Master Thesis

The Erasmus program and its potential to alter the perception of Erasmus students of their European Citizenship

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Summary

Many European citizens question the European Union´s (EU) capacity to tackle current challenges, such as high unemployment rates or stagnating economic growth. Michelle Cini defined this development as a "legitimacy problem" of the EU (Cini, 2013, p. 8).

This phenomenon can be traced back to the end of the 1970s (Cini, 2013, p. 10). At that time, the EU attempted to address the issue by implementing the European Citizenship (ECP) with the enforcement of the Maastricht Treaty of 1993. The goal of the ECP was to enhance the trust of European citizens in the EU and its institutions (Cini, 2007, p. 3). Apart from the ECP, the European Commission also introduced social programs, such as the Erasmus program. The combination of the ECP and social programs was designed to overcome the legitimacy problem by establishing a stronger bond between European citizens and the EU (Cini, 2007, p. 10). A lot of research has been done on the influence of the ECP and its effects on the level of trust of European citizens in the EU. Still, what is missing is research on the potential of social programs, such as the Erasmus program, to change the European citizen's perspective of the ECP.

Over the last 25 years, more than three millions students participated in the Erasmus program (European Commission, 2014b). Thus, they gained unique experiences in the Erasmus program, which might also entail experiences that have the potential to change their perception of the ECP. Data on the possibility that the Erasmus program could alter an individual´s perspective of the EU exists. However, data about the potential of the Erasmus program to change the Erasmus student perception of the ECP is not yet available. This master thesis aims to contribute to the research about the Erasmus program and its potential to change the Erasmus student perspective of the ECP. In order to achieve this aim, this master thesis will establish a case study on 15 German students that participated in the program and 15 German students that did not. The relevant data will be collected through semi-structured interviews.

Key words: European Citizenship, European Citizenship dimensions, Erasmus program, Erasmus students, Citizenship

1. Introduction

European Union citizens (European citizens) are skeptical about the European Union and its institutions (Cini, 2007, p. 7). This skepticism is shown by decreasing turnouts at elections to the European Parliament (EP), or in a survey about the trust of European citizens in the EU and its institutions in 2013[1].

However, this distrust is not a recent phenomenon. European citizens have been skeptical about the EU since the end of the 1970´s (Cini, 2007, p. 8). The European Commission (Commission) and European politicians were concerned about this development, since their legitimization to exist relies on the political support and trust of their citizens – the European citizens. The Commission as the executive body of the EU, decided to respond to this situation in order to gain the trust of European citizens in the EU and its institutions (Cini, 2013, p. 10).

They decided to reinforce the relation between European citizens and the EU by introducing the European Citizenship (ECP). With the introduction of the ECP, European citizens received legal rights, such as the right of free movement and the right of residence within the EU, the right to vote in European and municipal elections, the right to access European government documents, the right to apply to the EU institutions in one of the official languages, and the right to be not discriminated on grounds of nationality. The Commission expected that the ECP could enhance the trust of the people in the EU and would also establish a strong connection between European citizens and the ECP (Smith, 1999, p. 366). In order to support the development of such a connection, the Commission decided to launch different social programs, such as the Erasmus program. The Erasmus program is a student exchange program for European students and students from EU partner regions, such as Turkey, Norway or Switzerland (European Commission, 2013a).

The ECP consists of three different dimensions, namely the legal, the political agent and the identity dimension. Firstly, the legal dimension which contains all rights

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[1] The Eurobarometer conducts frequently on behalf of the European Commission public opinion surveys. The mentioned survey is called: Standard Eurobarometer 79 – Spring 2013 – Public Opinion in the European Union

enjoyed by a European citizen. These legal rights have been established by the introduction of the ECP and they are equal for all European citizens. European citizens are free to act according to the law and can decide individually and independently, which legal rights they would like to use. However, it has to be mentioned that some legal rights are limited to certain groups. For instance the right to participate in the Erasmus program is related to the right of free movement. It is called the right of academic mobility and is not accessible for all European citizens, since it is limited just to students (Kymlicka and Norman, 2000; Bennhold, 2005). Secondly, the political agent dimension, which considers European citizens as active participating citizens in European political institutions. This includes whether a European citizen uses his or her right to vote passively or actively. This dimension can certainly play a role for the individual perspective of the ECP, but has rather limited potential. Most European citizens are just active as political agents during elections and their voting behavior is often related to national concerns. Further, compared with all European citizens, this group, which is politically active in EU concerns, is rather small (Carens, 2000; Bennhold, 2005). The last dimension is the identity dimension. This identity dimension is interesting, since the identity of an individual can be influenced by experiences. These experiences might also have an influence on his or her perception of the ECP and could change the connection between Erasmus students towards the ECP. This master thesis will investigate the ECP dimension of identity and in how far the Erasmus program could possibly alter the perception of Erasmus students on it.

Although the ECP established some political and economic rights at the supranational EU level, it remains subordinated to European national citizenships (Bosniak, 2000, p. 458). Usually a national citizenship is framed around privileges, which a person receives through the citizenship[2]. The concept of citizenship can be traced back to the beginning of the early city-states of ancient Greece and has always related to the shape of a nation (Bosniak, 2000, p. 453). Since that time two main models on the concept of citizenship have developed, which are still relevant today: the liberal-individualist model and the civic-republican model. The liberal-individualist model

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[2] A person can receive a citizenship for several reasons, for instance through his parents, which are already citizens of a specific country or through birth or marriage.

understands a citizen as an autonomous being with duties, such as paying taxes and obeying the law. The state exists for the citizen and is designed to respect and to defend the rights of its citizens (Oldfied et al, 1994). The civic-republican model considers citizens as active members in a community. They are politically active and focus on matters of common concern. The state plays a central role, since the state represents all citizens and not just the individual (Kartal, 2001). While, more than these two ideas on the concept of citizenship exist, nearly all theories share the notion that the nation plays a central role (Walzer 1989; Kartal, 2001).

Although, the ECP is centralized around national citizenships, it differs from them (Bosniak, 2000, p. 459). National citizenships are limited on national boundaries and national law. The ECP is applied on a supranational level and is accessible to all European citizens (Bosniak, 2000, p. 459). An important difference is the European citizen´s perception of their identity, which often is related to their national identity and to their European Citizenship (Bosniak, 2000, p. 459). A lot of research has been compiled on how the relation between national citizen´s identity with their national citizenship as part of their identity. Still, what is undefined is how European citizens consider their European Citizenship as part of their identity.

Scholars argue that "a growing sense of European-wide-citizenship sometimes called a "Euro-consciousness" is developing as part of the European Union´s integration process" or in other words "there is a growing cultural awareness of a "European identity" (Bosniak, 2000, p. 483). The European identity refers to the sense of a personal identification with Europe, or in this context with the European Union. This identification can be influenced through certain experiences that an individual gains (Stråth, 2002).

Different scholars have argued that direct experiences with the Erasmus program can change an individual or even a group perspective of the European Citizenship (Kymlicka and Norman, 2000; Strath, 2002; Bennhold, 2005). It is possible that an individual or a group can develop more trust in the institutional framework, its leaders (often politicians), and in the community (often the nation). Thus, these perspectives could change distrust into trust. It is a fact, that Erasmus students gain

unique experiences during their Erasmus time, and that some of these experiences even will be shared by all Erasmus students (Bennhold, 2005).

It seems appropriate to investigate on this social phenomenon and to analyze, if Erasmus students have a different perspective of the ECP, with regarding to the identity dimension, than non-Erasmus students. The results could provide information about the ECP dimension of identity and how EU social programs might have the potential to change the perception of European citizens of the ECP.

Therefore this master thesis will focus on the research question: "Does the participation in the Erasmus program change the perception of European students of their European Citizenship?" The question is related to the potential of the Erasmus program to change the perception of Erasmus students of their European Citizenship dimension of identity, which in this case will be understood as European identity.

The theoretical framework will be framed around the ideas of the liberal-individualists and the civic-republican understanding of citizenship, and followed by an introduction of the ECP. Furthermore, this master thesis will provide a brief outlook on the concept of a European identity. The identity dimension of the ECP will be analyzed and seeks to discover if the experiences gained within an EU environment contribute to this identity. Afterwards, the thesis will introduce the Erasmus program and its structure, as the investigation will be based on it. Lastly, a short overview of some experiences, which an Erasmus student might gain during its Erasmus stay, will be provided.

German students are the largest group of students participating in the Erasmus program (European Commission, 2014b). Consequently, a case study on this group seems relevant and could be compared with further examinations. A qualitative research method will be used for the research, since this master thesis attempts to gather an in-depth understanding about the potential of the Erasmus program to change the Erasmus student perception of the ECP dimension of identity. Therefore this master thesis will make use of semi-structured interviews. They have a structure, which allows the adjusting of questions depending on individual experiences. The interviews will be with German Erasmus students and German students who have not been participating in the Erasmus program. On the basis of this research, this master

thesis will draw tentative conclusions about the potential of the Erasmus program to change the individual perspective of Erasmus students of the ECP and whether differences between Erasmus students and non-Erasmus students exist.

1.1. Scientific and social relevance of this thesis

Research on the influence of the ECP to change the European citizen perspective of the EU already exists. However, this research is rather general and omits not the perspective of European citizens of the ECP. Thus, data about the Erasmus program´s potential to change an Erasmus student´s perspective of their European Citizenship dimension of identity does not exist. Due to this lack of coherent data, genuine primary data had to be collected. This study provides important insights into the relation between EU programs and the European Citizenship. EU institutions could use these results for future improvements. Likewise, academics from the fields of European studies, sociology, and political science could employ the results for further research, while looking at European citizens.

The social relevance of this thesis becomes apparent by observing the increasing importance of the Erasmus program and the decreasing trust of European citizens in the EU (Cini, 2010). As of today, the Erasmus program is the EU program with the most participants among all social programs of the EU and the European Communities in history (European Commission, 2013a; European Commission, 2006). Consequently, it is likely that a large number of students who have been abroad between 2007 and 2013 could talk about their Erasmus experiences and how these might have changed their perception of the ECP.

Hence, this thesis could analyze the potential of the Erasmus program to change the perception of Erasmus students and their ECP dimension of identity. In the case that the program proves to have no influence on the strengthening of an individual´s European Citizenship it could be adjusted, reformed or even removed. As such, the thesis could provide important insights for policymakers at the EU level.

1.2. Interdisciplinary approach

The research for this thesis is conducted as part of the Master degree Social Policy and Social Interventions at Utrecht University. The interdisciplinary character of this thesis becomes apparent through the use of insights from European studies (more specifically – the history of the European Union, and the workings of EU institutions), sociology (especially the concept of European Identity), and political science (the introduction of the concepts of European Citizenship and citizenship). In the theoretical framework of this thesis, political science and sociology literature is used to understand the aforementioned key concepts. Literature on the workings of the EU in combination with literature on sociology is used to investigate the influence of EU programs on the European Citizenship and European citizens.

1.3. Structure

The first part of this thesis will establish a theoretical framework. Firstly, the concepts of citizenship and the European Citizenship will be introduced. Subsequently, the European Identity will be introduced. Afterwards the Erasmus program and it´s targets will be defined. Next, the paper will give an outline of experiences an Erasmus student could gain during the program. Lastly, this theoretical framework will be used to frame the research question and to establish expectations regarding the influence of the Erasmus program.

The second part will explain the methodology and introduces the interview questions, followed by the third part, which will present the findings. Subsequently, the most significant part of this thesis, the case study, will investigate the potential of the Erasmus program to change an Erasmus student´s perception of their European Citizenship dimension of identity. The expectations will be examined and used to support the analysis of the research question. Lastly, the main findings of the thesis will be summarized and further research opportunities will be outlined in the conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework will serve as scientific background for this thesis. Theories, concepts and ideas will be introduced and connected in order to establish a structure that allows for a precise analysis. With the support of two broadly acknowledged concepts of citizenship following a liberal-individualist and a civic-republican tradition, the ECP can be conceptualized more clearly.

This is followed by the concept of European Identity, which will then be linked to the European Citizenship. Afterwards, the Erasmus program and its targets will be defined to help shape an understanding of the influence of the Erasmus program on the shaping of a perception of the European Citizenship. Subsequently, different experiences, which an Erasmus student might discovers will be established. Lastly, the main ideas will be summarized. This will provide the opportunity to formulate expectations based on the previously developed theoretical framework and will lead to answer the research question.

2.1. Citizenship

Citizenship is a recognized status of a citizen within an institutional structure such as a state. It gives rights and duties to the citizen. These rights could entail for instance the right to vote, the right to work or the right to live in a country. The duties could entail the duty to pay taxes or to serve in the military. Citizenship is normally based on a person´s membership of a nation (Kartal, 2002, p. 101).

A person can be a citizen of a state for several reasons: for instance if his or hers parents are citizens of a given state, or if a person was born within a country, or through the marriage with another person from a given state. However, the person has to receive the status of a citizen in order to receive the rights and duties attached to it (Kartal, 2002, p. 102).

The first concept of citizenship was formulated at the beginning of the early city-states of ancient Greece, where the concept of citizenship was framed around the first laws. Through the years different concepts concerning the relation between an individual and the state developed. Currently, two competing concepts of citizenship are predominant – the liberal-individualist view and the civic-republican view (Kartal, 2002, p. 104).

Liberal-individualist view

According to Rawls (1971), the liberal-individualist view is based on the individual pursuit of self-interest. From this point of view citizens are sovereigns, but they have duties like to pay taxes or to serve in the military, while being politically passive. Private interest plays a significant role in this theory and determines the public interests. Rawls believed that every individual in a state has an "equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties" and the community can benefit from these rights (Rawls, 1998, p. 56). The state provides rights to the citizens, which the citizens can use. It is also the duty of the state to inform the citizen about his or hers rights and to make the citizen aware of his or hers concerns. A connection between citizenship and identity can only be established, if an individual is also willing to acknowledge this connection exists. It might be possible that a person who

enjoys the citizenship of a given state, but does not identify him- or herself with it. Whether the state attempts to enforce the relation between citizenship and identity is dependent on the public interests, which represents the individual interests. For instance, if a nation comes under attack, it is likely that a state would attempt to increase the national identity of every citizen in order to protect the state and its citizens. The state could establish more rights or duties, in order to increase or decrease the connection between national identity and the individual. The information about the increasing or decreasing of rights and duties, which are delivered to the citizens are mostly important for the success of the strengthening of this connection. Thus, if a state changes the content of citizenship and does not inform the citizen about these changes, it might be possible that a change of the perception of an individual of his or hers national identity does not occur (Rawls, 1971, 1998).

Civic-republican view

The competing concept of citizenship is the civic-republican view. In this concept citizens are active members of the state. They participate politically even in government affairs. Thus, the state is ruled by citizens, which makes the public sphere more important than the individual sphere. Citizens represent the state and therefore every citizen is related to the state (Poisner, 1996, p. 60). Citizens are informing themselves about their rights and duties. Whenever a new right or duty is implemented, it is the responsibility of the citizen to gain knowledge of them. The citizenship is the expression of the connection between citizens and their state. According to Poisner (1996), the increasing or decreasing of rights may influence the connection between identity and national citizenship (Poisner, 1996, p. 64). Citizens could feel more connected to the citizenship, if the alteration of the right has a direct influence on their rights. So, citizens identify themselves more or less with their national citizenship.

According to Ronald Beiner (1995), European citizens are citizens best described by the liberal-individualists view. They do not know a lot about their rights and duties and they are not politically active. The relation between citizenship and their self-awareness does not exist or is rather weak. They see the state as a framework,

which should secure their self-interest and should not influence their daily lives too much (Beiner, 1995, p. 50). It is the duty of the state to inform the citizen about new rights and duties and not the other way around. Furthermore, the state is obliged to act in the interest of its citizens (Beiner, 1995, p. 88).

With regard to the European Citizenship this would mean, that the European Union or the individual Member States, are obliged to inform citizens about rights and duties. Consequently, European citizens should have been informed about their right of academic mobility and their right to participate in the Erasmus program. Without the awareness about their rights and the possibility to make use of them, a connection between European Citizenship and European students could not occur.

The European citizenship differs from the national citizenship in at least two ways (Strath, 2002). First of all, it is not linked to a membership in a definite territorial boundary, as it is the case for a national citizenship. Second, it entails hardly any duties whereas the national citizenship usually has duties (Strath, 2002; Bennhold, 2005). However, the next part will introduce the ECP, since it is essential for this paper to understand the ECP profoundly.

2.2. European Citizenship

The European Citizenship was introduced by the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 and is complementary to the national citizenship. It offers a specific set of rights to all EU citizens, which can be used and obtained in the entire EU (European Commission, 1992). Each citizen has political rights such as the right to vote in European or municipal elections and to access political documents from EU institutions as well as the right of free movement and residence, and the right to consular protection when they are abroad. Further rights include, among others, the freedom from discrimination based on nationality and the right to hand in petitions (European Commission, 1992).

The rights a citizen can receive might differ. Marshall proposed that the concept of citizenship has to be divided into three elements, the civil, the political and the social citizenship (Marshall, 1950, p. 30). Civil rights have been established around the 19th century with the composition of rights "for individual freedom, liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude civil contracts and the right to justice" (Marsahll, 1950, p. 30). The political rights have been established around the turn to the 20th century and exercised the political power of the individual by the right to vote and the right to be elected. Social rights developed gradually at the beginning of the 20th century. They extended the rights of citizens in respect to social justice and economic independency.

A European citizen receives civil rights like the freedom of speech, thought and faith and also political rights such as the right to vote (Ferencz & Wächter, 2012). Social rights are only attainable for specific groups, like a scholarship for exchange students or grants for volunteers forming part of the European voluntary service (Ferencz & Wächte 2012; Sigalas, 2010). Still, these social rights are limited and not attainable for everyone. They often entail requirements and conditions in order to receive them. Marshall explained the concept of citizenship with regard to rights within a national context. So, his definition is framed around the nation and the boundaries of a nation. Consequently, it cannot be completely applied on the European Citizenship.

According to Linda Bosniak (2000) the European Citizenship entails more than just civic, political and some social rights – it also entails cultural rights – such as the human rights. Bosniak explains that "human rights regimes, or set of regimes, have taken shape at the international level, which are designed to implement standards, set out in a variety of multilateral agreements, for the treatment of individuals by states" (Bosniak, 2000, p. 466). So, the concept of the European Citizenship is partly de-nationalized and not entirely framed around the nation state. However, it is closely related to national citizenship. This has consequences for the rights a European citizen enjoys. The European Citizenship delivers rights to European citizens, which they could not receive merely in a national context. Like for instance the right of free movement, which also comprises the right of academic mobility. According to the European Commission academic mobility implies that students and teachers in higher education are moving to other institutions (within different Member States) in order to study or to teach for a specific period of time (European Commission, 2013d).

The possibility to make use of rights could have an influence on the perspective individuals have of their European citizenship (Bosniak, 2000, p.469; Bauböck, 2007). According to Bauböck (2007) a difference exists between the influences of European and national civic, political, social and cultural rights. European civic and political rights are having nearly the same effect as national civic and political rights. Hence, their existence would not necessarily alter the individual perception of the ECP. Though, European social and cultural rights are different compared with national social and cultural rights. They could change the perspective of individuals of their European Citizenship. Bauböck and Bosniak have remained unclear about the influence of European social rights and European cultural rights to change the perception of individuals of their ECP. They did not state, which dimension will change through the potential influence of European rights. The next paragraph will introduce the European Citizenship dimensions in order understand the context of the European Citizenship dimension of identity.

2.2.1. The European Citizenship dimensions

The concept of European Citizenship is composed of three elements, namely the legal status, the citizen as a political agent and lastly the citizen as a community member with an identity that is related to the ECP (Cohen, 1999, Kymlicka and Norman, 2000; Carens, 2000). These dimensions are interrelated and hence influence each other. The rights a citizen enjoys (legal status) defines the range of available activities (political agent) the citizen can participate in, whereas the identity strengthens the sense of self-awareness of the citizen (Rawls, 1972). The rights a European citizen enjoys have been aforementioned. In case that citizens use these rights, for example the right of academic mobility, they become a political agent (Carens, 2000). Both, legal status and the political agent dimension can influence the identity dimension. If the European commission would for instance decrease the legal right to vote, this would also entail that the possibilities of European citizen as a political agent would decrease and this could then influence the way European citizens identify themselves with the ECP (Carens, 2000).

According to Carens (2000) a strong identity can itself motivate a citizen to participate actively and to demand further rights. If citizens are sharing the same identity, it might be possible that they will motivate others towards participation and this might avow them for the use of further rights (Carens, 2000). Yet, in the case that they do not share the same identity, it is likely that they would not motivate others to use their ECP. As a result, a decrease of political participation could occur, and citizens would miss the chance to use and to influence their rights (Kymlicka and Norman, 2000).

The European Citizenship delivers rights to all European citizens. Once citizens are aware of their rights – and know how to use them, they can make use of them and might influence the development of further rights. In a survey conducted in 2012, a majority of Europeans responded that they feel as citizens of the EU, e.g. due to sharing significant elements with each other, such as the currency and values. Nevertheless, they predominantly feel as citizens of their respective nation state (European Commission, 2012, p. 21).

Erasmus students are a group, which is often aware of their rights and the fact that they use them. They normally know the background of their program and realize that by taking part in it they take advantage of their ECP (Bauböck, 2007).

Students, who stayed at home, might not have known that they had those rights or decided to stay, for different reasons. But there is a chance that they stayed because they were not aware of the existence of their rights. Over three million students participated in the program over the last 20 years, a fact which reveals, that many students have been aware that a program like the Erasmus program exists. They made use of their ECP right of academic mobility, although it might be possible that they were not aware that they were using these rights.

However, they decided to study abroad and they chose a program that delivers a certain structure and support. Whether the Erasmus program has an influence on the identification of participating students with respect to the European Citizenship remains unclear. While it is understandable, how the European Commission could attempt to strengthen the European Citizenship in its dimension of rights and active use, the possible path to strengthen the dimension of identity has yet to be clarified. The next part will explain the European Identity in order to deliver a possibility to determine how the Erasmus program might influence the perspective of Erasmus students of their ECP dimension of identity.

2.3. European Identity

In the past, research on the European Identity produced conflicting results. While some scholars denied its existence others believed in the possibility of an emerging European Identity. However, the term identity is conceptually rather vague due to many different definitions and possible interpretations (Stråth, 2002). This thesis will use the concept of collective identity that refers to a connection between solidarity and identity in order to conceptualize the European Identity.

Bruter (2003) believes in a differentiation between civic identities, which he understands as the feeling of living within and being a citizen of a European political

regime, and a cultural identity, which he describes as the feeling of culturally belonging to the European people. He argues that the civic component of identity is stronger than the cultural identity. He further believes that people can identify themselves with both the EU as a political system as part of a civic identity and as Europeans as part of a cultural identity (Bruter, 2003). A person can combine different identities (Kohli, 2000; Huntington 2004). Hence, it is possible that a person feels both his national and his European Identity, and potentially even further identities.

It is possible to differentiate between an individual identity and a collective identity, which derives from a sort of solidarity. In this case solidarity describes a situation where people are forming a group based on certain interests, sympathies or objectives (Huntington, 2004). The process, during which individuals identify themselves and others, does influence their self-identification (Kohli, 2000; Huntington, 2004). Even though identity is always an individual and a personal phenomenon, it is possible to define identities, like for instance the civic or the cultural identity as individual as well as collective shapes (Huntington, 2004).

However, a difference between collective identities exists as well. An individual can identify him- or herself with others on a personal basis. Identification as part of a family or a group on the basis of being a member of the same social entity, are merely two examples (Kohli, 2000). Nonetheless, a person can share many different identities, whether based on individual or collective traits. Therefore, a clear distinction between one and the other is not possible (Kohli, 2000).

The presence of "common points" in people's daily lives (i.e. sharing similar experiences) can have the effect of defining themselves as part of a group that is sharing a collective identity. This collective identity could be influenced by shared interests, sympathies or experiences (e.g. common experiences, a political system or program, ethics, etc.) (Huntington, 2004).

Considering the Erasmus program and participating students, this means that those who can and those who cannot participate in the program are forming different collective identities through two different forms of solidarity. On the one side, there are those who can participate and gain common experiences during their Erasmus

period and on the other side those who cannot. With regard to the Erasmus program this would imply, that participating students, who define themselves as European, share a European cultural identity and a European civic identity. The European cultural identity is more related to social experiences, which students made aside the general structure of the Erasmus program, whereas the European civic experiences are more directly related to the structure of the Erasmus program (Mutlu et al, 2010).

This thesis will examine the potential of the Erasmus program to change the perspective of Erasmus students of their European Citizenship dimension of identity. Therefore it is crucial to understand Erasmus students and their experiences with the Erasmus program, as well as which experiences are commonly shared and how they derived. Consequently, the umbrella-program of the Erasmus program, the Life Long Learning Program (LLLP) must be defined. It administers the program and has influence on its targets, which could set the framework for the experiences Erasmus students might gain during their studies abroad.

2.4. The Life Long Learning Program

The Lifelong Learning program (LLLP) is the EU funding program in the field of education and training. Its aim is to enable individuals to pursue learning opportunities across Europe. The program is an umbrella program, which integrates various education and training programs, such as the Erasmus program and sets the objectives and boundaries for these programs (European Commission, 2014c). The LLLP shall ensure "the effective and efficient implementation of the programs and secure that all programs are running in the respect for human rights, democracy, and against exclusion in all its forms [...]" (OJ, 2006, p.8).
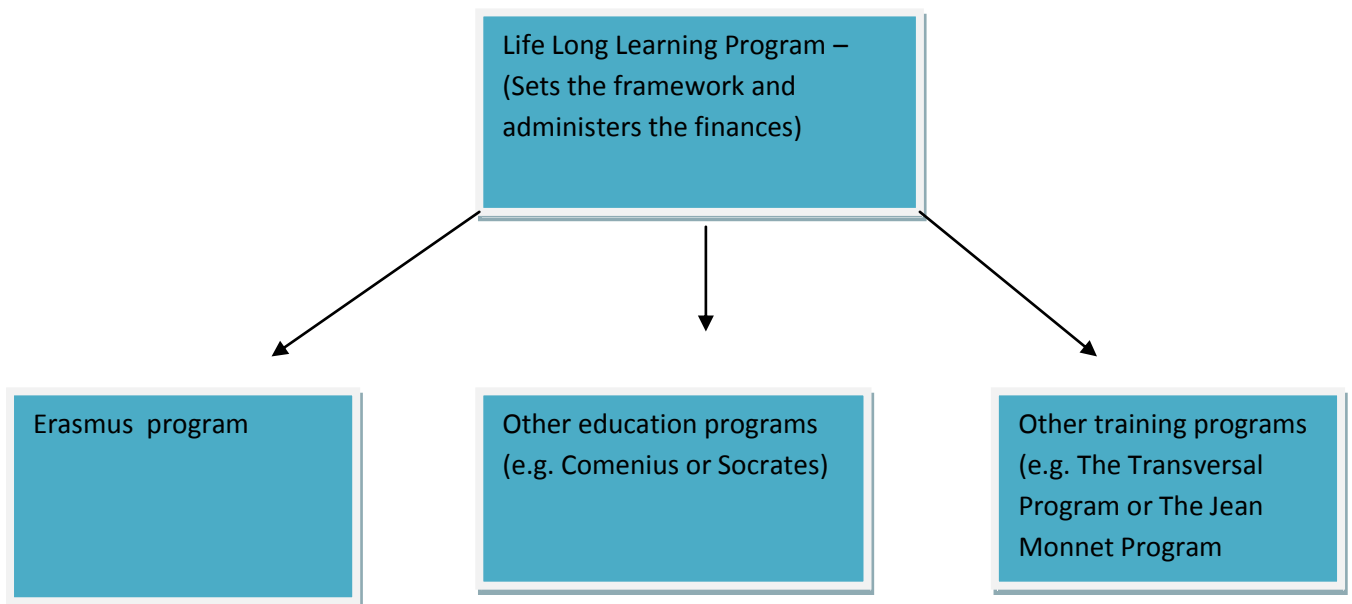
Figure 1: Life Long Learning Program

Former education programs, such as the predecessors of the Erasmus program or other education and training programs have been embedded and used towards the formulation of the LLLP. All of their current objectives and boundaries can be related to the decision of the European Council meeting of 2000 (Pépin, 2007). One main objective of the LLLP is to "reinforce the role of lifelong learning in creating a sense of European Citizenship" (OJ, 2006, p.5).

The LLLP monitors the implementation process of the different programs. Agencies, which have been installed for every program, are monitoring, analyzing and evaluating the programs. The reports of the examinations will be delivered to the Commission (OJ, 2006, p. 5). These reports have not been published yet, since the European Commission still evaluates the results of the reports. Based on the results, the European Commission will adjust the programs with respects of objectives and targets.

The LLLP is a set of agencies, which are monitoring EU programs, in accordance with values and norms, developed by the European Commission and the European Council. With regard to the European Citizenship this means, that the agencies are evaluating, whether the education and training programs are supporting the reinforcement of the European Citizenship.

The LLLP sets the framework of the Erasmus program. It is important to mention the LLLP, since the Erasmus program works under its supervision. The potential, which the Erasmus program could have to change the perspective of Erasmus students about their European citizenship dimension of identity, is therefore partly affected by the LLLP.

2.5. The Erasmus program

The Erasmus program was established in June 1987 and was initially supposed to support student exchanges for 6 years. Despite the initial resistance of a few Member States, namely France, Germany and the UK, which had already their own students exchange programs, the Erasmus program was eventually officially adopted and has been one of the first EU social programs available to a citizens of its Member States[3] (González et al., 2010). The EU financed five successive programs and, as of 2014, continues with the sixth follow-up program, namely Erasmus+. During the duration of the program more than three million students studied in one of the EU Member States[4] or in Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, Macedonia, Switzerland and Turkey[5] (European Commission, 2013a). During the period of 2007 to 2013 more students than in all previous Erasmus programs combined participated in the program (European Commission, 2014b). In order to participate, a student must be enrolled for a degree or diploma at a tertiary-level institution and must have completed the first year of studying (European Commission, 2013c). His or her right to participate in the Erasmus program can be traced back to the European citizenship´s right of academic mobility and therefore to the right of free movement (Pépin, 2007).

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[3] In 1987 the European Communities have been consisting of Germany, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom, Greece, Spain and Portugal

[4] Before Croatia entered the EU in January 2014, the EU was consisting of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom

[5] Non-EU Member States can become partners of the program, if they are included in the European Neighborhood Policy[5] and if they share the values of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and social cohesion (European Commission (a), 2014). Additionally, it is not necessary for a student to be a citizen of the European Union.

The Erasmus program is supposed to effectuate the targets and objectives of the LLLP. That means it has to ensure that the European Citizenship will be strengthened or, in more detail, that the relation between ECP and European students will be further constructed. However, the Erasmus program sets the framework for the exchange. It delivers the rules, values and norms for the implementation and ensures that students can go abroad under similar conditions. Furthermore, it provides Erasmus courses and language courses, which are obligatory for all students. These courses have been developed by the European Commission in accordance with the European Council strategy of 2000. They shall ensure that the connection between Erasmus students and European Citizenship will be developed (Sigalas, 2010, p. 251). The curriculum of the Erasmus courses includes several aspects; (i) the history of the EU and its institutions, (ii) the Erasmus program and its intention, (iii) the European Citizenship and the rights of European citizens as well as (iv) an introduction to the host country and its traditions (European Commission, 2013d).

Furthermore, participating universities must be pre-approved by the European Commission[6]. The Commission examines whether the universities fulfill the criteria of the Erasmus University Charter (European Commission, 2013d). This charter provides a general framework for the activities that a university has to carry out within the Erasmus program. For instance, it has to fulfill the organization of student mobility and teaching, it has to offer an intensive language courses as well as specific Erasmus courses for the participating Erasmus students. All Erasmus students receive the same educational input and have the same educational status. According to Sigalas (2010), group-based learning has an effect on the self-awareness of the students as forming a closed entity. It can be assumed that the inter-group interactions during these courses promote a socialization of the Erasmus students among each other (Sigalas, 2010, p. 242). They feel connected since they share the same experiences (Sigalas, 2010, p. 250). Evaluations of these courses and their effects on Erasmus students have not taken place yet.

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[6] The can be approved on the basis of recommendations of the EUC Evaluation Committee, composed of a panel of European Commission and Executive Agency officials.

Besides these courses and the framework, the Erasmus program has no direct connection with the European Citizenship dimensions. The Erasmus program has the aim to inform the Erasmus Student about their European Citizenship. So, the courses are making the participants aware of their rights, and of the fact that they are using these rights during the Erasmus program. The influence on the identity dimension is supposed to be delivered by collective experiences. As mentioned before, these experiences can strengthen the relationship between a social program and a group, such as the Erasmus students. Consequently, the next part will deliver insights about experiences that a student possibly makes during his or hers studies abroad.

2.6. Erasmus experiences

The Erasmus program has become a cultural phenomenon and it is very popular among European students to participate in the program in order to gain new experiences. Thus, the program has become part of the European integration process by creating collective experiences for students (Mutlu et al, 2010).

Wolff (2005) states that, when this generation takes the reins in the upcoming decades, in their national capitals and also in Brussels, a cultural shift could occur. "For the first time in history, we're seeing the seeds of a truly European Identity," Wolff said. "Give it 15, 20 or 25 years, and Europe will be run by leaders with a completely different socialization from those of today," he added. "I'm quite optimistic that in the future there will be less national wrangling, less Brussels-bashing and more unity in EU policy making – even if that is hard to picture today" (Wolff, 2005, p. 5).

However, the fact that Wolff defines the development as cultural shift delivers a hint that Erasmus students are somehow connected to each other and that their development is likely to follow a similar path.

Those students, who participate in the Erasmus program, will have a compulsory language course and a specific Erasmus course, which both have been developed by the European Commission (European Commission, 2013c). They will share similar

experiences including those of studying abroad, while being away from friends, family, the university and their respective home-country. These experiences can have lasting effects on them and might have an influence on the building of a collective identity (Kuhn, 2012; Salajan & Chiper, 2012).

2.6.1. Collective experiences

Every year, the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) conducts a survey on the beneficial effects of going abroad and about experiences Erasmus students gain during their Erasmus time (ESN, 2013). The ESN found out that Erasmus students (87 %) feel more European compared to non-Erasmus students (65 %) and they are better informed about the EU and more interested in international and European politics than non-Erasmus students (ESN, 2013, p. 34).

They also found out, that after their stay, most Erasmus students (78 %) feel connected to their host country and to the Erasmus program in general (65 %). Indeed, many students have enjoyed a more culturally oriented life and studied less compared to their home university (85 %). However, many refer to their stay abroad as mind-opening and a gain of experiences (94 %), which they never expected to gain before as well as a lot of fun and a fulfilling experience (89 %). Additionally, some gained academic skills, which have not been provided by their home university (54 %).

Erasmus students will share some experiences. They all have to organize their lives in a different country than their home country and will explore a new academic environment. Most students will go abroad to a country, where a different language is spoken compared to the one of their home university. Furthermore, they will travel around Europe, even if it is just between their home and their host country. Additionally, they will make new cultural experiences and will explore a different kind of independence, as for many students studying abroad is their first time to be independent from their home (Mutlu et al, 2010; Kuhn, 2012; Salajan & Chiper, 2012; Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2013). With regard to Huntington and Wolff, these

common experiences are "common points", which all Erasmus students share. Moreover, these "common points" could support the forming of a European cultural identity, since many of these experiences could be just shared besides the official structure of the Erasmus program (Mutlu et al, 2010).

However, they all gain the experience of the Erasmus course and the language course. These experiences can be related to the forming of a European civic identity. Both collective identities can be shared by an individual and might also potentially influence his or her perception of his or her ECP dimension of identity (Kuhn, 2012). The effect on the perception is depending on the development of the collective identities and the individual identity during the Erasmus program (Kuhn, 2012; Salajan & Chiper, 2012).

Besides these common experiences and the ones gained within the Erasmus course and the language courses, there are individual experiences for Erasmus students. Some feel excluded and separated, some feel lost and alone, while other students feel comfortable and have found a new home, new friends and maybe even a partner for the rest of their life (Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2013). These individual experiences can have an influence on the collective experiences and vice versa. They can have effects on the entire feeling about the Erasmus program and the time abroad. However, most Erasmus students enjoyed their stay abroad. According to the ESN Survey, around 81 % of all Erasmus students had a "very good" or a "good" time abroad (ESN, 2013).

Erasmus students are using their right to participate in the Erasmus program actively with a certain kind of identity. So, the concept of the European Citizenship is completed and can be analyzed. In order to do so, the following part will introduce some expectations about the result of the interviews, which can be traced back to the theoretical framework. Additionally, the expectations will grant the possibility to frame the research question and further sub-questions.

2.7. Expectations and research question

The expectations are derived out of the theoretical framework and will support the analysis. They allow for a comparison of theoretically derived expectations and the collected data. They thereby help to guide data collection and to answer the research question.

As mentioned before, the European Citizenship consists of three dimensions: the legal dimension, the political agent dimension and the identity dimension. All three together form the European Citizenship. This master thesis analyses the potential of the Erasmus program to change the perspective of Erasmus students of the ECP dimension of identity. Therefore, expectations will be framed merely around this dimension.

2.7.1. Identity dimension

It could be expected that Erasmus students have a stronger feeling of belonging to a particular group, which are related to a form of a collective identity. They will share experiences with other Erasmus student during and beside the Erasmus program. Thus, it might be possible that they will form a European civic identity and a European cultural identity. These forms of collective identity might change a student´s perception of his or her European Citizenship of identity.

According to Kohli (2000) and Huntington (2004), the fact that people identify themselves and others in a specific form is quite important for their self-identification. Consequently, it is likely that an Erasmus student, who identifies him- or herself as Erasmus student has a stronger connection / perspective of his or her ECP than a non-Erasmus student. Non-Erasmus students are excluded from the Erasmus students group - a group, which according to Wolff (2005), is quite exclusive and self-aware about their rights as European citizens.

According to Beiner (1995), most European citizens live in the way of the liberal-individualist point of view about citizenship. This would entail that Erasmus students are not necessarily better informed about their rights and their duties and have not a stronger perspective of their ECP identity than non-Erasmus students. Thus, the EU is obliged to inform all students about their rights and duties, and to prepare students, which are participating in the Erasmus program. However, with regard to the liberal-individualist view, a connection between citizenship and identity can only be established, if an individual is willing to acknowledge that this connection exists (Rawls, 1998, p. 56). Hence, even though a student decides to participate in the Erasmus program, this does not necessarily mean that his or her connection to the ECP dimension of identity is stronger than the connection of non-Erasmus students. The program structure of the Erasmus program might support the strengthening of a connection between Erasmus students and ECP through compulsory Erasmus courses, but there is no guarantee.

2.7.2. Research question

These aforementioned expectations need to be assessed in regards to their validity. Due to their rather positive assumptions, they neglect the fact that doubts about the potential of the Erasmus program to change the perspective of Erasmus students of the ECP exists. González et al., (2010) argued that the program is a waste of money, since participating students are using it just for personal leisure activities. This could further entail, that the perspective of Erasmus students of their European Citizenship does not change and could be the same as that of non-Erasmus students. Furthermore, it might be that the perspective of Erasmus students of the Erasmus program might change, but not their perspective of the ECP, since his or her experiences could be also related to his or her perception of the Erasmus program without direct connection to the ECP.

Consequently, it remains unclear, whether the Erasmus program has the potential to change the perspective of Erasmus students of their European

Citizenship dimension of identity, therefore this thesis will focus on the research question as follows: "Does the participation in the Erasmus program change the perception of European students of their European Citizenship?"

2.7.3. Sub – questions:

It might be necessary to focus on certain sub-questions, which might support the answering of the research question.

Sub – question I: The Erasmus courses could play a significant role in the development of the perspective of Erasmus students of their European Citizenship. Consequently it is valid to ask: "Do Erasmus courses have significance for the development of a connection between European citizens and European Citizenship?"

Sub – question II: The experiences that Erasmus students gain with their European Citizenship can be related to the experiences with the Erasmus program as an administrative framework and as a cultural environment. It might be interesting to evaluate the significance of the relation between European Citizenship and Erasmus students. Therefore, the next sub-question is: "What is the significance of having gained experiences with respect to the Erasmus program and its environment for the relationship between the European Citizenship dimension of identity and Erasmus students?"

3. Methodology

In order to answer the research question "Does the participation in the Erasmus program change the perception of European students of their European Citizenship?" in an appropriate form, this paper will make use of a methodology that fits the theoretical framework and the research question well. The theoretical framework established a relationship between theoretical concepts and observations of scholars about the Erasmus program. It enables the formation of expectations, which postulate reactions of Erasmus Students during and after they participated in the Erasmus program with respect to their perspective of their European Citizenship dimension of identity.

3.1. Research method

In order to develop an understanding of the underlying pathways of how the Erasmus program might influence the perspective of Erasmus students of their European Citizenship, this paper will make use of a qualitative research method, namely the method of semi-structured interviews.

As the form of the connection between the European Citizenship and the Erasmus students is not known in advance and it is not entirely clear, which influence could play a role in this relation - a qualitative method seems to be most appropriate. Such a method enables to examine important insights on the individual respondent level. Quantitative methods, which tend to rather generalize over large numbers of observations, might not capture theses individual-level information (Creswell, 2009).

The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they allow for a teacher-learner function (Legard et al., 2003). That means that all interviews will have the same structure and the same questions, but the interviewer can adjust the interview to the knowledge or the experiences of the study participants with additional questions or explanations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Legard et al., 2003). During the interviews,

the interviewer learns about the needs of the participants in order to answer the questions in a way that a gathering of data might be possible. Thus, the interviewer can adjust the questions with further details, which allows for more structure and flexibility (Legard et al., 2003).

The interviews will help to generate insights on the potential influence of the Erasmus program and to examine the questions presented before. They will scrutinize the conditions that must hold for the Erasmus program in order to influence the connection of between Erasmus students and European Citizenship.

Moreover, the interviews will allow to find exceptions and to chart extreme cases (Creswell, 2009). That might be relevant for answering the research question, since different types of Erasmus students are evaluated and might reveal the most common effects. The results of the interviews could possibly be validated elsewhere with several other students. Therefore, the method might be useful for further research. However, a shortcoming of the interviews is that they do not allow a generalization of the findings for all Erasmus students, since the results have to be understood in the context of this research and are based on a small sample size.

Two forms of questions will be asked. Firstly, a set of closed questions will be asked, which will collect general and demographic data about the age, gender, study field, study program and the participation in the Erasmus program. These questions will help to reveal, whether the two groups of Erasmus students and non-Erasmus students can be compared. Secondly, a set of open-ended questions will be asked. These questions will collect data about the experiences a student did or did not make with the Erasmus program, its structure, aside of the Erasmus program, the ECP in general, which ECP rights a student knows and in which relation they are important for him or her. Furthermore, the questions will ask whether a student feels "European" and what that means to him or her. Lastly, the questions will ask what a student knows about the European identity and what it means for him or her. Since the research attempts to find out, which different factors could play a role for the development of a student´s perception of his or her ECP dimension of identity and how it might change, a leading form like for instance closed questions, will be avoided. Closed questions would not give the respondent the possibility to explain

him- or herself or to explain the experiences, which he or she made or did not make during the Erasmus program (Creswell, 2009). An example can be found in the appendix.

In order to describe influence of the Erasmus program on the perspective of Erasmus students of the ECP and to test the expectations, it is required to operationalize the theoretical framework. The phenomenon that the perspective of Erasmus students of the ECP is different than the perspective of non-Erasmus students is highly difficult to measure. It is not possible to create or to evaluate an index. Additionally it is problematic to measure whether the perspective is different, since the perspective an individual has of his own identity depends upon the definition of the individual (Firebaugh, 2008).

However, it is possible to reveal an individual´s awareness of rights whether a difference between Erasmus students and non-Erasmus students exists. It is possible to expose the attitude towards the Erasmus program in more general terms and to reveal a difference about the experiences that have been made with the Erasmus program. Furthermore, it can be identified whether students would define themselves as Erasmus students or not. Furthermore, the results could provide expectations about the understanding of the European identity and what it means to a European student. Additionally, the results could reveal whether a difference between Erasmus students and non-Erasmus students is regards to the European identity exists. Lastly, it could be revealed whether Erasmus students and non-Erasmus students are having a certain kind of a perspective of the ECP or not.

However, it has to be mentioned that the findings are rather first indications and will not provide clear evidence, since the concepts could not be operationalized entirely.

3.2. Research strategy

So far, a connection between European Citizenship and Erasmus students has been built. It has been clarified, that according to the liberal-individualist concept of citizenship, a student is sovereign in the choosing of his connection towards an identity. It might be possible, that a student develops a European civic identity or a European cultural identity and that the Erasmus program could potentially affect this development. However, this identity and the connection to the student might have been influenced by experiences gained through the Erasmus program and its structure. It might be possible as well, that an identity developed due to other experiences besides the Erasmus program. Having this in mind, it is obvious that the method should be able to investigate on a deductive research form. That means, the method should support the testing of the developed theory, that the Erasmus program could potentially affect the perception of Erasmus students of their ECP dimension of identity.

As aforementioned, data on the existence of a relation between European Citizenship and Erasmus Students was not available prior to this research. Consequently, new data had to be collected for this paper. Therefore, the selected method should be able to develop data on one side, as well as investigate the feelings, experiences and emotions of the study participants, on the other side.

The interviews will create similar and different answers and all answers are accepted. All answers will be listed and the answer types will be collected. Thus, it is likely that a scheme appears. This scheme will reveal hints about the perspective of Erasmus students of their ECP. The data will be analyzed in the case study in such a way to give answers to the research question.

The case study allows the combining of different methods in order to explore causation about underlying principles. It allows to clarify causations by using information-oriented samplings and to formulate key cases. So, it allows the generalization of cases and can provide in-depth knowledge about the development of one or more social phenomenon (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 65).

Thus, it will allow to combine the interviews with the theoretical framework, which has been aforementioned and to analyze whether different perspectives of the ECP dimension of identity among European citizens exist. Additionally, it will investigate on the findings in combination with the theoretical expectations and attempts to develop tentative answers to the research question.

3.3. Research Participants

The researcher interviewed 15 Erasmus students and 15 non-Erasmus students. In order to simplify the query for appropriate candidates, the researcher conducted the interviews in Germany with German nationals who have or could have participated in the Erasmus program from 2007 to 2013. The interviews were held in German in order to simplify the response to the questions for the study participants. The researcher is German and lived in Germany during the entire research period. Consequently, it appeared as the simplest way to collect the data in this way.

In order to participate in the Erasmus program, a student must be studying for a degree or diploma at a tertiary-level institution and must have completed his first year (European Commission, 2013c), thus a possible target group had been defined by the program requirements.

A clear distinction between both groups exists. Consequently it is possible to develop a comparative approach. This will be essential for this paper, since the research question expects that the Erasmus program has a certain effect on the perspective of Erasmus students of their European Citizenship. In order to reveal tendencies about the influence, a comparative approach seems appropriate. Thus, two groups will be interviewed, namely a group of Erasmus students and a group of non-Erasmus students.

As aforementioned, open questions will be asked, since this method allows the participants to answer in their own way (Firebaugh, 2008). This is expected to let the interviewees answer more freely according to their feelings and experiences, as they can use their own language to describe it (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

All participants were given a code hence their real names are not part of this paper due to data protection regulations. They will be named X + a number as Erasmus students and Y + a number as non-Erasmus students.

In order to find appropriate candidates for the interviews, the researcher asked for participants within his academic surrounding[7]. Additionally, posts on social media networks supported the search. The researcher had to ask 61 persons to receive the intended 30 participants, because some of the possible participants dropped out because they did not fulfill the requirements and/ or they lacked the time to participate.

The number of participants was limited on 30 participants, due to the expectation that this number could reveal first tendencies and would provide the opportunity for further research. Additionally the number was limited to time constraints.

3.4. Transcriptions

The interviews have been carried out between May 26th and June 1st 2014. It is important to mention, that the elections of the European Parliament have been held at the May 25th 2014. So, it might be possible that some participants have been influenced in their answers by this fact. The interviews have been held via internet, in a public or private atmosphere. They have been recorded and transcript. The researcher used the program "F4" developed by the company "dr.dresing & pehl GmbH" for the transcriptions.

During the transcriptions, a database was developed, which should entail the most common and most relevant answers. This database will be used for the case study and the answering of the research question. The following part will give an overview of the findings.

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[7] Friends and colleagues, which have been studying during 2007 to 2014

4. Findings

This part will present the findings from the interviews carried out to answer the research question and the sub-questions. At first, demographic data of the participants will be presented. Afterwards, the findings will be introduced. In case that both groups of students, the Erasmus and the non-Erasmus students, are addressed, the term 'students' will be used.

The collected data has been categorized into sections with respect to the theory laid out before and to the research questions. Three different sections have been developed, namely a general section, where general information about the connection between students and the Erasmus program and about the Erasmus courses have been collected. This section reveals differences between Erasmus students and non-Erasmus students concerning their knowledge of the Erasmus program and the Erasmus program structure. Furthermore, it reveals experiences, which students made while participating in the program and otherwise did not make. These sections support the analyses of the research question and the sub-questions, because the findings allow tentative conclusions about the relation between the Erasmus program and students.

The second section is the legal section, where all information about the student´s knowledge of their rights as European citizens and within the Erasmus program have been collected. This section allows for the formulation of assumptions about the Erasmus program structure and whether the compulsory Erasmus courses might provide Erasmus students with knowledge and experiences that non-Erasmus student might not gain. Additionally, the findings could support the analyses of the potential influence of the Erasmus program to change the perception of Erasmus students of their ECP dimension of identity. This is owned to the fact that the knowledge and experiences, which might be revealed, could demonstrate differences in the relation between Erasmus students and non-Erasmus students with their ECP dimension of identity. Therefore, this section primarily supports the answering of the research sub-question.

The last section is about the Erasmus student perspective of the ECP and how students explain their relation to it. This section reveals differences in the perception of Erasmus students and non-Erasmus student of their ECP. Thus, the findings allow tentative conclusions about the differences in their perceptions and how they might have been influenced by experiences, which have been made during their participation in the Erasmus program. This will mainly support the answering of the research question, since these tentative conclusions could be related to a change in the Erasmus student perception of their ECP and whether it might have been reinforced.

4.1. Demographic – Data

The youngest participant has been 20 years old and the oldest 33 years. The majority group has been 27 years old. Hence, all participants have been in the required age during the period from 2007 to 2013 in order to participate in the Erasmus program. The interviewee pool had encompassed more men than women and in total twenty-two males and eight females. All respondents have been studying in the period 2007 to 2013, which means that they fulfilled another criterion to have been accepted for the Erasmus program. The largest part of the Erasmus students has been abroad in the fifth semester of their studies and for a period between five and six months, with one exception of twelve months. They have either been in Spain, Italy, Ireland, France or Turkey.[8] The major part of all students has been enrolled in the studies of European studies, economics or political science.[9] All participants have been German nationals.

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[8] France (5), Spain (4), Italy (3), Turkey (2), Ireland (1)

[9] European Studies (12), Economics (7), Political Science (5), Lectureship (3), Social work (2), Medicine (1)

4.2. General section

A major part of the Erasmus students participated in the Erasmus program in order to gain new experiences, to learn a new language and/ or because it was an obligatory part of their study program. A minor group expected to explore a new academic system or a new culture. The reasons of non-Erasmus students to not participate are a bit more complex. A few have been too busy with their study program and feared to lose track when going abroad. Language barriers and requirements of the home university in order be accepted have been among other reasons. Still, nearly all non-Erasmus students did know that something like the Erasmus program exists. Neither Erasmus students, nor non-Erasmus students mentioned that they participated or that they would have liked to participate in the program because of the structure or the relation to their European Citizenship.

Non Erasmus-students often just heard of the Erasmus program from friends. Erasmus students have a more direct connection to the Erasmus program. They found new friends, had a great time or said that they had a connection to the program because of their participation. Non-Erasmus students expressed as well, that they believe that Erasmus students have more courage than non-Erasmus students, since they are going abroad.

Just a minor group of the Erasmus students stated that they participated in a particular Erasmus course at their host university. The major group said that they did not, with the rest mentioning that they participated in such a course as part of the introduction week. Non-Erasmus students have confidence that such a course could influence the perspective of Erasmus students of their European Citizenship. Erasmus students are highly skeptical of such an influence. A group of Erasmus students stated that they believe that the influence depends on the student and whether he or she already has a connection to the European Citizenship or not.

All students mentioned that Erasmus students and Non-Erasmus students differ in the way they behave. Erasmus students appear more open-minded and active in finding new friends. Moreover, the biggest part of all Erasmus students stated that

they improved their intercultural understanding. Furthermore, all students mentioned that they guess that Erasmus students have an advantage with regard to learning the language of their host country due to their stay.

However, the significance of the European Citizenship is different for Erasmus students and non-Erasmus students. Whereas non-Erasmus mentioned that the European Citizenship rather has the same or an equal significance as their national citizenship, there is a completely different perspective among Erasmus students. The majority group of the Erasmus students stated that their European Citizenship is more than just a construct of rights, which allows them to travel freely between Member States. A minor part of both groups stated, that their European Citizenship is a reflection and confirmation of the EU and establishes a connection between them and the EU itself.

4.2.1. Legal right section

Regardless of the group, all students have a firm awareness of their rights as European citizens. They know for instance that they have the right of free movement and residence, that they can vote at European elections and that they have the freedom of movement to work. Non-Erasmus students are expecting to receive more rights from their European Citizenship than Erasmus students. They expect that due to their European Citizenship they receive social benefits in other EU Member States and that they can pay with the Euro. Erasmus students know more details about their rights, for instance that they have the freedom from discrimination on the grounds of their nationality or that they have the right to consul the ECJ.[10] However, all students mentioned that the right of free movement is really important to them. They appreciate their freedom to travel between Member States as a privilege. Further rights are important, but not comparably relevant. Some non-Erasmus students stated that their right to vote is important, but is not equivalent with the right of free movement.

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[10] European Court of Justice

As expected, Erasmus students know that they have certain rights during their time abroad because of the Erasmus program. They know for instance that they receive financial support and that they receive institutional support by the host-university during their stay. According to the Erasmus students, all of them received a short introduction about their rights and the content of the program.

4.2.2. Identity section

Nearly all Erasmus students stated that they gained a better comprehension about different cultures. It is interesting that non-Erasmus students are expecting that Erasmus students will do so. Both groups mentioned that they would assume that Erasmus students will learn a new language and that they will expand their horizon. Furthermore, Erasmus students announced that they explored themselves from a different perspective during the program. Non-Erasmus students expect that this would happen and that they would discover a different academic system. Another important point is that a few Erasmus students mentioned that they learned how to understand countries and nationalities from different perspectives as well as the behavior of their inhabitants.

Furthermore, the major part of the Erasmus students expressed that the Erasmus program strengthened their relationship to their European Citizenship. They explained this solidification with the fact that for most of them, it was the first time that they felt a connection to it at all. Non-Erasmus students have not been certain about the relation. A few stated that they would expect that no change would appear or that Erasmus students would feel a connection rather to the European Union than to the European Citizenship. This is believed due to the fact that the European Union provides and finances programs such as the Erasmus program.

Nearly all students have in common that they feel as "European" all the time and in particular while they are travelling. Erasmus students mentioned further details about their feeling to be European. For instance, they expressed that they feel European, while being outside of Europe when they can compare the European Union and their

rights with the region, where they are staying. Additionally, they have a strong feeling to be European, when studying and living in a different country than their home country. Non-Erasmus students have a more abstract relation. They feel particularly European if they can pay with the Euro and while they are talking about the European Union.

Moreover, Erasmus students believe that the Erasmus program changes or influences their feeling about their European Citizenship. They expect that through the Erasmus program they have a better understanding of the ECP and developed a more direct connection to it. They assume that this relation may have changed, because they used European Citizenship rights in a direct way and could directly see through the participation in the Erasmus program what the ECP legal rights mean and what they could influence. The major part of the non-Erasmus students is optimistic about a positive influence towards the EU and its institutions. Still, just a couple saw a positive relation to their European Citizenship.

Erasmus students are proud of the EU and their rights and believe that the EU is the answer for peace in Europe and likewise in the World. They have a general positive feeling about the EU and think that young Europeans have the obligation to sustain the European integration process. Non-Erasmus students did not express that many details. They merely stated that they have a positive feeling concerning the EU without further explanations.

There was a consensus about the connection between European Identity and European Citizenship. The major part of all students stated that the concepts of European Citizenship and European Identity are linked. Moreover, the European Citizenship rights are influencing the development of a European Identity. Yet, it has to be mentioned that a few students had doubts about the existence of a connection. They stated that between both is no connection.

No respondent stated that he or she has just the European Citizenship. They either referred to their German citizenship or to a combination of German and European Citizenship.

In the following case study, these results will be contrasted to expectations and the research question.

5. Case study

The case study shall examine the expectations of the theoretical framework and the findings with regard to the research question: "Does the participation in the Erasmus program change the perception of European students of their European Citizenship?" Additionally, the case study will reveal different perceptions of Erasmus students and non-Erasmus students of the European citizenship dimension of identity in order to find tentative answers to the research question.

The case study will be structured into two parts: First, a comparison is made between Erasmus and non-Erasmus students in regards to the possible alteration of their perception of the ECP dimension of identity. The second part, the synopsis, will put the results of the first part into the theoretical context and answers the research question and the sub-questions.

5.1. Alteration through the Erasmus program

The European Citizenship delivers the right of academic mobility to the Erasmus student, without this right participation at the Erasmus program would not be possible. All students are aware that they have certain rights due to their European Citizenship. Non-Erasmus students even overestimate these rights and cannot differentiate between their national rights and their rights as European citizen. Erasmus students are aware of this difference and can trace their right of academic mobility back to their European Citizenship rights. They know that they are using their European Citizenship rights, while they are participating in the Erasmus program. Thus, by giving rights to citizens and offering the possibility to use them

through programs, an active connection between European Citizenship and European citizens emerges.

Erasmus students do not participate in the program just because of their European Citizenship rights. Their focus is the desire to gain new experiences and not their European Citizenship. Furthermore, Erasmus students in general already have a relation to their European Citizenship; the actual strength depends on prior experiences and emotions they made with respect to their European Citizenship. *"I guess that I already had a relation to the ECP in advance, before I participated in the Erasmus program. It might be possible, that my experiences with the EU and to travel around in the EU already constructed a relation, but I have doubts that the Erasmus program had an influence on this relation and if yes, then just in a positive way." (X009, Female, 26 Years).* The European Citizenship delivers rights, which affect the lives and behaviors of European students, but it is not the main driver for an action, such as the participation in the Erasmus program.

The Erasmus program is a study exchange program, which delivers rights, conditions and financial support to students, teachers and universities. It shall establish a framework with equal rights for all participants. Furthermore, it is supposed to strengthen the connection between European Citizenship and Erasmus students. In order to foster a strengthening of the connection the European Commission decided to implement the so-called Erasmus courses. The interviews revealed that not many Erasmus students participated in the Erasmus courses. Although a small group of Erasmus students did participated in such a course, the larger part did not. It became obvious during the interviews that the absence of these courses was not depending on the university, the country or the year. It was a general perspective, which was voiced by nearly all Erasmus students. Consequently, no sufficient data could be collected in order to reveal a clear influence of the Erasmus courses on the possibility to change the perception of Erasmus students of their ECP dimension of identity.

The Erasmus program establishes the possibility of an exchange of students by delivering an administrative framework, which entails requirements that have to be fulfilled by all participating universities. It gives Erasmus students the possibility of

financial support and a secure structure. Furthermore, it sets regulations and requirements, which have to be fulfilled, like the participation in the Erasmus course. However, besides these regulations and requirements the Erasmus program creates a particular environment, which entails a group dynamic exclusively for Erasmus students. This environment cannot be artificially constructed, but the Erasmus framework can be the first "connection point" for Erasmus students to come together and to build up such an environment. For some Erasmus students this environment could alter their perception of their ECP dimension of identity more than the Erasmus program structure. *"Even in the case that there was something like an "Erasmus course", I don´t think that it would have changed my perspective about the European Citizenship, since all my Erasmus experiences are rather linked to the Erasmus time besides the formal program and that is what I related to the European Citizenship" (X011, Male, 26 Years).* Although, the Erasmus program structure sets the framework for the exchange of the Erasmus students and provides the environment for their stay, its potential to change the perspective of Erasmus student about the European dimension of identity seems rather weak. It has to be mentioned, it is possible to argue, that the potential of the Erasmus program to change the perspective of Erasmus students of their ECP dimension of identity is related to the European civic identity. Since the civic identity is related to the feeling of living and being a citizen within a structural framework (Bruter, 2003).

The environment is not a place or a region. It is rather the identification of Erasmus students, to be an Erasmus student. Through the identification, an Erasmus student grants the possibility for other Erasmus students to "connect" with him or her. This could even occur after the Erasmus program, since most Erasmus students will identify themselves as well as other Erasmus students after their Erasmus time. Moreover, this environment is actually open for everybody, yet, for a non-Erasmus student it is quite difficult to enter, since he or she often cannot share the same experiences, emotions and feelings as an Erasmus student. Furthermore, they can neither participate in the official Erasmus courses nor be part of the Erasmus live beside of the Erasmus program structure. *"The Erasmus students have been a community, they studied together, they had their own courses and they have made their own parties – I and my friends had not much contact with them" (Y012,*

Female, 24). This quote can be related to accusations which are brought up against Erasmus students. It is true, that the largest part of all Erasmus students has more leisure time compared to non-Erasmus students, which gives them the opportunity to use this time together and to gain mutual new experiences. These experiences will tie their connection among each other and hence further creates "connection points". *"The experiences, which I gained together with my Erasmus friends, brought us together as a group. We started to share emotions, feelings and our lives. I would say that these experiences with my new friends have been more important for me than the Erasmus program as an academic exchange program." (X012, Female, 27 Years).*

Despite the fact that some Erasmus students are excluded from this environment most others will use it to connect to other Erasmus students. As a result they are indirectly helping to build up a collective European cultural identity. Moreover, this collective European cultural identity can be traced back to the Erasmus program, as its existence is directly derived from the program.

However, the European Identity, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, is difficult to frame. It is undoubtedly true, that Erasmus students are developing "connection points". This, in turn, creates a European cultural identity and might alter the perception of Erasmus students of their European Citizenship. *"My Erasmus friends and I we had the feeling that we have been different compared to regular students at our host-university. As we belonged to the group of Erasmus students, even if we didn´t know all of them, but by the fact that they have been also Erasmus students we had something in common that the regular students did not have." (X002, Male, 28 Years).*

Still, the Erasmus program provides not the environment - it rather sets the ball rolling. Thus, it influences indirectly the establishment of an environment, which leads to a collective European cultural identity of former and current Erasmus students, which identify themselves as Erasmus students. As a spillover result the connection between European Citizenship and Erasmus students becomes strengthened. Erasmus students can differentiate between the Erasmus program as a program and as an experience. *"I think we have to differ between the Erasmus*

program as an academic program, which provides me as an Erasmus students a formal structure and between the time of being an Erasmus students aside of the formal structure. (X004, Male, 27 Years).

Last but not least, the Erasmus program supports the strengthening of the connection between Erasmus students and European citizenship also by the direct support of an administrative framework. Yet, for the biggest part of all Erasmus students the administrative framework provides rather a direct connection at the beginning of the Erasmus program, when its support is most needed. While, during and after the Erasmus program a direct connection is rather exceptional. Therefore we can conclude, the Erasmus program can alter the perception of Erasmus students of his or her European citizenship dimension of identity. Yet, we have to differentiate between the potential of the Erasmus program to change the European civic identity and the European cultural identity. Whereas the environment of the Erasmus program has the potential to change the cultural identity, there is rather a weak potential of the Erasmus program as formal structure to change the European civic identity.

5.2. Synopsis

The case study attempted to answer the research question: "Does the participation in the Erasmus program change the perception of European students of their European Citizenship?" This question cannot be answered in terms of yes or no. It rather allows an answering in the way that Erasmus student X004 did: "*To be honest, I do not think that the Erasmus program as a program alone changed my perspective of the European citizenship. I would argue that the change stems from time, which I had together with other European students in a different European country than my home-country (X004, Male, 27 Years)".*

The connection can be split into an official and an unofficial influence. Whereas the official influence is delivered by the European Citizenship rights and the Erasmus program framework, which sets the boundaries and establishes a direct connection,

the unofficial influence, which is established by "common points" within an Erasmus student´s environment.

However, the European Citizenship is rather a construct of rights, which affects the lives and behaviors of European citizens. This circumstance and the fact that almost exclusively European students are participating grants the opportunity for the creation of a European civic identity, which is influenced by European Citizenship rights and the Erasmus program. Consequently, we can conclude that an influence potentially exists. It is, however, a rather moderate official influence of the European Citizenship rights and the Erasmus program.

If we follow the path of Bosniak (2000) and Bauböck (2007), we could argue that they have been correct in their expectation that civic and political rights could have a partial influence on the perspective of an individual of his or hers European Citizenship. This can be explained by the theory of Rawls (1971) concerning his expectation about liberal-individual citizens and arguing that a connection between citizenship and identity can only be established if the individual is also willing to acknowledge the fact that such a connection might exist. As aforementioned, most Erasmus students are not participating in the Erasmus program because of their rights or because of the Erasmus program structure. They participate because of the possibility to gain new experiences.

Bauböck (2007) differentiates between the influence of civic and political and social and cultural rights and expects that social and cultural rights have more influence on the perception of an individual of his or her ECP. If we understand the Erasmus program as a social program, which provides social and cultural rights to Erasmus students with the forming of "connections points" or the establishing of an environment than we could conclude that Bauböck was right.

Erasmus students change their perception of their ECP dimension of identity because they acknowledged that a connection between their Erasmus experiences, their ECP and their identity exists. Furthermore, their awareness of their rights was partially increased by the Erasmus program. All students, regardless if Erasmus student or not have revealed that they understand their rights in a liberal-individual way as Rawl (1971) expected. They did not know a lot about their rights and their duties and

expected that an institutional framework should inform them about those rights. Yet, Erasmus students could reveal that they can relate their participation in the Erasmus program to their ECP rights. If there would have been no Erasmus program, it is likely that they would have the same understanding of their ECP as non-Erasmus students. The perspective of Erasmus students is therefore only different because of their experiences with the Erasmus program.

Erasmus students are forming a particular group, as expected by Wolff (2005). They are connected by "common points", such as their experiences, their feelings or their emotions. Huntington (2005) expects that they will form a collective cultural identity. He seems right, as most Erasmus students stated that they would relate these "common points" to their Erasmus time and to their European identity. With regard to Bruter (2003) we could argue that the ECP dimension of identity includes a European cultural identity for Erasmus students.

The sub-questions can be answered in a simpler manner. First, "Do Erasmus courses have significance for the development of a connection between European citizens and European Citizenship?" The collected data does not show a substantial influence of the Erasmus courses. Even if they are absent and not existing, a difference is not assessable. Some students would expect that they could influence the relation but just for those who did not have an opinion about this connection before. This fact reveals that the European Commission failed with their aim to reinforce the European Citizenship by Erasmus courses.

The second sub-question was "What is the significance of having gained experiences with respect to the Erasmus program and its environment for the relationship between the European Citizenship dimension of identity and Erasmus students?" As aforementioned, they play a central role since they are setting "common points", which can lead to a relation between European citizens and the European Citizenship. These experiences might have influenced the perception of Erasmus students of their perception of the European citizenship of identity.

The final part of the thesis, the conclusion, will sum up the central findings and presents answers to the research question and the sub-questions. Moreover the

strengths and weaknesses of this thesis shall be debated and recommendations for future research are provided.

6. Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, the European Union has a problem with its political legitimization. Some scholars defined this problem as a "democratic deficits" and meant a lack of political participation among European citizens. In order to solve this problem, the European Commission decided to implement the European Citizenship and to invest in social programs, such as the Erasmus program. This thesis attempted to answer the research question: "Does the participation in the Erasmus program change the perception of European students of their European Citizenship?"

The thesis introduced the concepts of European Citizenship, liberal-individual Citizenship, civic-cultural Citizenship, European Identity and explained the Erasmus program in order to establish a theoretical framework, which would support the formulation of a research question and two sub-questions.

In order to answer the questions new data had to be collected by the researcher as appropriate data was not yet available. Thus, semi-structured interviews with 15 Erasmus students and 15 non-Erasmus students have been conducted in order to collect suitable data. The interview questions have been formulated with regard to the theoretical framework and expectations, which have been delivered through the theoretical framework. Afterwards the interviews have been transcribed and the findings formulated. The findings in combination with the theoretical framework have been used for the case study of this thesis and to answer the research question and the sub-question.

Although, the case study revealed that the Erasmus program could slightly alter the perception of Erasmus students of their European Citizenship it has to be noted that the answer is more complex. Whereas the administrative framework of the European

Citizenship and the Erasmus program have a direct influence on the connection there also exists an indirect influence. This indirect influence is given by the circumstance that all participating students will make similar experiences, due to their European Citizenship rights, but also because they have the same intention to participate in the program. Therefore it is rather their motivation and the fact that they will find other students with the same motivation, which brings them together and influences their perception of their European Citizenship dimension of identity. They will find "common points", which they will relate to it.

The sub-questions supported were used to frame the interview questions and to help answering the research question. Furthermore, they revealed that the influence of the Erasmus program is limited. Most Erasmus students did not participate in the Erasmus courses. Consequently, it can be stated that the European Commission should enhance their influence on the monitoring of social programs, if they want to have an influence on the connection between European Citizenship and social programs.

However, this thesis gave new insights on the relation between the European Citizenship dimension of identity and social programs of the EU. Additionally, it related this connection to Erasmus students and proved that social programs of the EU can bring students together and might support the establishment of a collective European cultural identity. Moreover, the thesis gave an expression about the possibilities of common experiences and what kind of influence they could have on the individual and the cultural identity building.

Despite these new findings, some shortcomings have to be mentioned. The interviews have been held directly after the election of the European Parliament. It might be therefore possible that some participants have been influenced by the election and gave answers, which they would not have given under normal circumstances.

Additionally, the research on the influence of a social program on the perspective of European students of the ECP dimension of identity should be extended. The thesis merely investigated on 30 German students. It might be possible that students from other Member States or even from non-Member States would have answered

differently. Consequently, more research is needed to deliver deeper insights and to generalize the findings of this thesis for the entire European Union and for all Erasmus students.

Finally, this new perspective on the connection between European Citizenship and the Erasmus program leads the way for further research on the relation between European Citizenship and European students. It would be relevant to do research on non-students and to examine, whether social programs have the same influence on them as on Erasmus students. Furthermore, additional research should be done on the influence of the European Citizenship under usual conditions. Erasmus students live in a certain environment while they are doing their Erasmus. Yet, a regular citizen is certainly influenced by the European Citizenship in a different way. Thus, it could be interesting to do more research on the influence of the European Citizenship on European citizens in their daily lives.

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8. Appendix

<u>Interview Questions</u>

Date: _____

Time: _____

Name:

_____

Date of birth: _____

Gender: _____

Nationality: _____

Since when are you studying? Or if relevant, when have you been studying? :
_____

What are you studying? Or what did you study? :

_____

In which semester are you?

_____

Erasmus Student? Yes o. Nein

_____

How long have you been abroad?

_____

In which Semester have you been abroad?

_____

Where have you been?

_____

Code:

_____

_

Question 1)

What kind of connection do you have to the Erasmus program?

Question 2)

Is the connection rather positive or negative?

Question 3)

Why did you, or why did you not, participate in the Erasmus program?

Question 4)

What do you think are the experiences, which Erasmus students gain and regular Students don´t?

Question 5)

In how fare does the connection between the Erasmus student and the European Citizenship change?

Question 6)

Do you see any differences between Erasmus students and the non – Erasmus students? If yes, what kind of differences?

Question 7)

What kind of experiences do you have with the group dynamics of Erasmus students?

Question 8)

When do you feel European?

Question 9)

What kind of experiences, feelings or emotions do you relate to being European?

Question 10)

What kind of significance has the European Citizenship for you?

Question 11)

Do you think that the Erasmus program changes or influences your feelings about the European Citizenship?

Question 12)

(The European Commission decided in 2006 to establish an obligatory Erasmus course for all students. The first part of the course should explain the intention of the

Erasmus program and the EU – Institution. The second part should introduce the students in the culture, habits and the native customs of the host country.)

Question 12 a) (Just for Erasmus students)

Did you take such an Erasmus course?

Question 12.b)

What do you think about Erasmus courses, could they play a certain role in regard on the influence on the European Citizenship?

Question 13)

What kind of connection has your European Citizenship with your European Identity?

(Or in other words, what kind of connection is there between your rights as European citizen and your feelings to be a European?)

Question 14)

You have as European citizen particular rights, which do you know?

Question 15)

Which of these rights are important for you?

Question 16)

What kind of citizenships do you have?

Example

Question 15: Which of these rights are important for you?

Type	Erasmus students	Non-Erasmus students
Right to vote in elections to the EP	4	7
Voting in municipal elections	2	1
Accessing European government documents	1	0
Petitioning Parliament and the Ombudsman	0	0
The right to apply to the EU institutions in one of the official languages	0	0
Right of free movement	13	11

and residence		
Freedom from discrimination on nationality	2	1
Right to consular protection	1	0