professional expectations and outcomes from SA indicate that overall the participants have high expectations and the perceived outcomes are rather similar in all three contexts (Table 17).

Table 17: Expected benefits from the experience¹⁵

This experience will/ has benefited me:								
	Oulu		Lleida		Bucharest		Total	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
Personally	4.7	4.7	4.8	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.8
Academically	4.1	3.5	4.3	3.9	4.2	3.8	4.2*	3.7*
Professionally	4.1	3.9	4.3	4	4.2	4	4.2*	4*

Most students expect to experience personal benefits, with average ratings from 4.7 to 4.9. In the PRE-test, no significant differences were found among groups, even though the Bucharest group gives significantly higher importance to personal benefits than the Oulu group. Concerning the respective degree of accomplishment of initial expectations, professional outcomes are significantly lower than expected: ($Z=-2.820$, $p = .005$), which may indicate that ongoing discourses on the professionally related benefits of study abroad are of a higher magnitude than the actual outcomes in relation to professional development. Overall, the scores assigned to the personal and professional benefits of participating in an Erasmus experience are very high, showing that students are eager to invest and indeed do invest and reap the benefits of the sojourn abroad for their personal and professional identity. It is also worth noting that the decrease from prior to posterior perceptions only happens with regard to the professional dimension but not to the personal, in which the average rating is maintained at 4.8.

¹⁵ The symbol * indicates that there are significant differences ($p < .05$) between the items it follows.

4.3.3. Personal benefits and outcomes

Most of the participants report personal gains as one of the most highly expected assets of their experience. However, personal expectations are related to the different identities the participants imagine for themselves, and therefore, even if they are all related to personal growth, they sometimes point in different directions.

4.3.3.1. Beginning of the sojourn abroad

In the Oulu group, Jennifer and Claudia report their expectation that they will overcome their fear of moving by participating in the Erasmus program. Since both students foresee an imminent need to consider mobility for job reasons, they enroll in the stay abroad with the understanding that it is an opportunity for them to experience uncomfortable feelings, like feeling down, being alone when it comes to communicating in a foreign language, etc. Doing so as students means they can change their mind if they feel they need to go home, something they would not be able to do if they had a job:

JC: *pues a nivel de independencia/ no porque ya la tenemos/ vivimos fuera de casa de nuestros padres/ pero sí un poco más alejadas/ no? y es como más/ con más independencia/ a valerte por ti misma en el idioma/ porque claro vas a hablar un idioma que realmente no tienes mucha ... experiencia/ entonces...* (so with regards to independence/ no because we already have it/ we live outside our parents' home/ but we are a little bit further/ right? it's like more/ with more independence/ being on oneself with respect to the language/ because surely you will speak a language you don't really have much... experience/ so...)

CQ: *sí/ y a la hora de la verdad/ pues es como un paso para prepararnos para cuando realmente tengamos que irnos de casa para buscar trabajo/ (yes/ so when the time comes/ then it's a step to get ready for the time when we'll have to leave from home to look for a job/)*

JC: *es la vida/ es la vida/ (it's life/ it's life/)*

CQ: *entonces tarde o temprano esto lo teníamos que pasar/ y dijimos vale que te pase ahora que todavía tienes tiempo para decir pues si me da la bajona/ bajona/ bajona/ pues me puedo ir a casa/ que no que estar en trabajando/ te dé la bajona/ bajona/ bajona y no poderte ir a casa/*

(so sooner or later we would have had to go through this/ and we said OK so let it happen now that you still have time to say if you are down/ down/ down/ then you can go home/ instead of being working/ feeling down/ down/ down and not being able to go home/)

JC: *si/ exacto/ (yes/ exactly/)*

CQ: *entonces es como una superación/ (laughs)/(then it's like a self-improvement (laughs)/)*

Diego mentions personal growth as a way to challenge himself in order to eventually be able to tell himself that he has achieved something:

DD: *si/ personalmente también/ l/ lo mismo que... o sea crecer como persona creo yo/ de decir vale/ lo he conseguido/ no? (and also personally/ t/ the same that... I mean growing as a person I believe/ and say OK/ I got it/ right?)*

Another expected personal outcome is overcoming timidity and becoming more open to meeting new people. Meyer expects that this experience will help him be more relaxed in his life and feel comfortable with everyone:

ML: *yeah/ I I think that people who/ ah/ travel a lot and are fine with meeting new people are just more relaxed in their whole/ life/ style of life/ ah/ it's just/ you're comfortable with everyone and you are not afraid to say/ "hi"/ to anybody or/ those things/*

Contact with other people is also seen as a good source of personal growth. By way of example, Stefaan, who even though he thinks his ethical values are already shaped, admits the possibility of change by learning from other people:

SM: *a: h/ well actually/ a:h/ I think of myself that I'm already pretty/ ah:/ how do you say? my morals are already pretty shaped/ but I think it's really interesting to learn from other people/ and maybe you will change/ but I don't know yet/*

Mila reports that the Erasmus program will enable her to explore a different culture which she thinks is a unique opportunity not available to the average person in her home country:

MJ: *well/ I de/ I just thought that ah that doing this Erasmus program is a great opportunity to explore ah some culture/ some other culture than mine/ and I don't think that ah:/ in life I will have another opportunity again to live half a year in another country and ah from my university they will send me some money to live/ here/ so I don't think that ah the average Bulgarian person can afford that/ ah...if there weren't such mobility programs/ so:/ and of course ah I wanted to/ visit some other country/ to explore the culture... yes/ (laughs)/*

In the Bucharest group, Jesús refers to the need to overcome fear when travelling to certain places. He probably regards Bucharest as a place that might raise safety concerns when it comes to spending some months there, but he does not refer to this explicitly. What he envisions is that the program will enable him to be aware that he will not always be in his comfort zone, protected by his loved ones. In Jesús' words, this personal asset will improve his professional chances because he believes that employers seek people who can operate in different places:

JO: *yo/ cómo me va a influir? yo creo que lo que más me va a ayudar es a... que realmente era consciente pero nunca lo aplicas/ a que no todo es tu zona de confort/ no vas a estar siempre donde es fácil/ donde tienes a tus amigos/ donde... e:/ tienes si quieres a x horas de distancia pero siempre tienes a tu familia para solucionarte los problemas que tú no quieres solucionar/ y sobre todo yo también creo que profesionalmente a mí me va a ayudar porque hasta...por lo menos mi visión es que lo que busca...lo que se busca al día de hoy es gente que pueda desenvolverse en todos los lados/ (...) pero sobretodo yo...es la autonomía/ el sentir ese miedo y que a mí realmente es un miedo que me gusta/ pero eso sí que creo que me va a ayudar en...dejar de tenerlo cuando te vas a sitios así/ (me/ how it will influence me? I think mostly it will help me to... something I was actually aware about but one never applies it/ that not everything is your comfort zone/ that you won't always be where it's easy/ where you have your friends/ where...e:/ you always have if you want at x hours of distance but you always have your family to solve the problems you don't want to solve/ and especially because I also think that professionally it will help me to...because my vision is that what people look nowadays for is people that can operate everywhere/ (...) but mostly me...it's the autonomy/ feeling that the fear which is a fear that I actually like/ but I think it will help me in...not having it when you go to this kind of places/)*

Jesús' words reveal a certain desire to get out of his comfort zone, and to experience fear, and Bucharest provides a good environment for overcoming his "fear to go to places like this one".

Sami and Jussi expect the experience to affect them by changing their social skills:

JN: *yeah/ I'm sure of that/ ah/ I'm sure that I will be perhaps/ perhaps not an entirely different person/ but it will affect me in some way/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/*

JN: *I'm sure/ we/ we will see it when we go back to Finland/*

INTERVIEWER: *what do you think/ Sami?*

SM: *I think there will be a development in some social skills maybe and/ and the way/ the way we talk to people will be different/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/*

SM: *and...well social skills mainly/ I guess/*

Federica remarks that this Erasmus experience is the first opportunity she has to live by herself:

FH: *and for me it's same but it is important this experience for me to learn English/ learn another/ another language and a/ to live alone/ because in my my town I live with my family and this is the first experience to live alone/ and to do everything in my way/ (laughs)/*

This is a key aspect of the Erasmus experience for some students, in particular those who will live on their own for the first time; they gain a new sense of independence. Federica experiences for the first time the empowering feeling of doing everything in her own way. This feeling of empowerment is naturally not shared by students who had already been living on their own before the Erasmus experience and so it may not be considered a consequence of it, as much as a result of the separation from family and home, but yet the Erasmus mobility necessarily carries along such separation, which therefore needs to be considered as one of the effects of the stay abroad among students.

In the Lleida group, Federico refers to the usefulness (though he actually says 'useless', it is obvious from the context that he means 'use-

ful’) of having the opportunity to self-reflect. It seems that for Federico, being by themselves in a new place enables individuals to get to know themselves better:

FA: *yes/ I think it's very useless to be independent and to reflect about your life/ and...*

Mildri points out the feeling of unease as a kind of challenge one needs in order to grow as a person:

ML: *a:h... I think/ (laughs)/ it's a very classical answer/ but I think I will grow as a person because when you/ when you/ have to go to a place all by yourself and you have to/ I don't know/ you have to take a lot of initiative yourself because you don't know anyone/ and you have to speak a language that you are not hundred percent sure about/ so I think there are many situations that are a bit/ uncomfortable maybe because/ for example when I have my practicals here/ I don't always understand what the professors say/ and it's/ yeah/ it's a lot of situations where you maybe have to go a little bit out of your comfort zone/ and I think that's/ you need this kind of ah challenges to...*

Like Jesús, Mildri feels a certain predisposition and a need to challenge herself by getting out of her comfort zone, being by herself and taking the initiative. She imagines Lleida, with its linguistic landscape, as a place that could provide numerous challenges and uneasiness.

Mădălina refers to contact with people with a different mindset which is already having an impact on her own mindset as an Erasmus student. It is possible that by the time of the interview, the participant had spent around three weeks in Lleida. This is a variable that may change slightly from one participant to the other because some of them arrived at the city some days before the semester started, during the holidays. Mădălina is experiencing the differences between what she calls a soviet mentality, which she defines as closed, and a more open mindset which she believes is benefiting her and helping her develop a new vision of life:

MS: *cred că deja îi simt impactul/ sunt de mai mult sau mai puțin o lună aici și sunt în fiecare zi uimita de schimbările care au loc în... în mintea mea pentru că aici lumea are altă mentalitate/ eu încep să cunosc puțin și simplu parcă o altă viață/ nu știu... e atât de diferit de mentalitatea*

aceea închisă/ sovietică din Moldova/ aici toata lumea cumva e mai deschisă către oportunități/ către... și cred ca lucrul ăsta îmi face bine/ sa văd/ să fac o diferență între ce există în viața asta/ (I think I already feel its impact/ I've been here for more or less one month and everyday I'm mesmerized by the changes that happen in... my mind because here people have another mindset/ I'm already starting to get to know, downright, kind of another life/ I don't know... it is so different from that closed mindset/ soviet from Moldova/ here everyone is somehow more open to opportunities/ to... and I believe this is good for me/ to see/ to make a difference between what exists in this life/)

Radka expects to enhance her personal growth through contact with other people, which she connects with previous mobility experiences that had already given her the feeling of being more open-minded:

RT: mmm/ well/ I really like to travel and every time I am returning from from some journey I feel like I am more open-minded/ I know more opinions/ so I think it is a really good experience to live the life of a/ in another country for half of year and yeah/ see how people are doing there/

The participant comments that every time she returns from a journey she feels more open-minded because of contact with other people. Radka connects her previous travel experiences with her Erasmus stay and, therefore, she identifies it as a really good experience from the beginning.

4.3.3.2. End of the sojourn abroad

At the end of their stay abroad, the participants were asked what they thought the personal impact of the program, if any, was, or would eventually be in their lives, and how they saw themselves at the end of the Erasmus experience.

In the Oulu group, Jennifer and Claudia, who saw the stay abroad as an opportunity to prepare for imminent migration in search of a job, declare that they came back with a completely different mindset, more relaxed and seeing life in a different way, which, according to them, contrasts with the stress experienced by those who remained in their home country:

JC: *ah/ sí/ sí/ además yo vengo de: con otra mentalidad completamente/ la verdad/ (ah/ yes/ yes/also I return of: with another complete mindset/ certainly/)*

CQ: *sí/ (yes/)*

JC: *más relajada/ más tranquila/ ves la vida de... no sé/ de otra manera/ (more relaxed/ more quiet/ you see life...I don't know/ in another way/)*

CQ: *de otra manera/ aquí llegamos/ y se nota un montón la gente que se quedó estancada/ (in another way/ here we arrived/ and it's very clear the people who stayed static/)*

JC: *agobiada/ están todos agobiados/ viven... no sé/ es que no sé/ (overwhelmed/ they are all overwhelmed/ they live...I don't know/ the thing is I don't know/)*

Moreover, the participants explain that the experience, which they call “a trip” has given them knowledge, which can be understood as cultural, even though they do not directly refer to cultural knowledge. However, at a personal level, they agree that they are still the same persons and see their stay abroad as an opportunity to disconnect from the bad vibrations in their country and understand that the most important thing is to live life in their own way without considering the opinion of other people:

JC: *a nivel de conocimientos yo me considero que/ a ver que un viaje siempre te aporta... (regarding knowledge I consider myself that/ let's see a trip always brings you...)*

CQ: *siempre es enriquecedor/ siempre/ (it's always enriching/ always/)*

JC: *es que te aporta conocimientos/ cultura/ y de todo/ sabes? (it gives you knowledge/ culture/ and everything/ you know?)*

CQ: *sí/ (yes/)*

JC: *así que a nivel de eso/ sí/ pero ya luego como persona/ pienso que sigo siendo la misma/ (so concerning that/ yes/ then after as a person/ I think I'm still the same/)*

CQ: *como personas yo creo que seguimos siendo las mismas/ lo que pasa que sí que es verdad que gracias a ese viaje pudimos desconectar de la mala vibra que hay aquí adentro/ (as persons I think we're still the same/ what happens is that actually thanks to this trip we could disconnect from the bad vibes inside here/)*

JC: *sí/ (yes/)*

CQ: *entonces sí es verdad que es algo que ya necesitábamos/ (so it's true that's something we already needed/)*

JC: *aprendí/ que la rivalidad que genera estudiar en España/ allí no lo hay/ la competencia esa no la hay/ (I learnt/ that the rivalry generated by studying in Spain/ doesn't exist there/ that competence is not there/)*

CQ: *no/ (no/)*

JC: *es/ es que es increíble/ para mí/ eso es lo más importante/ (it's/ it's incredible/ for me/ that's the most important/)*

CQ: *creo que además tenemos otra meta/ ya la teníamos/ no? pero que por lo menos yo/ por lo menos yo/ por lo menos yo te recuerdas lo que realmente es importante en la vida y lo que no/ lo realmente importante es disfrutar sin importar lo que vaya a decir la gente/ sí es verdad que tengo algún día en el que me jode algún comentario que otro/ claro porque soy persona pero... (I think we also have another aim/ we already have it/ right? at least myself/ at least myself you remember what is really important in life and what is not/ what is really important is enjoying without taking into account what people'll say/ yeah it's true there's some day when some comment pisses me out more than another/ of course cause I'm a person but...)*

Diego, who expected his stay abroad to be a challenge and a way to achieve something big, and to show himself he was able to do it, remarks that he has achieved his goal:

DD: *pues/ yo creo que... personalmente me ha ayudado mucho porque yo jamás había salido de casa... bueno sí/ de Ceuta a Granada pero/ a otro país/ y solo/ y yo allí me fui totalmente solo/ estaba al principio muy perdido y tal... pero bueno al tiempo me di cuenta que...o sea pasé adelante no... no me:/ que pude hacerlo/ vaya/ entonces ya he ganado mucha confianza en mí mismo/ en plan si me he ido a Finlandia solo y he podido hacerlo/ puedo hacer lo que sea/(so/ I believe that...personally it helped me a lot cause I would have never left home...well yes/ from Ceuta to Granada but/ to another country/ by myself/ and there I went totally alone/ I was very lost at the beginning and so...but well after a while I realized that...well I went on...I didn't/ I didn't/ I could do it/ damn/ so I gained a lot of confidence in myself/ in the sense that if I could go to Finland by myself/ I can do whatever/)*

Furthermore, Diego explains that he has become much more open. He also brings to the fore that he is much more willing to travel and get to know new things. While before his stay he would conform to getting a job and remaining in his city, his Erasmus experience has transformed him into a much more non-conforming person:

DD: *(laughs)/ pues yo creo que me he convertido pues en mucho más abierto con todo el mundo/ mi forma de pensar yo creo que es más abierta/ no? de... y... con muchas más ganas de viajar/ y de conocer/ y...y sí/ de eso/ y de no estarme quieto/ y no conformarme con... que si me dan a lo mejor ahora un trabajo aquí en Granada pues si me lo dan pues... antes decía pues de puta madre/ ahora digo no/ no me voy a conformar quedándome aquí/ sabes? en eso yo creo que he mejorado/ mejorado para mí/ a lo mejor otro me dice que no/ ((laughs)/ so I believe I became much more open with everyone/ my way to think I believe is more open/ right? for... and...much more willing to travel/ and to know/ and...and yes/ for that/ and for not being quiet/ and not feeling conformed with...if they give me maybe now a job here in Granada well if they give it to me... before I said that's great/ now I say no/ I won't conform to stay here/ you know? in that I think I got better/ better for me/ maybe some other will come and say no/*

Mila talks about how her world and her mind became broader and the impossibility of being static that came along with her stay abroad:

MJ: *well/first of all/ ah... it mmm/ made me meet so many people/ from every single continent of the world/ from ah so many countries... like I feel that somehow it expanded my... view for the world and just changed my/ changed my way of thinking somehow/ it broadened it/ make it/ made it bigger/*

(...)

MJ: *ah/ yeah/ I think I changed/ like I think that I look inside myself more and I try to ah/ change something/ to do some moves in my life/ since before that I had quite like a static life/ ah I didn't really go out a lot/ outside of Bulgaria/ ah yeah it was quiet like I was/ I thought like I was sitting in one place/ but now that I saw a different way of life and I was outside for some months/ and I don't think that I can remain static as before/*

Meyer, who expected to become more relaxed in life and feel more comfortable with everyone, affirms that despite being unable to name concrete things, the Erasmus stay has brought him more life experience and maturity:

ML: *ah/ I think I got like/ that's just what I just meant/ I/ I can't point out certain things that I learnt/ but I think you just like get like life experience and you get more mature/ I don't/ I don't think that I as a person I changed a lot but ah yeah/*

Finally, Stefaan, who expected to change personally by learning from other people is facing the reality of his life in the Netherlands, but with a new perspective after the experience abroad:

SM: *(laughs)/ that's a really good question...I just see myself...it just feels like/ the year that passed by in Finland feels like/ a week afterwards/ and I just dropped back to reality/ and I have to graduate and after I'll see again...*

INTERVIEWER: *and would you say you are a changed person?*

SM: *ah/ yeah/ I'd say I am/*

INTERVIEWER: *in which way? like/ what happened with Stefaan?*

SM: *I'd say...in what way? in a good way/ ah/ I just...yeah/ I don't know how to describe it/ I think that's something that other people can probably describe better/*

The participant declares that he believes he is a different and a better person, but he is unable to determine in what exact way he has changed, and simply says that other people can describe the change better than he can.

In the Bucharest group, Federica, who thought the stay would impact her on a personal level because it would be her first opportunity to live by herself, now explains that she can live by herself and manage her economy after her stay in Bucharest:

FH: *yes/ this mobility opportunity influence my life because I know a new friend/ now I ah/ I feel them/ and I lived alone without my parents/ because in my city I live with my parents/ and this is important for me/ because I live only with myself/ and so I can try to/ to live with my money/ and without my parents/*

Furthermore, she remarks that she has been changed by the experience and now she is able to share more with foreign people:

FH: *ah/ because now I can ah/ share more experience with abroad/ with person of other countries/ I live alone for six months/ and this is*

very important for me because myself now is better/ I can live in the future alone/

Sami, who expected changes at the level of social skills, declares that his stay abroad has changed his life forever, and that from now on he will always feel he has a home in Romania:

SL: my life/ it changed it/ forever (laughs)/ so/ I I get to see different cultures and different different people and I will always feel like I have a different home in Romania from now on/

Moreover, he explains that his social skills also improved, as he expected and, besides, he improved his perspective and has clear goals for his future. Sami declares he has changed for the better and is willing to work abroad at the end of his stay:

SL: yeah/ I think I'm a different person/ I'm more social/ I I see things differently/ I even have quite clear goals for my future/ I want to work abroad/ and I I think/ I changed into better/

Similarly, Jussi, who at the beginning of his stay also expected to become more social, brings to the fore that he has gained perspective by learning from the behavior of other people, and also that he has grown a little due to the experience:

JN: well/ first of all/ like I gained per/ perspective/ for/ other cultures/ not only Romanian/ because there were so many exchange students/ I learnt... a bit like a: more of the behavior of other people/ and a:/ I think I grew up/ a little bit/

Jussi declares that he saw the change when he encountered Finnish people again and he realized he now was more social, open, and happier:

JN: mm/ a little bit/ yeah/ and kind of like/ in the end of the exchange/ I wasn't thinking that/ I I changed much/ but then when I came back here/ I started you know when the contrast is/ when I come with Finnish people here/ I felt like/ yeah/ something has changed/

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/*

JN: *I'm not the same as I don't know/ as I was in/ in September/*

INTERVIEWER: *and what would you say has changed?*

JN: *mm/ I don't know/ I think I feel more/ a bit more/ social/ open/ and/ happier/*

Jesús, who expected to get out of his comfort zone and experience uneasiness in Bucharest, explains that the experience has enabled him to find new perspectives through contact with people from different countries, which has made him understand that his society has positive things he could not see before:

JO: *a ver/ yo creo que te... ayuda a ver dos cosas/ lo primero que no todo se ve desde el punto de vista en el que lo ve tu sociedad/ luego también te das cuenta de las cosas positivas que puede tener tu sociedad/ en el tema/ por ejemplo me di cuenta en el tema de... socialmente hablando/ yo pensaba que no/ pero resulta que somos uno de los países más respetuosos que hay con cosas como la homosexualidad o la inmigración/ y claro yo pensaba que no/ porque tú ves a una persona homofoba y dices "esto no puede ser"/ pero otros países parece ser que es lo más habitual/ y bueno también me ayudó a ver otras cosas/ aprender de otras culturas/ yo vivía con una persona turca/ entonces aprendía mucho/ era kurdo/ de hecho/ entonces me contaba la... el conflicto que tenían ellos/ y te ayudaba a ver las otras cosas/ él por ejemplo se quejaba de que no tenían ningún tipo de... de voz/ los atentados que por ejemplo mientras yo estuve allí hubo 80 muertos en Ankara/ y él decía "yo no me alegro de que maten a 120 personas en París pero no sé por qué no se preocupan de los 80 que han muerto nuestros"/ (let's see/ I think it...helps you see two things/ firstly that not everything is seen from the point of view your society sees it/ then you also realize the positive things your society could have/ concerning/ for instance I realized with regard to...socially speaking/ I didn't think that/ but it appears that we are one of the most respectful countries out there with things like homosexuality or immigration/ and clearly I thought we weren't/ because you see a homophobic person and you say "it can't be"/ but other countries it seem to be the most usual thing/ and then it also helped me to see other things/ learn from other cultures/ I lived with a Turkish person/ then I learnt a lot/ he was Kurdish/ in fact/ so he explained me the...the conflict they had/ and he helped you see the other things/ he for instance complained about them not having any type of...of voice/ the attacks that for example while I was there there were 80 deaths in Ankara/ and he said "I'm not happy*

they killed 120 people in Paris but I don't know why they don't care about the 80 ours that died?/)

Incidentally, the close relationship with his Kurdish flatmate made Jesús open his mind to see events occurring outside his immediate environment.

Finally, Kalina asserts that her participation in the program has enabled her to obtain knowledge about different people, nations, habits and languages:

KN: *a:/ in the ways of meeting new people/ learning a:/ lot of new stuffs about different people/ different nations/ different habits/ different languages...*

All in all, it seems that the Erasmus experience has transformed this participant into a more tolerant and open-minded person:

KN: *as a more tolerant and open people/ open-minded people/*

In the Lleida group, Federico, who expected his Erasmus stay to be an opportunity to self-reflect and be alone with himself, declares that he has not yet seen any change and that he is looking for an Erasmus traineeship in order to get further experiences:

FB: *no sé/ tal vez/ hasta ahora/ no pero/ quién puede decirlo? si...por ejemplo estoy viendo ahora por el Erasmus for traineeship para hacer otro Erasmus/ también con más práctica/ (I don't know/ maybe/ until now/ no but/ who can predict it? yeah...for example I'm looking now for the Erasmus for traineeship to do another Erasmus/ also with more practice/)*

However, he explains that people tell him he is a little bit different even though he cannot perceive it, though he finally admits that he sees some things in a different way and that he is now more independent:

FB: *mmm/ sobretodo me lo dicen que un poco soy diferente porque de mi mismo no me doy cuenta muy bien/ pero...* (mmm/ mostly I'm told that I'm different cause about myself I can't see it that well/)

INTERVIEWER: *vale/ y qué ha cambiado? qué crees que ha cambiado?* (OK/ and what has changed? what would you say has changed?)

FB: *mmm/ mmm/ no sé...e:h/ por ejemplo e:h/ la manera de ver algunas cosas/ y el hecho de ser un poco más independiente/ (mmm/ mmm/ I don't know...e:h/ for example e:h/ the way to see some things/ and the fact I'm a little bit more independent/)*

Similarly, Mildri remarks that she has grown a lot as a person, she has become more independent, self-confident, and has realized that everything is possible. Noteworthy is her example that she realized that everything is possible even if it is in Catalan, and “Catalan” here almost becomes a synonym for impossibility:

ML: *(...) like personally/ I think I grew a lot as a person/ I become more independent/ maybe more ah... sure of myself/ my possibilities/ and I think also I realized that everything is/ possible/ like if you... if you just want to do something/ it's possible/ even if it's in... Catalan/ (laughs)/*

Mildri also highlights that even though she was very open before her stay abroad, now she feels even more eager to travel and live in other places:

ML: *ah... actually like I said I/ I was very open to/ to the world as I said before I went also/ but I think maybe I became more eager to travel and eager to live other places/ and ah... see other cultures/ like I was also this before I went but I think even more/ like now I just want to travel and live for periods some place/ for a period another place/ and yeah/*

Mădălina, who expected to grow through contact with people with a different mindset, explains that she was influenced by the experience she had been through and the people she had met:

MS: *la ha tenido seguramente porque bueno/ después de regresar de la movilidad por un tiempo/ tuve un poco el síndrome de post – Erasmus/ sabes? cuando extrañas a todo el mundo y eso/ pero lo que me extraño en mi caso es que no fui tan tan no sé cómo no fui tan impactada como pensé que iba a estar/ sí/ que sí extraño mucho a mis compañeros/ pero pero creo que regresé en un momento en el que tuve que regresar/ como que todo pasó y fue como un cuento pero ya se terminó/ y lo que me preguntaste lo de influ/ influ/ bueno/ influenciar sí/ creo que se trata de las experiencias que he vivido y de las personas que he conocido/ porque ahora puedo decir que tengo amigos en todo el mundo/ y eso es una cosa no sé/ muy linda/ no sé cómo explicar/ bueno/ (it certainly*

had it because well/ after returning from the mobility for some time/ I had a little bit of the post-Erasmus syndrome/ you know/ when you miss everyone and so on/ but what surprised me in my case is that I wasn't so so I don't know like I wasn't as impacted as I thought I would be/ yeah/ I do miss my friends a lot/ but but I think I returned in a moment that I had to return/ like everything went by and it was like a tale but it's over/ and what you asked me about the influ/ influ/ well/ influencing yeah/ I think it's about the experiences I lived and the people I met/ cause now I can say I have friends all over the world/ and that's something I don't know/ very beautiful/ I don't know how to explain/ well/)

Moreover, Mădălina affirms that she feels more mature, more tolerant, and more resilient:

MS: *me veo un poco más madura/ con más lecciones/ he aprendido algunas lecciones de vida/ me veo más tolerante/ más sociable/ más eh/ eh/ acepto ah con más facilidad algunos cambios que vienen en mi vida/ intento no ilusionarme tanto...creo que eso/ sí/* (I see myself as a little more mature/ with more lessons/ I learnt some life lessons/ I see myself more tolerant/ more sociable/ more eh/ eh/ I accept ah more easily some changes that come to my life/ I try not to make so many illusions...I think that/ yeah/)

Petronela also remarks that her Erasmus experience transformed her into a more tolerant person, and she is now more willing to travel and get to know new people and things:

PT: *ways...oh my god/ I think more travelling/ and I want to meet more people/ and I discover culture/ (laughs)/ so I'm more tolerant/ (laughs)/ for this news/ I think/*

Furthermore, the participant also declares she is more creative, sociable, and less shy:

PT: *(laughs) I think yes/ yes/ I'm more/ how to say maybe more creative/ more social person as I said before/ and I think I'm not so shy maybe after this/*

Radka brings to the fore that she has made good friends with whom she is still in touch:

RT: *yeah/ aahh yeah/ I found there really good friends / really good a: flatshares/ flatmates/ and we are still in touch/ a:/ so yeah I think this could be the personal way (laughs)/*

Finally, she also stresses that she sees herself as being more tolerant than before:

RT: *mmm/ yeah/ mmm/ well not extremely but yeah/ I think I'm more tolerant / at least I would/ I would like to say that/ I'm not sure I am but I see myself like more tolerant/*

All in all, different themes arise regarding personally related expectations in SA. Certainly, this is closely related to the fact that the participants, by the time of the interview, were in their early twenties, which is a period of important personal changes. For some students, their Erasmus experience is also their first experience of living away from home and family.

In this sense, one of the expected personal assets of the sojourn is an increase in independence and autonomy. Similarly, some other participants report that they will improve at a personal level by overcoming their fear of moving. Fear is an element that appears in the participants' discourses at the beginning of their stay but is hardly ever seen as a negative aspect. Actually, fear, in the words of the students, appears as something desirable, which takes the form of a challenge, a unique chance to experience uneasiness while still in a position of comfort and they expect it to prepare them for harder times when they will embark on "more serious types of mobility", such as work-related migration. Experiencing uneasiness and challenging themselves is also among the most expected personal outcomes of the program. Individual growth is also expected to arise from the achievement of social skills by means of contact with other mindsets and experiencing different cultures.

Finally, it is important to mention that personal and professional expectations sometimes become one and the same thing, and the participants struggle when it comes to separating the outcomes they expect on a personal level and what others may be obtained in relation to professional skills. Certainly, this leads to the conclusion that an identity approach to study abroad is necessary because one cannot consider the personal outcomes to be expected from the experience without considering the final aim of these outcomes, which might well be becoming the sort of

individuals the employment market is looking for. This is related to the idea that the new globalized economy looks for individuals who can cope with different cultures, languages, and realities.

Altogether, from the accounts the participants give with regard to the impact of the Erasmus experience at a personal level, SA does affect the self of the young sojourners. On the one hand, probably the most outstanding impact is an increased willingness to travel and live in foreign places for an extended period. This is connected to another important outcome, which is the impossibility of being static. This comes together with clearer objectives and an enhanced need for change, both on a personal and on a professional level. Furthermore, the previously mentioned outcomes are deeply related to the amplification of the participants' horizons and a more open mindset, which is sometimes described as a changed perspective of the world, brought by sharing time and space, getting to know, and learning from the behavior of other people. This also leads to heightened tolerance towards other cultures and people and is an important increment in social skills.

Finally, equally linked to the above is a reported sense of knowing oneself better due to the unique chance to look inside oneself that SA offers. This leads to a general feeling of being a more open, self-confident, happy, social, and resilient person. All in all, students return from their sojourn as more mature and resilient and accompanied by the feeling that everything is possible.

4.3.4. Professional benefits and outcomes

Professional development is another of the aspects on which SA may in principle be expected to have a deep impact. In the participants' discourses, academic improvements tend to appear closely related to professional expectations. Therefore, both aspects will be jointly approached in this subsection.

Becoming more "employable" is one of the highest assets of the sojourn abroad, as reported by the participants at the beginning of their SA. In this respect, the young sojourners report on a myriad of aspects in which investing in their SA is perceived to be beneficial and well-considered by the employment market.

4.3.4.1. Beginning of the sojourn abroad

In the Oulu group, Claudia and Jennifer report that participation in an Erasmus experience, as well as knowing foreign languages, looks good in any CV. Even though they are doubtful when it comes to voicing the professional aspects that may be affected by SA, the two students show confidence that the impact will be positive, and that even if it does not lead to better job opportunities, it might still give them the skills to look for opportunities, to which they refer with the term “desparpajo”, which has no negative connotation and may be translated as “ease of manner:

JC: *probablemente/ siempre se dice que un Erasmus queda bien en un currículum/ y que ah sabes/ conocer idiomas y demás también/ entonces me imagino que sí/ la verdad/ no lo sé/ la verdad/ yo creo que sí/ que tendrá un efecto positivo/ que...* (probably/ it's always said that an Erasmus looks good in a CV/ and that ah you know/ you know languages and so on also/ so I imagine it helps/ actually/ I don't know/ actually/ I think it will/ it will have a positive effect/ that...)

CQ: *sí/ (yes/)*

JC: *pero no se/ profesionalmente...* (but I don't know/ professionally/)

INTERVIEWER: *creéis que tendréis más oportunidades laborales que vuestros compañeros que se han quedado en casa?* (do you think you'll have more employment opportunities that your classmates that stayed at home?)

CQ: *mm a lo mejor no más oportunidades laborales sí puede que tengamos más desparpajo a la hora de ir a buscarlas/ (mm maybe not more employment opportunities but we might have more ease of manner when it comes to look for them/)*

Mila emphasizes her certainty that the experience will help her professionally because the Erasmus experience provides a good environment for making friends from whom she can learn and because she will be able to learn the language (probably referring to Finnish, in which she seems to be interested) better:

MJ: *yes of course/ because you make a lot of friends here/ you... I I will be able to learn the language better/ so/ and communicating with different people who also learn and want to succeed in life/ like inspires*

me in some way and I want to learn more and to do better so yeah/ I think that this will affect me/

Similarly, Diego states that having participated in an Erasmus program is very helpful. He envisions a job interview where people are asked if any of them has been an Erasmus student and answering affirmatively means that you are a person who knows how to manage in life. He continues that having participated in the Erasmus program actually distinguishes an individual from others who stayed at home due to having participated in an experience where you have to socialize and self manage. Finally, he mentions the importance of speaking a foreign language:

DD: *sí/ sí/ sí/ muchísimo/ o sea creo que... hoy en día un Erasmus tiene/ ayuda muchísimo para el tema de... que me abre la mente a irse a un... no sé si en una entrevista de trabajo o lo que sea van a preguntar: “alguno se ha ido de Erasmus?” y sí/ y si dices que/ o sea si tú te has ido de Erasmus/ eso quiere decir que tú has podido decir venga pues iré por mi cuenta a otro país y sé mejorar/ sabes lo que te digo? (yes/ yes/ yes/ a lot/ I mean I believe that... nowadays an Erasmus has/ it helps a lot with respect to... that it opens my mind to go to... I don’t know if in a job interview or whatever they will ask “has anyone participated in an Erasmus program?” and if/ if you say that/ I mean if you’ve participated in an Erasmus/ it means that you were able to say well I’m going on my own to a foreign country and I know how to improve/ you know what I mean?)*

(...)

DD: *que no es/ no sería lo mismo una persona que se ha quedado en su casa/ a estudiar en su casa y... y ya está/ no ha hecho nada más/ esto es una experiencia muy sociable/ tienes que manejarte/ tienes que hacer las cosas tú solo/(that it’s not/ it wouldn’t be the same a person who stayed at home/ who studied home and... and that’s it/ he (or she) didn’t do anything else/ this is a very sociable experience/ you have to manage yourself/ do things by yourself/)*

INTERVIEWER: *muy bien/ muy bien/ vale/(very well/ very well/ right/)*

DD: *y hablar otro idioma/(and speaking another language/)*

Meyer gives a similar account when he states that companies look for people who have experience dealing with different cultures:

ML: *yeah/ for me I hope so/ because I will have a double degree after that and ah/ but anyways/ even just for one semester/ I think every company is looking for somebody who has ah experience in a foreign country/ or experience dealing with different cultures/ and for that way I'm pretty sure that/ mm/ such a program can only be an advantage for oneself/*

Furthermore, the participant remarks that even though he has not decided yet about what exactly he wants to reach in his life, he thinks his participation in the Erasmus program will be positive in itself:

ML: *I hope so/ ah/ I haven't... yeah/ of course I have thought about it but ah/ but I haven't decided yet what I want to be in my life and what exactly I want to reach/ I don't have that big picture of how this is going to influence me/ but yeah/ as I already said I think that in any kind of view that can only be an advantage/*

Stefaan also mentions employment benefits, but he approaches the issue of language learning, especially English, and the idea of creating a network of professional connections:

SM: *a: h/ yeah/ yeah of course/ because ah/ the better my English gets/ the more chance I got of a better job/ also internationally/ since it's a requirement to have good English... so yeah/*

INTERVIEWER: *OK/ and what about the training? like this ah...not just English but your/ the training you're receiving here/*

SM: *a:h/ I'm/ not/ sure in which way it will affect ah/ my career/ but I'm pretty sure ah/ I'm learning a lot there and/ yeah/ I don't know if it adds extra X for the subject I'm in/ but ah/ it does for the connection/*

In the Bucharest group, Sami and Jussi report an expectation of academic benefits because they are not in Bucharest to study. This is a recurrent factor among the participants, especially in Bucharest, but also in the other two contexts, which may sound puzzling given that the Erasmus experience is academic, and it is compulsory for them to enroll in a certain number of credits at the university.

Jussi states that when jobseeking, potential employers will recognize a former Erasmus student, which will have a positive influence because it shows a courageous and international person. Sami adds

that the sojourn abroad is important for him because he is planning to work abroad:

SM: *to be honest ah I...don't think it's gonna affect too much because we are not really here to study/ right? well/ we had to pick some courses/ of course some in/ interesting courses but it's not the main thing/ really/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/ OK/ and professionally?*

JN: *professionally I think when you are applying for jobs/ they will recognize you have been an exchange student/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/*

JN: *and I think that will have a positive influence because you had/ had the courage to go there/ they know you can ah ... be international/*

SM: *yeah/ yeah/ it's true/*

INTERVIEWER: *OK/ that's very good/*

SM: *and I'm actually planning to work abroad/ so this is a big thing for me/ yeah/*

In a similar way, Jesús does not foresee an important impact with regard to the academic benefit of the Erasmus stay but he acknowledges that professionally the stay will bring him skills that companies look for, such as knowing how things are done in different places and being open to different perspectives:

JN: *yo profesionalmente no creo que vaya a aprender más física aquí que en España/ tampoco menos/ o sea/ no ...a día de hoy para lo que me queda...no voy a... si me dan el título hoy o me lo dan en tres-seis meses/ yo voy a tener el mismo conocimiento pero yo creo eso que... que profesionalmente sí que te ayuda el haber visto como se hacen las cosas en otros sitios y eso/ que... cuando tú vas a una empresa/ esa empresa sepa que eres una persona que está abierta a/ a diferentes... a diferentes formas de ver las cosas/ (me professionally I don't think I will learn more physics here than in Spain/ nor less/ I mean/ no... at this very moment for what remains to be done... I won't... if they give me the diploma today or in three-six months/ I will have the same knowledge but I think that... that professionally it helps that you've seen how things are done in other places and so/ that... when you go to a company/ that company will know you are a person open to/ to different... to different ways to see things/)*

In Lleida, Mildri is among the few who emphasize the importance of languages in the CV, as well as knowing how things work in different places as an asset for obtaining employment:

ML: I think so too/ actually/ especially about the languages when I apply for a job I think it's nice to have on your CV that you speak another language/ and... and also I think it's/ it's good to have seen how things work in other countries/ now I've seen it both in Norway and Poland/ and now I see how things work in Spain/ so you have some kind of idea about the differences/ and also the classes are really good here/ and...

The participant also highlights that the lessons are really good in Lleida, as a way of conveying the idea that the teaching part of the experience will have an impact on her professional development.

4.3.4.2. End of the sojourn abroad

In the Oulu group, Claudia and Jennifer remark, as at the beginning, that the Erasmus experience opens many doors to a jobseeker. Furthermore, it is seen as training for life, a sort of comfortable version of migration, by which one is abroad with all that that implies, but the commitment is less than when having a job:

CQ: porque se te abren muchas puertas después a la hora de buscar trabajo/ o ya no de trabajo sino de la vida misma/ que: es una enseñanza/ y y... desde mi punto de vista/ vale más ir de Erasmus y conocer otro país pudiendo regresar a casa sin tener ningún tipo de compromiso/ que el único compromiso es que no te den la beca/ pues bueno/ pues mira/ pues bueno/ te fuiste de Erasmus y a que vayas a buscar trabajo/ consigas trabajo/ y después veas que no te guste y... (because many doors open after when you look for a job/ or not even for a job but for life itself/ that: it is a lesson/ and and... from my point of view/ it's easier to go on Erasmus and know another country being able to return home without any type of commitment/ that the only commitment is that they won't give you the scholarship/ so well/ so well/ you went on Erasmus and then if you go to look for a job/ get a job/ and then you see you don't like it and...)

JC: no te guste/ y te tengas que quedar porque tienes un contrato/ (you don't like it/ and you must stay cause you have a contract/)

CQ: *y te tengas que quedar/ sí/ y entonces es mejor siempre probar de Erasmus que no que te tires al agua/ pues/(and you have to stay/ yeah/ and so it's always better to try the Erasmus and not that you jump in the deep/ so/)*

Diego affirms that the Erasmus stay, even if it looks insignificant, might make a real difference for him, especially because he is determined to go abroad after his sojourn:

DD: *sí/ sí/ o sea/ como he dicho antes/ primero a lo mejor me ayuda para/ pues...o sea imagínate que estoy de prácticas en una empresa y la empresa le sale un trabajo en Finlandia/ a quién va a llevar? a alguien que no sabe nada o al chico que ha estado en Finlandia? pues al chico que ha estado en Finlandia/(yes/ yes/ as I said before/ firstly it may help me for/ so...I mean imagine I'm doing practices in a corporation and the corporation has an offer in Finland/ who will they take there? someone who doesn't know anything or the guy who's been in Finland? the guy who's been in Finland/)*

INTERVIEWER: *vale/(OK/)*

DD: *que es una tontería/ no? un grano allí en la arena que/ que parece no pero bueno/ ya está eso allí/ y también a decidirme a irme y esas cosas/ sabes? que me dicen "te vas a Dubái"/ pues bueno/ me voy/ venga/(which is a small thing/ right? a drop there in the ocean that/ it seems right but well/ it's already there/ and also to decide to go abroad and these things/ you know? If they tell me "you go to Dubai"/ then well/ I go/ let's go/)*

Mila also believes that having studied education in Finland, a country with a much praised education system, will be an asset in her CV in the future:

MJ: *yes/ definitely/ especially that I studied education in Finland/ and even if it was only for four months/ I think that this is ah highly-praised in other countries/ like you know that there was/ there was so much noise about the Finnish education system so I think that this will be a huge plus in my CV/*

INTERVIEWER: *mhm/*

MJ: *for the future/*

Despite not considering that his stay will have a deep impact on his professional life *strictu sensu*, Meyer asserts that the skills obtained through

the program enable him to manage people and things, which will help him professionally:

ML: yes/ ah/ because/ maybe/ maybe not like ah... super professionally seen/ probably not/ ah but just like in the way you learn to handle with people and like or to to to do/ to deal with people/ ah/ or to handle things/ ah/ I think you just get a lot life experience which is gonna help you/ let it be in marketing but also let it be in any other kind of job/

Finally, Stefaan mentions that although, according to him, education in Finland was not as good as he imagined, he learnt a lot on a professional level and improved his chances of getting a job later in his life:

SM: ah/ well/ I think the education in Finland was not as great as I hoped it to be/ but on the other hand I did learn a lot professionally and it's great XX/ I also improved my chance of a job later on/ personally it also made some pretty big changes because I already knew that the Netherlands is not the place where I want to stay for the rest of my life/ this confirmed it even more more/ and it also confirmed that I don't want to live in Finland/ it's way too cold... but yeah now I also have a Czech girlfriend/ ah for almost ten months already/ so/ we XX/

The participant also reports that on a personal level, some substantial changes have occurred, which might also change his professional choices. The interrelationship between personal changes and professional perspectives is something that has not been studied here but which should not be neglected. The Erasmus experience, in addition to being an academic activity, is also a great event in the life of a university student which shapes personal experiences and determines the choices to be made in professional life.

In the Bucharest group, Federica is unsure about the impact of the program on her professional life, but she is hopeful in this respect:

FH: I don't know/ I hope that this/ this experience ah/ can ah/ could be a new opportunity for...for work/ for jobs/

More positively, Sami highlights that even though he did not focus much on his studies in Bucharest, he feels the stay abroad enhanced his willingness to work abroad and stresses that he sees more possibilities around the world, and not just in Russia, as was his initial intention:

SM: *mhm/I think academically not so much/mhm well I didn't focus on my studies too much there but/but maybe in a way that I I learnt to take more responsibility of myself now/ in this way/ and can you can you repeat the question?*

INTERVIEWER: *yes/ from the professional point of view/*

SM: *professional/ professional I have have this dream for a long time that I'm gonna work abroad and this only made it stronger/ but maybe now I have/ more more possibilities around the world not just in let's say Russia/*

Jussi is also quite confident about the positive contribution of the stay to his job prospects, but he does not mention how:

JN: *mm...yeah/ (laughs)/ I think so/*

Similarly, Jesús points out that he believes certain corporations value the ability to deal with people and having a global vision which enhances problem solving:

JO: *pues yo creo que sí porque si... o sea/yo sé eso/ que en las empresas de este tipo se valora el hecho de saber tratar con más gente/ y el hecho de:/ o sea más allá de saber tratar/ de haber tratado/ por el hecho de que te genera una visión más global/ y no todos los problemas o situaciones se resuelven con lo que tú ya sabes/ sino con otras cosas que hayas visto y que piensas que no pueden ser útiles/ pero pueden serlo/ (well I believe it does because if...I mean/ I know that/ that in the corporations of this type it is valued the fact that you know how to deal with other people/ and the fact that/ I mean besides knowing how to deal/ of having dealt/ for the reason that it gives you a more global visión/and not all problems or situations are solved with what you already know/ but with other things you might have seen and you think they can't be useful/ but they can/)*

Finally, Kalina also believes the experience has had a positive impact on her future job chances:

KN: *oh yes/ definitely/ (laughs)/*

INTERVIEWER: *in which ways/ Kalina?*

KN: *a:h/ because you speak with different people that are doing politics also/*

In the Lleida group, Federico seems confident about the contribution of his Erasmus experience to the enhancement of his employability and mentions that just the fact of having learnt an additional language is already a good contribution:

FB: *sí/ bueno seguramente ya solo por/ por el hecho de haber aprendido una lengua más... (yes/ well surely already just for/ for the fact of having learnt another language/)*

On a different note, Mildri explains that the stay abroad confused her with respect to her decision about finding work:

ML: *maybe it confused me more because I/ I'm not sure after this Erasmus where I want to be/ because ah I'm sure that I'm open to be other places than the: standard places so maybe yes/ I'm more confused/ (laughs)/*

Mădălina remarks that her sojourn abroad will help her not only to get a job but also in general in life:

MS: *sí/ me va a ayudar en general en la vida/ lo que creo que es también muy importante/ pero también creo que esta experiencia como ha despertado un poco mi espíritu periodista/ porque como periodista tienes que ser siempre muy/ cómo se dice? curioso/ (yes/ it will help me in general in life/ I think it's also very important/ but I also think this experience somehow awakened a little my journalist spirit/ cause as a journalist you always have to be/ how do you say? curious/)*

The participant stresses that her stay in Lleida has transformed her into a more curious person which is an important asset for her future job as a journalist.

Likewise, Petronela points out that gaining language skills is necessary to think about working abroad:

PT: *yes/ of course/ because if I want to work abroad I have to have skills/ languages skills/*

Radka has a different point of view. She remarks that the only impact on her employability skills could be her new perspective of a different education system, but she is skeptical with regard to any improvement in her potential employability:

RT: *mmmm/ not really/ maybe just a little but maybe...maybe...well another/ another point of view of education system so: yeah/ I/ I think now I have more knowledges about that/ but no...*

From the accounts that the participants give at the end of their stay abroad concerning the impact of the experience on their professional life, it can be concluded that the students perceive almost unanimously that their participation in the program has enabled them to become more employable. However, differences arise when it comes to the perceived reasons behind the outcomes. In the first place, it is the global vision and the ability to deal with different people and new situations gained through the program (a type of capital that is in its essence, symbolic) that is perceived as bringing material gains in the future, either when they are looking for a job or when they are already working.

The second reason is having learnt an additional language, most of the times English but also Spanish in the case of the students in Lleida. Managing foreign languages is perceived both as a skill that enhances employability for corporations and as a determinant element in the CV when job seeking, because it triggers willingness to go abroad, and therefore, it expands the target market.

Thirdly, the possibilities of work are also enhanced by the experience, which provides a great environment for making connections and establishing friendships with people from different places. However, and despite participants perceiving themselves as more employable due to their participation in the Erasmus program, it is puzzling to see that it is rarely the formal education received that is mentioned as a catalyst for this outcome. In fact, in some cases the participants mention that they do not feel they have improved much on an academic level. This is particularly obvious in the students in Bucharest, and a possible reason for it might be that their initial motivation for studying during their SA was low. One participant in Lleida does mention the finality of teaching, though.

Students in Bucharest appear not to have chosen their destination with an academic goal in mind, but rather with a desire to live in that environment. Therefore, their sojourn is positively valued when it brings them a new perspective and life-experiences that help them become different from how they were at the beginning of their SA. This is also visible in the other two contexts. A general trend that may be observed

is the impact of the intercultural experience obtained from living in a different environment, and a non-negligible aspect is the perception that future employers may highly value such personally challenging intercultural experience.

All in all, it seems that it is the students in Oulu, and especially at the beginning of their stay, those who believe that their SA will positively impact on their future employment possibilities. There is an important connection, therefore, between their expectations and their choice of context.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

5.1. SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND LINGUISTIC CONTEXT-RELATED DIFFERENCES

The results presented in this volume indicate that SA triggered a significantly higher sense of being able to deal with cultural difference and an increase in the multiple viewpoints of the students, regardless of the context. However, Bucharest provides an environment that most enables the expansion of personal points of view to a significantly further extent than Oulu. The Bucharest group also scores slightly higher than the other two groups regarding their attitudes concerning cultural difference.

It is possible that from the beginning, those participants who chose Bucharest as a destination were more open towards cultural differences. The Bucharest group also shows gains in this respect, which are significantly higher than those of the Oulu group in certain cases. However, an increase in awareness of difference because of the Erasmus stay can be observed in all three groups. Thus, an Erasmus SA period might raise the cultural awareness of the students, no matter their choice of destination. A particularly interesting finding is that spending one or two semesters studying at a university in Bucharest increases appreciation of and a willingness to live among cultural differences to a higher extent than an Erasmus stay in Oulu, which shows that the cultural, social, and linguistic characteristics of the context impact the outcomes SA.

From the start, those students who chose Bucharest as a destination relate to a lesser extent to the category of immigrant as regards context than those who chose Oulu. There are two possible explanations for this: Finland receives immigrants while Romania mostly sends migrants abroad. It may also be that those students who chose Bucharest as a destination were inclined to feeling more at home in the world than those in Oulu. This could indicate that students who choose an Eastern European country for their Erasmus stay may feel more at home in foreign places than those who choose a Northern European country.

However, by the end of the sojourn abroad, this difference has disappeared and there is homogenization among the three groups. Furthermore,

there is an overall tendency among the students to be significantly less a stranger and to a significantly higher extent a local by the end. Norton (2016: 476) claims that “(p)articularly important with regard to access to social networks and target language speakers is the intriguing way in which learners can reframe their relationship with others in order to claim more powerful identities from which to speak.” This is also related to SA students’ perspective of future mobility. The idea of living in any European country surpasses the idea of living anywhere else both at the beginning and at the end of SA and is not significantly affected by the SA experience. Expectation to live in any European country is even higher than that of one’s own country both at the beginning and at the end of SA.

At the onset, significant differences were found regarding the idea of living in any Western country, with the Oulu group scoring significantly lower than the Bucharest group and almost significantly lower than the Lleida group. The group who had the lowest predisposition towards living in any Western country were more inclined to choose Finland as a destination. These results suggest that students with certain orientations might choose a particular context for their SA. This reinstates the Bucharest group’s greater willingness to feel at ease anywhere in the world, and reinforcing the hypothesis that students who choose Romania as a destination might already be more open towards living anywhere in the world than those who choose Finland.

At the end, however, the differences between the students in Oulu and Lleida, and between those in Lleida and Bucharest increase to a significantly higher extent. Students who had Oulu as a destination see the possibility of living in their home country in the future at a significantly higher extent than those in Bucharest and Lleida. Secondly, the Oulu group have a significantly lower capacity to envision themselves living in any occidental country than those who had Lleida and Bucharest as a destination. Finally, the Oulu group also assigns significantly lower scores to the idea of living in any country of the world in the future when compared to the Lleida group.

These outcomes signal that the possibility of living in any occidental country is higher if Bucharest or Lleida are chosen as an Erasmus destination, while at the end of the stay, the possibility of living in any country in the world is foreseen as less likely if the Erasmus stay was spent in Oulu rather than Lleida.

5.2. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND LINGUISTIC EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Expectations from SA are high overall. Participants' highest hopes concern personal aspirations, with no initial differences among the three groups. At the end, only personal benefits show no significant difference between expectation and accomplishment. Professional and academic benefits are still high but lower than expected, contrary to the results of Dolga *et al.*'s (2015: 1013): "70.8% of the inquired students consider that the Erasmus program has had a positive influence on their career, and 62.5% appreciate that the exchange has had a significant influence on their personal life".

The highest expectations are related to knowledge of other cultures and knowledge of English. Personal goals like improvements in autonomy and self-confidence follow shortly after. Finally, there are considerable expectations for improvements in relation to acceptance of other cultures and knowledge of other languages.

However, from the beginning, the expectations for the three groups are different, which indicates that the choice of context for the stay is made according to the expectations of the participants and to their degree of investment in cultural, social, and linguistic differences. For instance, improvements in knowledge of English are significantly lower in the Lleida group than in the Oulu and the Bucharest groups. Furthermore, enhancement of knowledge of other languages is significantly lower in the Oulu group when compared to the Bucharest and the Lleida groups. Finally, the Oulu students have a significantly lower expectation of progressing in their acceptance of other cultures than the Bucharest students. These differences signal a certain disparity between the three locations in terms of personal expectations, and in the practices in which the students feel more eager to invest.

The above results could be partially explained by examining the sometimes monumental differences between expectations and outcomes with regard to the social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics of SA. In the Oulu group, expectations are substantially high. Finland is portrayed having an exquisite education system, good social welfare, and a high level of English. Finland sometimes becomes an English-speaking country in the participant discourses and the presence of Finnish is ignored. For some students, the seduction of Finland is high enough to undermine

the value of their home country at the beginning of their SA. It is also Finland that brings the most colossal disappointment at the end for some participants. A myriad of socially, culturally, and linguistically adverse conditions are brought to the fore, among which we find darkness, high prices, lack of social life, and the lack of empathy and coldness of the Finnish people.

Despite varying degrees of satisfaction and dissatisfaction being reported, the Oulu group is the one that signals a higher degree of disappointment at the end of SA. These results contradict those in Mutlu (2011) where participants seldom mention the problems they might have encountered. The outcomes indicate that some felt alienated in Oulu society, especially if they had to relate to local people during their practicum. This is connected to what Norton (2013) defines as relations of power between language learners and the local community and it connects well to the marginalization one of the participants (Eva) in Norton's (2013) study goes through at her workplace. However, Eva finds a way to access the social network at her workplace and gains her right to speak, while this is seldom the case for certain Oulu participants, who prefer to keep their outsider status while praising their nation states over Finland. These results are also connected to those by Pellegrino Aveni (2005: 16): when an individual uses a given language, he or she needs to make sure that their self is "enhanced, or at least, protected". However, second languages and different cultures lessen the amount of control learners have on self-presentation.

An important role is played by the attitudes and beliefs that the learner holds with regard to him or herself and others, and the social and cultural determinants of the contexts, as well as their own language and the language learning process. In the case of some students in Oulu, the almost total refusal to learn Finnish could have brought the feeling of alienation and subsequent adverse reaction to the local language and culture.

The reverse trend is found in the Bucharest group. The Romanian capital is described at the beginning as an affordable city with possibilities for learning English, which provides a good place to challenge oneself and prepare for unexpected surprises in the future. Bucharest is exotic enough to provide some culture shock. And it is also able to go beyond the participants' expectations. The friendliness and kindness of Romanians and the surprise of a better-than-expected experience determine the students to characterize their stay in Bucharest as quite positive.

Finally, Lleida (Spain in the discourses of the students) is imagined as a place that would enable the participants to learn Spanish, and in some cases, as a place that is open to English-speaking students. Lleida's imagined linguistic landscape is adorned with fascination and expectancy for the Spanish language. The stay in Lleida proves to be more or less as expected, with the exception of the significant presence of Catalan at the university and what is described as the refusal by some instructors to speak any other language but Catalan, together with the reduced use of English at the university and the limited contact with local people. These results diverge from those of Jacobone & Moro's (2014) study with Erasmus students affirming that "(w)hen engaging in academic study in a foreign culture, the individual is fully immersed within that society and, therefore, encouraged to function as other citizens" (p. 326). Some participants declared they did not have many expectations at the beginning, which in some cases was due to the conscious desire not to be disappointed.

Hence, it can be stated that high expectations in SA are correlated to rather disappointing results, while low expectations lead to surprising satisfaction. An apparent lack of expectations might also be related to a positive outcome. These results confirm Jackson's (2008) suspicion that unrealistic expectations might diminish the outcomes of the sojourn abroad, whereas realistic ones contribute to enhancing the outcomes.

In relation to identification with different people according to the languages they speak, the participants first identified with those who share a first language, and secondly with people who speak English. These results signal that for the Erasmus students in the three contexts, being able to speak English was more important for identifying with a group of people than being European, and the Erasmus stay has no effect in this respect.

The people with whom the participants expect to spend most of their sojourn abroad and the people with whom they actually spend their time are relevant for the language learning related outcomes of the Erasmus experience. Overall, students think they will spend most of their time with other international students, followed by local people, and native speakers of English. Paradoxically, the wish to spend their stay with other international students and with local people is considerably high, while the desire to learn the local languages (Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan) is rather low. Finally, the desire of the participants to spend their stay

with people from their own countries is quite low. Their wish to spend their time abroad with native speakers of English is higher than the wish to spend time with people from their own countries, even though none of the host institutions were in a country where English is the native language. The only significant difference among the groups at the beginning concerns the desire to spend most of the stay with international students, significantly lower among the Oulu students than among both the Bucharest and the Lleida groups.

Expectations and outcomes are also different in this respect. At the end of their sojourn, the participants report having spent significantly less time with local people, as well as with native speakers of English and significantly more time with people from their own countries. The Bucharest group spent significantly less time with native speakers of English than the Lleida and the Oulu groups.

Discrepancies are encountered also at the linguistic level. While the Oulu and the Bucharest groups have English at the top of their desires, the Lleida group shows a lower expectancy with regard to improving their English. Furthermore, the Lleida group has higher expectations when it comes to gaining other languages, probably having Spanish in mind. The Lleida group has divergent linguistic goals from the Oulu and the Bucharest groups. Finally, the significantly lower score for the possibility of improving their acceptance of other cultures in the Oulu group, compared to the Bucharest group, shows reduced interest in cultural learning as an asset by those students who chose Finland as a destination compared with those who chose Bucharest.

In relation to the fulfillment of expectations, overall, the outcomes are more modest, though they differ for each context. Knowledge of English improved to a significantly lower extent among the Lleida students than among those in Oulu and Bucharest, while knowledge of other languages was significantly higher in Lleida than in the other two groups. Better knowledge of other cultures is significantly higher in Lleida than in Oulu. These results partially correlate with those of Durán Martínez *et al.* (2016: 14) “(t)he most salient increase at the end of their placement abroad is the one regarding the awareness dimension which is proportionally similar in both groups”.

Autonomy also increased but to a significantly lower extent in Oulu than in Lleida and Bucharest. Similarly, the Bucharest group showed significantly higher progress in self-confidence when compared to the Oulu

group. Finally, the Lleida group showed significantly higher advancement regarding acceptance of other cultures than the Oulu group. The Oulu group showed lower expectations of improvement in acceptance of other cultures, from the beginning, which indicates a high degree of correspondence between expectations, investment, and outcomes in study abroad. These results demonstrate that the general claims which report intercultural gains, such as for example Engle & Engle (2004) who found that more than fifty per cent of study abroad participants in his study showed improvements in intercultural gains, or Jackson (2008) who also revealed that her participants significantly improved in this domain, are only partially true.

5.2.1. Linguistic investment and outcomes

As for language expectations, the local languages Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan are given similar importance, while Spanish clearly stands out at the beginning of the sojourn abroad. These results indicate that the perceived economic value of each language has an outstanding role in Erasmus sojourns, of which the participants are aware: “(t)he decision to invest (in language, in this case) is always made with the idea that it will pay off in the future and refigures the object of investment as something – or someone – with a certain potential.” (Flubacher *et al.* 2018: 4). SA has an effect in this sense too, as the Oulu group feels significantly less motivation for the local language at the end of their stay than at the beginning. The participants in the two other groups report less motivation for Catalan and Romanian, and a significantly higher motivation for Spanish among students in Lleida. Thus, SA can contribute to decreased motivation in students where local languages are perceived as of little importance in the market and to increase the interest in languages whose economic value is perceived to be high.

This hierarchy is also reflected with regard to language use. Spanish was the most extensively used language among the Lleida students. Romanian also appears to have been used to a considerably higher extent than Finnish in Oulu. On the other hand, English was used less in Lleida than in the other two groups. There is a tendency towards a significantly lower reported use of English and local languages and a significantly higher reported use of their own languages at the end of the sojourn abroad.

Concerning language attitudes, once more Spanish plays a substantially different role from that of all the other local languages. The power of Spanish equals or surpasses the power of English in the Lleida group. This may explain why, in some cases, Catalan is assigned significantly lower scores than Finnish and Romanian. This animosity towards Catalan can be perceived most especially when it comes to the wish to learn Catalan, and even listening to people speaking Catalan. However, the perceived need to learn Catalan is higher at the end than at the beginning of the sojourn, indicating that Catalan has considerable weight for the local people in Lleida, making it more important than they initially thought. This may have led to the negativity towards language. Feeling rejected by the host culture or a degree of superficiality in the relationship with the host members can lead to withdrawal and reduce success in second language acquisition and positions that the learners adopt when encountering sociocultural and linguistic differences may play a role in restricting or facilitating their access to the target communities (DuFon & Churchill, 2006).

These findings correlate to those encountered by Garrett & Gallego-Balsà (2014: 374):

The polarisation between the home and international students at UdL might be viewed in terms of two kinds of ‘psychological reactance’ (Brehm and Brehm 1981). The home students tend to react against the language threat they perceive to Catalan from Spanish, pointing to the opportunities for additional speakers of the minority language. In contrast, the international students’ reactions are more in alignment with those of majority language speakers, and indeed, given De Bres’ (2008: 476) claim that ‘the umbrella category of “majority language speakers” can be defined in different ways at different times’, they might arguably be seen as a part of that category. They tend to react against the ‘constraints’ of the minority language at the university, suggesting an appeal for freedom of choice (...). They appeal for example to its inappropriateness in an international university and, perhaps, perceive a threat to their academic success arising from the restrictions on which languages they can use in their studies.

More negative feelings towards the local languages Finnish and Romanian also become apparent at the end of SA, which relates to the economic idea of investment in Flubacher *et al.* (2018: 4):

(t)he decision to invest (in language, in this case) is always made with the idea that it will pay off in the future and refigures the object of investment as something – or someone – with a certain potential. This is also central to human capital theory, according to which cost and benefit of investment is a fixed component in education policies (...). From this perspective, language competences become human capital per se, that is, “individual knowledge components or skills”.

Regarding the perceived language-related outcomes, overall, the low level of improvement of Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan is similar in all three contexts. This is analogous to what Kinginger (2009) emphasizes: assuming a direct relationship between study abroad and linguistic immersion is unrealistic. Similarly, Block (2014) is skeptical about any dramatic language learning occurring in SA. The author points to the importance of individual and contextual diversity which might lead to less remarkable outcomes than expected. On this note, the present study shows there is room to believe language learning in study abroad is a reality. However, it is seldom related to local languages whose economic value is perceived to be low. These results also recall Murphy-Lejeune’s (2004) connection between mobile students and travelers from the international elite, whose return home is already scheduled and for whom language and culture are left to choose. Concerning communicative skills, there is a significantly higher perception among the participants in Bucharest that the mobility stay impacted positively on their communicative skills than is the case in Oulu.

In relation to the impact of the sojourn abroad on the willingness to learn other languages, there is significantly lower motivation to learn foreign languages as a result of the sojourn abroad among students who had Finland as a destination than among those who were in Lleida and Bucharest. This connects to Flubacher *et al.* (2018: 2), citing Duchêne (2016) who affirm that: “(l)anguage learning and language competences are thus reconfigured in terms of “investment”, that is, individual, institutional, or societal investments in terms of financial resources, time, and energy for the development of language competences that (ideally) can be turned into economic profit”.

The interviews show that the linguistic expectations of the participants at the beginning of their stay are closely related to the contexts they had chosen for the Erasmus experience. In Oulu, English is expected to

significantly improve by those students whose English level is low or intermediate, while those who already have a good level expect to refine it by using it more often. English is also mentioned by those students who chose Bucharest. However, in Bucharest, linguistic and cultural learning sometimes become the same thing. In Lleida, the participants refer to Spanish as the language they would like to learn, while attitudes towards Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan are very similar, and they are neutral at the beginning of the sojourn abroad.

At the end of the sojourn, participants in Oulu had improved their English, but in some cases, they were less than satisfied by the acquired level, even though some participants do affirm that their English level has opened some professional doors for them. On the other hand, Bucharest provided a good environment for improving competences in English as a lingua franca. Many participants mention progress in their English because they were able to develop communication strategies that enable them to manage in situations when English is used among non-native speakers. The outcomes correlate with Kalocsái's (2014) study in which the Erasmus students in the Hungarian city of Széged aimed to and achieved the goal of creating an Erasmus family, based on having fun and developing self-confidence. This was a common aspiration that was attained by social and linguistic means which implied the use of English as a lingua franca, and always in a cooperative and supportive manner. Further, this study is a response to the model of competence based on multilingualism and dialogic models of communication demanded by Kinginger (2009), who laments the research to date has often taken the native speaker as a model, thus relying on a monologic frame.

Students in Lleida declare having improved their Spanish. Interestingly, their Spanish has improved mostly due to communicating with students from Mexico. Therefore, limited contact with the local community in Lleida did not impede the participants from pursuing their linguistic aims. Attitudes towards the local languages also appeared to have changed, especially in relation to Finnish and Catalan: more negative feeling were displayed towards Finnish and Catalan while the attitudes towards Romanian were not as negative, even though little interest was shown for Romanian.

5.3. IDENTITY – A KEY FACTOR

These results indicate a significantly higher perception among students that their identity is more complex and contradictory by the end of the sojourn abroad, where distinctions between places, languages, and cultures are more blurred. Thus, the Erasmus experience triggers a more pluralistic and hybrid identity: mobility is a complex phenomenon that can lead to different outcomes, which include cosmopolitan, multifaceted, and multilingual or syncretic, or more assimilated identities within society (Duff, 2015).

Overall, an increased willingness to become mobile in the future is expressed in the three groups. While at the beginning the students appear to be able to express with considerable clarity the places they belong to and the elements that keep them rooted in these places, at the end of their stay, many have the conviction that they can feel at home in more than one place. Some participants report a loss of a sense of home and some others bring to the fore a reduced concern about their sense of belonging. These results diverge from Osler's (1998) study with student teachers abroad which indicated the sojourn led them to a clear sense of self-identity.

All in all, what these results signal is that participating in an Erasmus stay, independently of the context, triggers a destabilization and hybridization of identity. Therefore, spending at least one semester studying in a foreign university through the Erasmus program provides an environment where individuals are confronted with cultural, symbolic, and material differences which create awareness of how things work in different places, and which finally might blur or change their ideas regarding their sense of belonging and their position in the world. These outcomes coincide with Block's (2014) conceptualization of second language identities: crossing geographical and cultural borders often triggers certain ambivalence and hybridization of the identity of individuals. Hence, the author is not entirely convinced that SA might bring such hybridization. In this respect, the present study shows that SA for as little as one semester does trigger more ambivalent and hybrid identities, in line with Benson *et al.* (2013): SA is an experience that challenges imagined identities for it requires students to negotiate them under new cultural circumstances. Similarly, these results correlate to the ones in Pellegrino Aveni (2005: 14) who

affirms that study abroad gives rise to a ‘deprivation and/or alteration’ of the self because of the use of a second language, and therefore “(t)he learner’s self becomes trapped behind the communication barrier that results, and only an altered picture of the self, one filtered through this new, incomplete language, is projected by the learner”.

While confrontation with difference for a prolonged period may trigger increased tolerance, openness, and an expansion of the horizons with respect to places of belonging, it may also prompt an increased sense of belonging to the national state and pride in one’s origins. This has also been discussed in Smith (2004) and Llurda *et al.* (2016). Hence, the general tendency in the present study is a destabilization of what were initially relatively clear identities, and a subsequent acquisition of a more open identity which integrates the local while looking beyond its horizons: “(f)ormerly mobile students tend to stay mobile or oriented on the international level in their future careers” (Klose, 2013: 46).

Overall, the study abroad experience represents a rite of passage, where fears are overcome through exposure and introspection. This leads to an understanding of who one wants to be, what places one wants to inhabit, and with what community one would like to identify. It is a hybridization of a sense of belonging and a subsequent openness to and adoption of multiple identities, which does not necessarily imply leaving aside national or local affiliations.

Participants mentioned various themes with regard to their personal expectations from SA which could be related to their particular realities as young adults, a period of life with intense personal changes. For some participants, the sojourn abroad was their first outside their homes and at a relatively long distance from their families and their comfort zone. It is therefore not surprising that one of the personal expected assets of the sojourn was an increase in independence and autonomy.

Similarly, some other participants reported that they would improve at a personal level by overcoming their fear of mobility in the future. Fear is an element that appears in the students’ discourses at the beginning of their SA, but seldom as a negative aspect. It is a desirable challenge, and an opportunity to feel uneasy while still in a position of relative comfort. This endurance is expected to lay the foundations for harder times when the participants will embark on more serious types of mobility, often related to work. Students reported expecting to improve social skills by means of contact with other mindsets and different cultures.

On a less straightforward note, in the interviews personal and professional expectations sometimes became the same thing, and the participants struggled when it came to separating expected outcomes from the sojourn on a personal level and those related to professional skills. This relates to the new globalized economy, which looks for individuals who are able to cope with different cultures, languages, and realities, and this may be the imagined identity the participants envision for themselves when they enroll in an Erasmus sojourn abroad.

Probably the most outstanding impact is an increased willingness to travel, and also to live in foreign places for an extended period of time, which comes with feeling at home in multiple places and is connected to an uneasiness at being static. This creates clearer objectives and an improved desire for personal and professional change. These are profoundly related to the expansion of the participants' horizons and a more open mindset, which they express as a changed perspective of the world, brought about by sharing time and space, getting to know, and learning from other people. Cohabiting with different people also results in higher tolerance towards other cultures and people, and an enhancement in social skills. Finally, the participants reported knowing themselves better due to the unique chance to look inside themselves that the sojourn abroad offers, which brings the feeling of being a more open, self-confident, social, and resilient person. In sum, students returned from their sojourn as more mature, resilient, and accompanied by the feeling that everything is possible.

Concerning professional expectations and outcomes, most students thought their participation in the program had enabled them to become more employable. This connects well to Murphy-Lejeune's (2004) assertion that since migration and mobility are two faces of the same phenomenon and given the changes in the forms of migration that came with globalization, new migrant profiles have arisen, among which is the highly skilled worker, whose migration might be only temporary, and who is in search of professional added value or who moves for study reasons. The European mobile student prepares the way for this new type of migrant, for whom migration, rather than a single act, becomes a continuous, progressive process.

However, differences arise when it comes to the perceived reasons behind the outcomes. For some, it is the global vision and the ability to deal with different people and new situations gained through the program

(a type of capital that is in its essence, symbolic) that is perceived to bring material gains in the future, either when jobseeking or working. Managing a foreign language(s), often English but also Spanish in the case of the students in Lleida, is perceived as a skill for being more employable for corporations and as a determinant element in the CV when searching for jobs, because it triggers willingness to go abroad, and therefore, it expands the target market. These results reinforce those in Klose (2013: 47): “(in) sum, the effect of ERASMUS becomes stronger where the former ERASMUS student seeks (or is offered) employment in a job that has an international feature, be it located abroad or domestically; in these jobs, a former Erasmus student normally has the best opportunity to make use of the knowledge gained abroad”.

The experience also provides a rich environment for making connections and establishing friendships with like people from different places. However, and despite the fact that the participants perceive themselves to be more employable due to their participation in the Erasmus program, it is puzzling to see that the formal education received is rarely mentioned as a catalyst for this outcome. In some cases, the participants mention not having improved much on an academic level. This is particularly evident among students in Bucharest, and a possible reason for it could be their initial low motivation for studying during their sojourn abroad, and therefore their investment in it. Students in Bucharest do not seem to have chosen their destination with an academic goal in mind, but rather with a desire to live in that particular environment. In this respect, Benson *et al.* (2013: 34) established that one of the key features of study abroad relevant to second language identity development is that “formal study is one, but often not the only, purpose”.

For this reason, their Erasmus experience is positively valued when it gives students a new perspective and life-experiences that help them change personally compared with the beginning of their sojourn abroad. This is also observable in the other two contexts but is accentuated in the Bucharest group. A general trend is the impact of the intercultural experience obtained from living in a different environment, and in this respect, there is a perception that future employers may value highly such personally challenging intercultural experience.

In general, at the onset of SA, the participants in the study abroad program have some difficulties when asked to see themselves in five years' time, and many express uncertainties, especially when it comes to

the places where they might be. However, the most outstanding feature of their discourse in this respect is a certain degree of openness, where mobility is frequently an option. This is correlated to what Murphy-Lejeune (2004) called ‘the travel bug’ which seems to be a common characteristic of the Erasmus students that consists in mobility prior to the sojourn abroad and a desire to travel.

A few participants prefer to remain in their countries, and a few more express openness to living in other places, openly stating that their countries are not an option, either because of a perceived lack of opportunities or for the higher degree of attractiveness of other places. It is important to mention that students from countries with a weaker economy tend to be certain about living elsewhere in the future, while those who come from countries with a more stable economy either see themselves working at home, or working abroad due to personal reasons that are not economic. Consequently, it might be that the Erasmus experience is seen as an opportunity to prepare for an imminent need to move in the future as perceived by some students, or as a cultural experience that would enable the participants to know how things work in different places, even though these students might have no, or very few, intentions of working abroad.

At the end of their stay, the majority of students seem to be much more confident about being mobile in the future. While for some participants, the need to learn English would push them to a native English-speaking country, some others decide to move because getting to know other cultures and people has become a desire they need to fulfill. Many of the participants already reported a certain inclination towards future mobility at the beginning of their sojourn abroad. However, the scale of this mobility is definitely higher at the end of their Erasmus experience, probably as a consequence of having shown to themselves their ability to manage living in a different culture and becoming more open to seeking opportunities outside their comfort zone. Similarly, by expanding their linguistic repertoires, new avenues which were difficult to imagine before become now available for them.

The reader might also have perceived that these results also show some euphoric satisfaction towards their participation in the Erasmus stay as it appears in Krzkalewska (2013: 79): “the high level of satisfaction with the ERASMUS experience expressed by ERASMUS students can to some extent be explained by the fact that a story of “being an ERASMUS student”

fits very well into contemporary discourses around youth and adulthood". This is because the Erasmus experience, coinciding with the entrance into adulthood, in some cases is a sort of rite of passage, where individuals have the chance to act according to their will while they distance themselves from the moral and social norms and expectations of their societies which could also trigger major identity changes. At least, the experience can become a catalyst for the destabilization of what seem to be rigid identities.

5.4. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study has various limitations. There is a limited sample of students in each context, certainly enough for detecting some significant differences, but in some instances, complicating the process of finding significant differences in cases where those encountered clearly suggested an effect of the location; significant differences would have appeared had the sample been greater.

Another limitation is that despite considering three different contexts across Europe, sketching possibilities for each of them was far from being able to make claims that can be extended to the rest of Europe and overseas.

Another limitation stems from the variety of origins of the participants, which could have enriched the findings of this research project, could also be a distorting element which renders initial differences in the sample unavoidable.

Finally, the present study considers social, cultural, and identity-related factors that are key only for the individuals that are both agents and subjects of studying abroad through the Erasmus program: higher education European students, without being able to contrast their responses to those of any other social actor who directly or indirectly might have participated in such experience.

Future research might find interesting results by trying to overcome the above-mentioned constraints: approaching a sample of the population that would allow for comparing groups, focusing on a wider array of contexts, and considering the voices of other social actors taking part in the experience will enable us to shed light on how social, cultural, and identity-related factors shape language learning in SA.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE¹

Demographic information

1. Name and surname:
2. Gender (please circle): MALE/FEMALE
3. Age:
4. Nationality:
5. Habitual country of residence:
6. E-mail address:
7. Telephone number:
7. Current Studies: degree (Bachelor/Master/PhD) and field:
8. Languages you speak (circle the level you think you have)
 - 1) Elementary Intermediate Advanced Native
 - 2) Elementary Intermediate Advanced Native
 - 3) Elementary Intermediate Advanced Native
 - 4) Elementary Intermediate Advanced Native
 - 5) Elementary Intermediate Advanced Native
9. Level of education of parents (please circle the highest):
Primary / Secondary / Vocational Studies / Bachelor / Master / PhD

¹ Finnish was substituted by Catalan/Spanish or Romanian, according to the location.

10. Social class you think you belong to (please circle):

Low / Low -Middle / Middle High / High

11. Previous mobility experience (please circle and write the country and the duration in months). If you participated in any more than once, please write the total amount of time)

1) School mobility program. CountryDuration

2) University mobility program. Country Duration

3) Language course. Country Duration

4) Work mobility. Country Duration

5) Other (please specify)

Country Duration

12. Do you consider yourself a person with a strong interest in foreign people or cultures?

(please circle): YES / NO / UNDECIDED

13. I am an (please circle)

ERASMUS EXCHANGE STUDENT / DEGREE PROGRAMME STUDENT.

14. Duration of your stay (in months)

1. Please, write the first 5 words that come to your mind when you hear the words:

Erasmus/ Student mobility program

1..... 2..... 3..... 4..... 5.....

In the following section we would like you to answer some questions by simply giving marks from 1 to 5. Please, circle one of the numbers:

1 = not at all 2 = not really 3 = so-so 4 = quite a lot 5 = very much

Example:

How much do you like hamburgers? 1 2 3 4 5

2. How frequently do you follow the following news and affairs?

Local.....1 2 3 4 5

National.....1 2 3 4 5

European.....1 2 3 4 5

3. How would you rate your knowledge of European history?.....1 2 3 4 5

4. How proud are you to be European?1 2 3 4 5

5. How proud are you of Europe in each of the following:

The way democracy works.....1 2 3 4 5

The political influence in the world.....1 2 3 4 5

The economic achievements.....1 2 3 4 5

Its history.....1 2 3 4 5

Its treatment of all groups in society.....1 2 3 4 5

Its contribution to the foundation of modern civilization.....1 2 3 4 5

6. When you think about the European identity, how important do you consider to be:

The European Flag.....1 2 3 4 5

The Euro1 2 3 4 5

Open borders.....1 2 3 4 5

Shared cultural heritage.....1 2 3 4 5

Multilingualism.....1 2 3 4 5

Common future.....1 2 3 4 5

Sports competitions1 2 3 4 5

Human rights.....1 2 3 4 5

7. How much do you feel you belong to:

Your town/city/province.....1 2 3 4 5 Europe.....1 2 3 4 5

Your own country.....1 2 3 4 5 The world.....1 2 3 4 5

8. To what extent do you identify with:

People who speak your first language.....1 2 3 4 5

People who speak English.....1 2 3 4 5

European people, no matter their language.....1 2 3 4 5

9. How likely are you to vote in the following elections:

Local.....1 2 3 4 5 National.....1 2 3 4 5

Regional.....1 2 3 4 5 European.....1 2 3 4 5

10. How opposed would you be to having as street neighbors people from:

Other regions in your country1 2 3 4 5

Other European countries.....1 2 3 4 5

Countries outside Europe.....1 2 3 4 5

11. Do you consider participating in other mobility programmes? YES / NO. Please, write down which type of programme.....

12. Every European citizen should know at least two foreign languages.....1 2 3 4 5

13. It would be a good idea to have a common official language in Europe.....1 2 3 4 5

14. English is an important tool for bringing the Europeans together.....1 2 3 4 5

15. The English spoken by all Europeans should follow native speaker rules.....1 2 3 4 5

16. The multiplicity of languages in Europe is a handicap for:

Economic competition with other continents.....1 2 3 4 5

Internal cohesion.....1 2 3 4 5

17. All languages in Europe should have equal official recognition.....1 2 3 4 5

18. English lessons should focus on communicating rather than on imitating the rules of the native speakers.....1 2 3 4 5

19. The people I understand better when speaking English are (please circle):

Native speakers

Other Europeans

20. To what extent did the opportunity to learn one of the following languages motivate you to take part in this mobility programme:

English.....1 2 3 4 5

Other languages.....1 2 3 4 5

Finnish.....1 2 3 4 5

21. My level of English will be an important barrier to communication.....1 2 3 4 5

22. All cultures have the same value.....1 2 3 4 5

23. Different cultural backgrounds can be a barrier to communication.....1 2 3 4 5

24. My life experience enables me to be successful in any cultural context.....1 2 3 4 5

25. When I get to know some other cultures, I realize how much better my culture is.....1 2 3 4 5

26. No matter their culture, people everywhere are motivated by the same things.....1 2 3 4 5

27. How do you perceive yourself with regard to the local community in which your stay will take place:

An immigrant.....1 2 3 4 5 A traveler.....1 2 3 4 5

A local.....1 2 3 4 5 A stranger.....1 2 3 4 5

28. The more cultural differences, the better – it’s boring if everyone is the same.....1 2 3 4 5

29. People in other cultures are different in ways I hadn’t thought before.....1 2 3 4 5

30. I can maintain my values and also behave in culturally appropriate ways in any context.....1 2 3 4 5

31. Everywhere is home, if you know enough about how things work there.....1 2 3 4 5

32. I can look at any situation from a variety of cultural points of view.....1 2 3 4 5

33. This study abroad experience will give me better job opportunities.....1 2 3 4 5

34. My decision-making skills are expanded by having multiple cultural viewpoints1 2 3 4 5

35. This mobility experience will have influence on my:

Knowledge of English.....1 2 3 4 5

Knowledge of other cultures.....1 2 3 4 5

Autonomy.....1 2 3 4 5

Self-confidence.....1 2 3 4 5

Knowledge of other languages.....1 2 3 4 5

Acceptance of other cultures.....1 2 3 4 5

36. This experience will benefit me

Personally.....1 2 3 4 5 Professionally.....1 2 3 4 5

Academically.....1 2 3 4 5

37. I want to spend most of my stay with:

Local people.....1 2 3 4 5

Other international students.....1 2 3 4 5

People from my own country.....1 2 3 4 5

Native speakers of English.....1 2 3 4 5

38. I think mobility students mostly socialize and connect among themselves during their

stay.....1 2 3 4 5

39. In the future, I see myself living

In my country.....1 2 3 4 5

In any European country.....1 2 3 4 5

In any occidental country.....1 2 3 4 5

In any place of the world.....1 2 3 4 5

40. Our world will increasingly resemble an Erasmus community, with intense contact between

languages and cultures.....1 2 3 4 5

41. I know well who I am and to which geographical space I belong.....1 2 3 4 5

42. My identity is complex and sometimes contradictory with regard to the places where I live,

my cultures and my languages.....1 2 3 4 5

43. We acquire our identity from our parents and environment; we have no

choice.....1 2 3 4 5

44. We have the choice to decide on how to develop our own identity.....1 2 3 4 5

45. I have the feeling that I need to negotiate my role in society constantly.....1 2 3 4 5
46. I will never use Finnish, so it's useless to learn it.....1 2 3 4 5
47. We should all try to use Finnish frequently.1 2 3 4 5
48. In my current context, learning English is more important than learning Finnish.....1 2 3 4 5
49. I like or I would like to speak Finnish.....1 2 3 4 5
50. I like listening to people speaking Finnish.....1 2 3 4 5
51. I will never use English, so it's useless to learn it.....1 2 3 4 5
52. We should all try to use English frequently.....1 2 3 4 5
53. Learning Finnish is more important than learning English.....1 2 3 4 5
54. I like or I would like to speak English.....1 2 3 4 5
55. I like listening to people speaking English.....1 2 3 4 5
56. Which language do you think you'll use more during your mobility stay:
- Finnish1 2 3 4 5 English.....1 2 3 4 5
- Your own language.....1 2 3 4 5

Would you like to participate in a short, informal interview during your international experience?

ALL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS WILL TAKE PART IN A LOTTERY ☺ (please circle)

YES / NO

APPENDIX 2: PRE-INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS

What's your name and where are you from?

Which were the reasons that determined you to enroll in a mobility program?

Why Oulu/Lleida/Bucharest?

In which ways do you think this mobility plan will influence your life?

Personally

Academically (languages)

Professionally

How would you define yourself? Do you feel you belong to a country/a province/Europe? What makes you feel this way?

Do you think a mobility plan can have any effects on your sense of belonging?

Are you planning to socialize more with local/Erasmus/people from your own country?

Do you think Erasmus students usually get along together? Why?

Which is the common language of the Erasmus communities?

Which were your expectations before coming to Oulu/Lleida/Bucharest?

How has your stay here been so far?

Which are your hopes with regard to your stay here? And fears?

How do you see your role in this new society?

How do you see yourself in 5 years?

And where do you see yourself?

Had you had any experiences with foreign people before coming here?

Which kind of experiences?

How do you react to different manners to do things?

Do you think they affected your choice to be here in any way?

Which kind of jobs do you imagine yourself having in the future?

Do you think this experience will help you with that?

Do you think that the Erasmus programs are a place to make friends for a life?

How will you stay in contact with them?

Do you think there are any elements that define the European culture/identity?

Do you think the fact you belong to a European country made your stay here easier?

How do you see the world in the future? Do you think it will resemble more and more an Erasmus community?

How do you see the future of the European Union.

APPENDIX 3: POST-INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS

What's your name and where are you from?

Which were the reasons that determined you to enroll in a mobility program?

Why Oulu/Lleida/Bucharest?

In which ways do you think this mobility plan have influenced your life?

In which ways do you think it will influence your life?

Personally

Academically (languages)

Professionally

How would you define yourself? Do you feel you belong to a country/a province/Europe?

What makes you feel this way?

Do you think a mobility plan can have any effects on your sense of belonging?

Did you socialize more with local/Erasmus/people from your own country?

Do you think Erasmus students usually get along together? Why?

Which is the common language of the Erasmus communities?

Which languages have you used and in which situations?

Which were your expectations before going to Oulu/Lleida/Bucharest?

Did you feel welcome by the society where your stay took place? What about the institutions?

How has your stay there been so far?

Which were your hopes with regard to your stay here? Were they fulfilled?

And fears?

In which way was the culture of your stay different from yours?

Which languages can you speak now?

Have you learnt the local language? Why/why not?

Have you learnt English? Why/Why not?

What do you know now about Finland/Romania/Catalonia that you didn't know before? Have you learnt any social or cultural aspect?

Has your vision about any national group of people changed?

Have you thought about going back to Finland/Romania/Catalonia?

How do you see your role in this society now? Would you say it has changed?

How do you see yourself in 5 years? And where do you see yourself?

How do you react to culturally different manners to do things?

Which kind of jobs do you imagine yourself having in the future? Do you think this experience will help you with that?

Do you think that the Erasmus programs are a place to make friends for life?

How will you stay in contact with them?

Do you think that this experience provided you with anything that the students back home do not have?

Do you think that this experience would have been different in a southern/northern/eastern European university? What was special about the country of your stay?

Do you think that your host university encouraged the development of your knowledge of a different language and a different culture?

What about outside the university? Was there any place for your own voice? Have you talked about the customs in your country? To whom? Which was their reaction?

Have you visited your country during your mobility stay? Have you visited other countries?

Do you have the feeling that you belong to a different society in your host country?

Do you think it's a good idea to use your first language while you're on Erasmus?

Do you think that knowing more English and using it more somehow stops the development of other languages?

Have you used any digital networks during your mobility stay? What for?

Did you fall in love during your stay? Has this fact changed your view about the national group this person belonged to?

Do you think there are any elements that define the European culture/identity?

Do you think the fact you belong to a European country made your stay here easier?

How do you see the world in the future? Do you think it will resemble more and more an Erasmus community, with more intense contact between people from different places?

How do you see the future of the European Union?

How do you see your country now, after the mobility stay?

How are you going to keep in touch with the people you met during your mobility stay?

Study abroad has been a matter of concern in sociolinguistics for a few decades now. Nevertheless, research on study abroad has rarely combined the study of sociolinguistic aspects with the analysis of perceived language-related gains. Similarly, there has been a lack of studies integrating qualitative and quantitative methods in SA research. Thus, the present volume comes as a response to the need to triangulate sociolinguistic aspects with perceived language-related gains, qualitative and quantitative methods, in three different European contexts, and participants from almost every corner in Europe for a deeper understanding of the study abroad phenomenon on the European continent.

Vasilica Mocanu is an assistant lecturer of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Salamanca. Her research is concerned with multilingualism, identity, and diversity under globalization, language learning processes in situations of mobility and the potential of mixed-methods to investigate the implications for language and identity in situations of mobility and displacement across different cultural landscapes.