Erasmus student mobility and the construction of European citizenship

Enric Llurda*, Lídia Gallego-Balsà, Clàudia Barahona and Xavier Martin-Rubió

*Departament d’Anglès i Lingüística, Universitat de Lleida, Lleida, Spain; bDepartament de Teoria i Història de l’Arquitectura i Tècniques de Comunicació, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain

The Erasmus student mobility programme allocates three explicit objectives to the experience of spending a few months studying in another European country: (1) to benefit students educationally, linguistically and culturally; (2) to promote co-operation between institutions and (3) to contribute to the development of a pool of well-qualified, open-minded and internationally experienced future professionals [European Commission, 1996. The Obstacles to Transnational Mobility. Green Paper. http://aei.pitt.edu/1226/1/education_mobility_obstacles_gp_COM_96_462.pdf (accessed April, 2015)]. The programme has also sometimes been referred to as one of the most powerful tools of European integration. However, little research has so far been undertaken on how it may alter students’ attitudes towards aspects of European identity and sense of European citizenship. Our study investigates the extent to which the Erasmus experience affects the sense of self as European citizens of a cohort of students from the University of Lleida (Catalonia, Spain). It also explores the students’ position towards the notion of European citizenship and how this relates to the development of their plurilingual competence. Two questionnaires, one before and one after the study-abroad experience, provided quantitative data while qualitative data were obtained through the analysis of discussion groups focusing on aspects of European vs. national identity and citizenship.

Keywords: European citizenship; identity; student mobility; study abroad; Erasmus

Introduction

The Erasmus student mobility programme allocates three explicit objectives to the experience of spending a few months studying in another European country: (1) to benefit students educationally, linguistically and culturally; (2) to promote co-operation between institutions and (3) to contribute to the development of a pool of well-qualified, open-minded and internationally experienced future professionals (European Commission, 1996). Though not stated as an explicit objective, the programme has also sometimes been referred to as one of the most powerful tools of European integration. In her speech of acceptance of the 2004 Principe de Asturias Award for International Cooperation, the European Commissioner for Education and Culture, Viviane Reding, declared that ‘Erasmus enables them (students) to discover sometimes for the first time a different kind of citizenship founded on roots common to all Europeans, respecting historical, cultural and linguistic diversity.’ However, little research has been undertaken thus far on how Erasmus student mobility programmes may affect students’ attitudes towards aspects of identity and feelings of European citizenship.
European citizenship and identity

Defining Europe and European identity is difficult and a matter of considerable controversy, as can be seen in the debate over the origins of Europe. While some argue that the foundations of Europe have Christian roots, others completely disagree and emphasise a secular vision of the continent (Rubenstein 2011). After much debate, Article 1a, added to the Treaty of Lisbon of 2007, reads as follows: ‘…the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities’. The fact that neither God nor Europe’s Christian roots are mentioned was criticised by groups such as the Irish Society for Christian Civilisation (2009). Of course, this kind of controversy would arise equally if trying to define the traits or values of a single nation-state, but when the subject is a supranational entity of close to 30 nation-states, the difficulties are further exacerbated.

Another example of this kind of difficulty is the tension between the concepts of identity and citizenship. Identity and citizenship are clearly connected, but at the same time differentiated: whereas identity relates to the individual and their positioning towards a culture or group of people, citizenship relates to formally established bonds linking an individual to a given national society, by means of some kind of mutual allegiance that may involve feelings of identity but will also emphasise the rights and obligations of citizens with regard to their national state. This may involve some degree of conflict with the notion of ‘European citizenship’ established by European institutions.

The concept ‘Citizenship of the Union’ was established in Article 8.1 of the Maastricht Treaty of 1992: ‘Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union.’ Article 8.2 declares that these citizens will enjoy rights and be subject to duties, although no duties are listed. In the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997, one line was added to Article 8.1 of the Maastricht Treaty: ‘Citizenship of the Union shall complement and not replace national citizenship.’ This addition seems to respond to concerns from member states that an expansion of the status of EU citizenship may be detrimental to national identities (Mancini 1998: 32).

The report of the results of Flash Eurobarometer 365 (European Commission 2013) indicates that although 81% of respondents claim they are familiar with the notion ‘citizen of the European Union’, only 46% say they are both familiar with it and know what it means. People know the expressions ‘citizenship’ and ‘European Union’, so most will say they are familiar with the concept, but less than half were able to say what it entails. Citizenship is about rights and duties, but it is also about feeling part of a given political entity. Shore (2004: 29) argues that ‘citizenship’ is ‘a socio-cultural category that necessarily includes both legal and political as well as subjective, emotional and cultural dimensions’. These different components are connected, since the benefits and rights derived from being a citizen (the legal and political component) mean that people identify with this entity (the emotional element).

The question is, however, whether an entity like the European Union, with its complex and non-state structure, can generate the kind of sense of community generally achieved at local and state levels; whether meaningful citizenship can be created beyond the state. Scholars like Weiler (1999) argue that in the case of the European Union, a decoupling of the above-mentioned components of citizenship has taken place. Weiler claims that in the current globalised world, people can identify with different collectives (demoi) based on different factors of identification, and that all these identifications are compatible. One can be German and Catholic at the same time, so one can feel German
and European in the same way. Weiler (1999) presents two visions derived from the introduction of the European citizenship construct into the two treaties mentioned above: the ‘unity’ vision, where European citizenship would be a step towards further integration of Europe and the demise of national states within it; and the ‘community’ or ‘supranational’ vision, where the national and supranational levels are decoupled, but because they appeal to different aspects of the human psyche (the national to the irrational, and the supranational to the rational), they can coexist.

Contrary to this view, Shore (2004) claims that the legal and political component cannot simply be decoupled from the emotional component. Not only would this be ‘empirically untenable’; it would result in a ‘disembodied, legalistic, and a-cultural view of citizens that simply does not correspond to lived reality’ (Shore 2004: 29). The case of the USA is used here as a counter-example. One might want to consider that citizens of the USA feel what Habermas (1992) has called ‘constitutional patriotism’. However, love for the constitution is neither better nor worse than love for the nation, and in fact, the same amount of irrational behaviour can be generated in both cases. In the USA, there appears to be an emotional component coupled with the legal and political. Smith and Kim (2006) report how the USA has moved from being ranked second on national pride and patriotism by the International Social Survey Program in 1995, to being ranked first in 2003. In the EU, legitimacy lies in the local, in the regional/national, and in the state/national levels, but so far there is little to suggest that it is also felt at the supranational level, as can be seen, for example, in the historically low turn-outs in European elections as compared to other types of elections. There have been efforts to create a sense of a European identity from the top down, but the very way this is being undertaken highlights the great difficulties the process is encountering. Whereas locating the demos at the state/national level in, say, the USA presents little ambiguity, one might wonder where the European demos is located. Is it one demos or different ones, as mottoes like ‘unity in diversity’ or ‘the peoples of Europe’ suggest?

These problems are in fact also present at the state level, as in the case of Spain. A great number of Spanish citizens display a nationalist discourse following Billig’s (1995) idea of ‘banal nationalism’, and their feeling of allegiance to the Spanish nation is treated as simple patriotism rather than nationalism. However, in regions such as Catalonia, where the data presented in this study were collected, the dominant discourse conceives of Catalonia as a nation integrated in a pluri-national state. This clash of discourses is present in everyday life, in the way people construct their identities in interaction (Martin-Rubió 2011) and constitutes a salient factor for Catalan university students, no less so when they go on an Erasmus stay to another European country.

**Study abroad and European citizenship**

Since the launch of the first Erasmus programme in 1987, student mobility in Europe has increased significantly. The programme was named after the Dutch humanist and theologian Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (1466–1536), but the name also serves as an acronym for European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. In 1995, Erasmus became part of the broader Socrates programme, which incorporated not only student mobility but also teaching staff mobility and international cooperation among universities, thus placing more emphasis on collaboration in higher education. In 2007, the Lifelong Learning Programme replaced Socrates/Erasmus as an integrated EU action project for education and training. The current Erasmus+ programme, which started in January 2014, brings together all the existing EU schemes for education, training, youth
Student mobility still remains at the heart of the programme, making it the most popular student exchange scheme in Europe.

One of the main objectives of this successful EU student mobility policy is to serve ‘the purpose of economic cooperation, since the Erasmus programme aims at the training of European-minded professionals’ (Papatsiba 2005: 175). Thus, sojourners are envisaged as a pool of future graduates with experience of living in other member states, that is, with a better knowledge of other countries’ economic and social life. This will make them more likely to be able to create supranational networks in their professional careers, in accordance with the requirements of the single market. The European Commission also stresses this link between education and work on its Erasmus+ home page by stating that this programme ‘will support transnational partnerships among Education, Training, and Youth institutions and organisations to foster cooperation and bridge the worlds of education and work in order to tackle the skills gaps we are facing in Europe’ (European Commission 2015). In addition, the fact that this programme is supported by a grant system strengthens the idea of investment in the European Higher Education Area with a view to promoting competitiveness, innovation and economic growth, and cooperation among member states.

Despite the prevalence of this professional and economic vision of student mobility, the notion of European citizenship is not neglected. Papatsiba (2005) observes the reinforcement of this notion in the European Commission’s White Paper on Education and Training: Towards the Learning Society, which emphasises that ‘education and training will increasingly become the main vehicle for self-awareness, belonging, advancement and self-fulfilment’ (European Commission 1995: 2) and that ‘education lays the foundations of awareness and of European citizenship’ (op. cit: 10). Likewise, ‘with this increasing freedom of movement should come a growing European consciousness instilled through greater awareness of others as a result to exposure to new cultures and societies’ (European Commission 1996: 1). However, it has not been sufficiently demonstrated that a sense of European identity can be generated directly from mobility and exposure to other cultures.

Scholars like Papatsiba (2006: 109) argue that ‘without a specific systematic action to support intercultural learning, acquiring a feeling of belonging in an enlarged Europe, enriching national identities with the desired European dimension, seems to be a random outcome of individual experiential learning’. In line with this, Byram (2008) proposes a framework of education for intercultural citizenship in order to prepare younger generations for globalisation and help them acquire a sense of belonging to international communities, but with ties to their country of origin. More specifically, regarding the European situation, he suggests that European policy for citizenship education is underdeveloped as the Council of Europe has not proposed any particular action that reveals concern with the promotion of citizenship education nor has it articulated the concept of transnational civil society, both key aspects for the evolution of a European identity. Similarly, Davies (1997: 105) points to

a lack of consistency in the way the word citizenship is used and at times it is ignored altogether in favour of terms which seem to imply that a somehow neutral collection of data or movement of people for vocational purposes is all that is required.

Concerning students’ perceptions, Erasmus mobility is, in general, deemed a challenging experience providing many benefits. For example, it is widely accepted that a stay abroad results in personal development and improved capacities to adapt to a changing environment (Carlson and Widaman 1988; Cash 1993; Kauffmann et al. 1992; King and Young 1994; Milstein 2005). More specifically, with respect to students’ perception of
citizenship, their participation in the programme does seem to strengthen their feelings of belonging to Europe. However, this seldom constitutes an explicit awareness of European identity at the end of their stay abroad. As Papatsiba (2005: 184) concludes in her study on political and individual rationales for student mobility, the gains of cultural transmission and development of the European identity ‘seem to take a second place, welcomed as we can see, yet fragile’, which reveals that fostering student mobility is not enough for the acquisition of a European citizenship.

From plurilingual competence to the development of European citizenship

Language, similarly to geographical boundaries, is commonly considered to be one of the main resources that states have at their disposal to construct a shared identity among the people living within their political boundaries. Linguistic homogenisation of a citizenry is pursued not so much for communicative purposes but for the purpose of identification (Hobsbawm 1990). Indeed, Billig (1995: 14) argues that those nations in which different linguistic groups co-exist are fragile and at risk of fragmentation in periods of crisis. The assumption that there is a natural link between a language and its speakers is in fact a fairly recent phenomenon (Blackledge 2000); in Medieval Europe, boundaries were not constructed based on linguistic differences. Linguistic homogenisation became possible thanks to the printing industry, since it enabled the mass circulation and spread of one variety of language. The language variety that triumphed over others usually coincided with that of the ruling elite of a nationalistic movement. Two extremely well-known cases are those of France (Billig 1995) and Italy (Hobsbawm 1990) whose current official national languages were only known to a small elite when they gained their current status. These examples highlight the fact that in the construction of a nation, having a common language has little to do with allowing communication but is instead related to issues of power (Hobsbawm 1990). Gramsci (1971) proposed that the control of the state could not endure without the agreement of the subordinated groups. Such an agreement is achieved through ideological persuasion, which often consists of a process of linguistic normalisation, after which people become convinced that the domination of one variety over others is the natural state of things.

As noted above, Billig (1995: 14) argues that those nations in which different linguistic groups co-exist are vulnerable to fragmentation. For this reason, multilingualism is often perceived as a threat to national unity. And yet, despite the attempts of governments to maintain linguistic homogeneity within their boundaries, multilingualism represents the distinguishing feature of an increasing number of globalised, hybrid and multicultural societies, such as Europe. The states that make up the EU have traditionally constructed their national identity on the basis of monolingualism, which raises questions about what counts as a language in Europe and who has the power to make that decision. The case of Europe is interesting because, even if in general terms some may claim that there is a shared set of beliefs, values, behaviours, history or geography, plus a common flag and a shared anthem, it is ‘obviously not possible to create a language comparable to a national language to symbolise the European identity or embody the shared beliefs and values in the way that a national language does’ (Byram 2008: 140). For this reason, Byram excludes the possibility of European identity being constructed analogously to national identity.

The acquisition of a European identity seems rather to be based on the acquisition of plurilingual competence, which may alter the taken-for-granted reality of nation building. Byram (2008) holds that linguistic diversity appears in the language education policy of the Council of Europe (2006) as one of the sine qua non conditions for the success of
particular aspects of social policy, such as the exercise of democracy and social inclusion, accessing economic and employment opportunities, or the evolution of a European identity. Similarly, Beacco and Byram (2007: 9) argue that, since Europe is a multilingual territory the sense of belonging to Europe and the acceptance of a European identity depends on the ability to interact and communicate with other Europeans using the full range of one’s linguistic repertoire. In this light, individuals are encouraged to become plurilingual; in other words, to acquire linguistic competence in different languages and experience in different cultures (Council of Europe 2001: 168). In this regard, Beacco (2005: 20 as cited in Byram 2008) suggests that cultural and linguistic tolerance and respect needs to be taught in order to develop ‘pluricultural and plurilingual capability’ because even if plurilingualism becomes an established feature of people’s everyday life, they nevertheless need to become aware of their own linguistic diversity and value it.

The sense of belonging to a national group is acquired and maintained in social interaction through language (Byram 2008: 138). This reinforces the fact that language is not just a symbol of national identity but also embodies it. Byram (2008) discusses the implications of this for the construction of European identity and makes three points. Firstly, individuals may have different degrees of attachment to their social identities, such as in the cases of Andalusia and Catalonia in Spain, or Scotland in Great Britain. In the case of European identity, Byram holds that it may not appear to compete with national identity but it is an additional identity, comparable to the notion of ‘Asian identity’ that emerges in South and East Asia as a counter-balance to ‘Westernisation’. Secondly, where people adopt two different social identities of the same nature, tensions may arise because the values and beliefs associated with those groups may seem incompatible. This would be the case of an individual who claims to have two national identities, especially if these two identities appear to be in conflict. Finally, Byram’s third point is that for the construction of European identity, as well as for the construction of national identities in general, schools can represent a valuable tool. Therefore, the introduction of a European dimension into the curricula of schools across Europe would promote this process. One way of doing this is by fostering multilingualism in schools through the incorporation of additional European languages in the curriculum.

Data and methodology
The research discussed here is part of a larger project investigating the impact of Catalan university students’ international mobility experiences within Europe on their English skills, intercultural competence and on their development of an enhanced European identity and awareness of the concept of European citizenship. In this particular study, we focus on the latter aspect and thus explore, through a survey and focus group discussions, students’ engagement with the notions of European identity and citizenship. In recent years, research on the internationalisation of higher education has already examined the language attitudes of students, teaching and administrative staff in the context of Catalonia (see, for instance, Garrett and Gallego-Balsá 2014; Lasagabaster, Cots and Mancho-Barés 2013; Llurda, Cots and Armengol 2013, 2014). However, none of these studies has yet explored the development of these attitudes or how the specific notion of European identity develops after a stay abroad.

Survey data
The survey data were obtained from a group of 46 Erasmus students from the Universitat de Lleida (henceforth, UdL) who participated in the Erasmus European student mobility
programme during the academic year 2013–2014. Students were enrolled in different academic programmes, including humanities, social sciences, medicine and nursing, and engineering. The questionnaire (shown in Appendix 1) was developed after analysis of the literature on aspects of citizenship and European identity. It consisted mainly of a set of Likert-scale questions reflecting some of the ideas found in the literature relating to European citizenship and identity. The questionnaire was drafted and then piloted for clarity with six respondents before being implemented. Its final version initially asked about the chosen destination and the main reason to choose that particular country, and it contained a total of 51 items dealing with Europe and European identity and citizenship, followed by a section asking respondents to indicate how willing they would be to work and live in particular places in the future.

The same questionnaire was administered on two occasions: once during a general meeting organised by the Office of International Relations of the UdL in April, about four months before departure (PRE-Q), with the participation of 109 students, and on a second occasion approximately one month after they had returned back home (POST-Q). For the POST-Q, students were contacted individually after their return and were asked to complete again the same questionnaire. Only the responses of students who had completed both the PRE-Q and the POST-Q were included in statistical analysis. The number of completed questionnaires on this second occasion was 46; these 46 students thus constitute the final sample used to measure the impact of the Erasmus mobility experience. Apart from descriptive statistics, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used in order to determine if any significant changes occurred following the Erasmus experience.

Focus group data

The focus group discussions were organised with a selected group of students among those who had completed the survey and were enrolled in an Erasmus programme in the academic year 2013–2014 in the following three contexts: the UK, Denmark and Italy. For each of these destinations, one focus group was conducted before the students’ stay and one afterwards, thus data were collected from a total of six focus groups. Students came from four different areas of study: law, engineering, languages and education. For the purpose of this study, the analysis looks at whether the experience abroad affected the students’ sense of self as European citizens, their position towards the notion of European citizenship and how this related to the development of their plurilingual competence.

The analysis of the focus groups was undertaken from a discourse-analytical perspective. Following Wood and Kroger (2000), the first step consisted of identifying patterns in the content and the structure of the discourses which were activated by the students (i.e. adopting an emic perspective). This then led to the location of thematic units, which included recurring sets of beliefs that shed light on the students’ positions towards the development of a European identity and language learning before and after their stay abroad. According to Block (2015: 330) thematic analysis puts ‘primarily a focus on the content of what is said’, leaving aside other aspects such as how it is produced. The analysis here also pays attention to features of speech such as gesture, which contribute to the construction of meaning. Transcriptions are presented in the original Catalan with translations into English. Transcription conventions are given in Appendix 2.

The analysis is organised in three sections, which correspond to three recurring themes emerging in the six focus group sessions. For each section, we offer examples that illustrate our key points.
Analysis and discussion

Languages in Europe: English is useful, but is it enough?

We present below the analysis of students’ attitudes towards Europe and languages. The issue of language diversity and the debate around the potential ‘danger’ of all Europeans sharing a common language has been part of the European debate (Ammon 1994, 2006; Phillipson 2003). European institutions have consistently declared that language diversity is one of the important elements of Europe, which should be protected and promoted (Bliesener 2003; Lever 2003; Vlaeminck 2003). In the survey data, eight items in Section 2 of the questionnaire dealt with aspects of language use and language policy in a multilingual setting (items 3, 6, 17, 20, 21, 22, 32 and 38). Two of them had high mean results ($x > 4$, in a 1–5 scale) whereas two others had rather low results ($x < 2.5$). The four items with the highest and lowest responses are shown in Table 1. High and low results do not seem to be associated with one particular language or languages being identified as necessary or required, but rather with the question of whether languages should be seen as a complementary and useful knowledge or as an imposed requirement by an institution. We can see that students do appreciate the advantages of knowing English to communicate in other European countries and feel that knowing several European languages is important for European identity, but they do not support the idea that either English alone or English, French and German should be established as Europe’s official language(s). When applying the Wilcoxon signed-rank test to items in this area, no significant differences were found between the Pre-Q and Post-Q, thus suggesting that students’ vision of the role and need for languages in Europe was not affected by their SA experience in a different European country.

Across the six focus group discussion sessions, languages in Europe was one of the most prominent themes. Europe emerges as a linguistically and culturally diverse space, where knowing English is useful, but recognised as not enough. However, and as we will see next, differences appear in the discourses that underpin the need to know different languages in each of the three groups of students.

The role of English as a lingua franca across Europe was questioned by the students in all three contexts (Denmark, Italy and the UK). In the UK pre-stay focus group, there was consensus among the students that it was important to keep all languages in Europe as a sign of identity of the different nationalities. English appears as a lingua franca that enables communication all over Europe but when it comes to achieving cultural integration in a particular country, speaking the local language is presented as essential.

Table 1. Language-related Likert-scale items.

| Item                                                                 | Pre-Q    | Post-Q   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| 3 – When I have to travel on my own, knowing that I will meet many people who speak English whenever I go to any European country makes me feel better | $x = 4.24$ | $x = 4.13$ |
| 6 – I think that speaking two or three foreign languages is important to gain a European identity | $x = 4.02$ | $x = 4.18$ |
| 20 – I think that English should be the only official European language | $x = 2.22$ | $x = 2.17$ |
| 21 – I think that Europe should have 3 official languages: English, French and German | $x = 2.22$ | $x = 2.26$ |
Extract 1. Speaking the local language for integration (pre-UK)

1. ST1 amb l’anglès et pots moure per Europa tranquillament
   with English you can move around Europe easily
2. ST2 si penses anar per exemple de turisme un temps de vacances de sobres sihou’s for a long time it’s better
   it’s for a long time it’s better
3. val parlar l’anglès
   to speak English
4. ST3 potser per molt que tothom sàpigui l’anglès tu te’n vas a Alemània i te vols
   maybe no matter everybody speaks English you go to Germany and you want to
   integrate into the German society
5. encara que parli anglès tu has de parlar alemà
   although they speak English you must speak German

Similarly, in the pre-stay focus group of students going to Denmark, English appears as a language that can compensate for lack of knowledge of the local language, but only to some extent. A sense of insecurity emerges, as we can see in Extract 2, when the students refer to the use English in the host context.

Extract 2. Insecurity in using English (pre-Denmark)

1. ST4 pots plantar-te allà (…) i serà el meu nivell d’anglès sufit fi puguem utilitzar o al restaurant o use it at a restaurant or
   somewhere else/ you will really be
   on your own (0.5) and on top of it
2. l’idioma que toca no/ però you don’t speak the language that corresponds right/ well if you go to
   another city within Spain you say
3. estic sol però m’espavilo ok I am alone but I can manage
4. però en un altre lloc pos no but somewhere else you won’t
   sabràs com podràs fer entendre’t know whether they understand you or not
5. ST4 no molt català castellà i no molt/ catalan Spanish and
   (0.7) [rotating hand movement] (0.7) English
6. ST5 home molt malament (.) només tres[laughs]
   well very bad (.) only
   three
7. ELL [laughs]
8. ST5 no sé normal\ jo penso\ l’únic que clar si que has estat I don’t know normal\ I think\ but
   it’s true that one has been studying
9. estudiant durant molt molt temps for a long time but when it
   comes to speaking it well you’re
10. però a l’hora de parlar-lo pues not really used to it
11. no estàs tampoc tan acostumat

ST4 compares two hypothetical scenarios. In the first one, he imagines himself in a ‘restaurant or somewhere else’ (lines 3 and 4) abroad on his own, unsure of whether his level of English will be enough to manage that situation. The same student compares
this to a second hypothetical scenario in which he is in a Spanish city. In that situation, he pictures himself being perfectly understood in Spanish. When asked about his linguistic repertoire (line 13), ST4 includes three languages: Catalan, Spanish and English. However, he evaluates his own multilingual repertoire as being rather poor (line 15) probably because he perceives his level of English as being not so good as indicated by a rotating hand movement (lines 16 and 17). This triggers two interventions. ST5, one of the other students, teases ST4 and tells him it is bad that he can only speak three languages (lines 22 and 23), which is interpreted by ELL as a joke (line 24). JMC, one of the researchers, asks the student to explain what he means by the rotating hand movement (lines 18–20). ST4 argues that although he studied English for several years, he is not used to speaking it (lines 25–29), and being able to speak English appears to be crucial in the Danish context to compensate for the lack of knowledge of the local language. The level of oral competence in English appears as one of the main concerns of the students before their stay in Denmark. This refers not only to the general use of English but also, and more specifically, to the varieties of English that the students thought they might encounter abroad and the fact they might not be easy to understand. It should be noted that lack of knowledge of the local language is never mentioned as a limitation.

Interestingly enough, the feelings of insecurity which emerged in the Danish pre-stay focus group, disappeared in the post-stay focus group. In the following extract, we can see how ELL, one of the researchers, asks the students whether they would move abroad again after their experience in Denmark and whether the local language would stop them. The students reply that the local language would not represent a problem because they could rely on English.

Extract 3. Empowerment through English (post-Denmark)

| 1  | ELL  | per Europa\ però qualsevol lloc | within Europe\ but anywhere in |
| 2  | d’Europa\ és igual\ és igual | Europe\ it doesn’t matter\ it’s the |
| 3  | Lituània que la República | same Lithuania or the Czech |
| 4  | Txeca que França | Republic or France |
| 5  | ST6 sí\ (1.2) sí\ ara sí | yes\ (1.2) yes\ now yes\ |
| 6  | ELL i si us sortís feina a un altre lloc ja aprendries la llengua | and if you found a job somewhere else you’d learn the local language |
| 7  | ST7 primer que em motivés la feina | first the job should motivate me |
| 8  | ELL que et motivés la feina i la llengua no us faria por\ | the job should motivate you and the language wouldn’t scare you |
| 9  | ST6 encara que fos lituà que és més petit que el danès\ (…) no\ si saben tant anglès\ i tu veus que et pots comunicar en pla:n | no\ if they know so much English\ and you see you can communicate like |
| 10 | ST7 no\ | no\ |

In Extract 3, the presence of a local language in another country does not appear as an obstacle for students to work abroad. The stay in Denmark appears to have contributed to their sense of empowerment (line 4), making the intrinsic interest of a potential job more important than the fact that it may be necessary to learn the local language (lines 7 and 8). ELL, one of the researchers, pushes the students a bit further by asking them whether
they would be scared about encountering a language such as Lithuanian (line 12), with even fewer speakers than Danish. In answer to this question, ST6 and ST7 categorically deny any concerns (lines 14–17). ST6 adds that if people in the foreign country can communicate in English, then it would not be a problem to move abroad, again highlighting the sense of empowerment brought about by having lived in a context where English works as a lingua franca.

In Extract 4, SMA, another researcher, then returns to the question of whether English is enough for moving around Europe, and ST6 concedes that not knowing the local language may be a source of difficulty.

Extract 4. English is not enough (post-Denmark)

|   | SMA | ST6 |
|---|-----|-----|
| 1 | abans de marxar us vam fer una pregunta que era que no necessiteu cap altra llengua per voltar per Europa\ amb l’anglès en tinc més que suficient\ (…) | before leaving we asked you a question which was that you didn’t need any other language to move around Europe\ with English it is more than enough\ (…) |
| 2 | bueno pero\ d’on vagis\ hi han països que potser no saben anglès la la majoria de gent | well but it depends where you go\ there are countries where maybe most people do not know English |
| 3 | o sigui que l’anglès no és suficient per voltar per Europa\ | so English is not enough to move around Europe\ |
| 4 | una amiga meva a Lituània va estar vivint tres mesos i tenia anglès bastant bo i va dir que allí ningú parlava anglès\ ningú\ i que per comunicar-se ho va passar fatal\ | a friend of mine lived in Lithuania for three months and her English was pretty good and she said that there no one spoke English\ no one\ and she struggled to communicate |

Similarly to the pre-stay focus group, there is a prevailing vision here of Europe as a linguistically heterogeneous territory, also as regards the knowledge of English as a foreign language (lines 7–10). The researcher, SMA, pushes the students to position themselves towards whether English is enough to move around Europe or not (lines 11 and 12). In response, ST6, who previously stated that she is not scared of moving abroad without knowing the local language (Extract 3), supports her argument that English is not enough in Europe by using a personal anecdote (lines 13–18). The preservation of a linguistically heterogeneous view of Europe together with the lack of fear of encountering local languages abroad reinforces the idea that the stay in Denmark may have provided students with a sense of empowerment to move abroad through English but also stresses the need to learn local languages. This sensitivity towards local languages, which is expressed by all three groups of students, might well be influenced by the fact that they all come from a Catalan-speaking background and they are particularly aware of the need to use and protect languages with lesser international value.

The students who completed a study-abroad (SA) period in Italy express similar views towards the role of English as a means to communicate around Europe. However, compared to the other two groups (UK and Denmark), knowing only English is presented as a personal limitation, thus emphasising the importance of learning the local language, i.e. Italian. Furthermore, we can observe a critical stance towards the ‘obligatory nature’ of English today.
Extract 5. One language is never enough (pre-Italy)

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | ST8 no t’estanquis només en l’ànglès do not stagnate only in English |
| 2 | perquè potser ara potser està ehm because it may be ehm\ |
| 3 | suïcient entre cometes però enough now so to speak but |
| 4 | d’aquí un temps no bueno not in the future |
| 5 | (…) |
| 6 | SMA no creus que la majoria don’t you think the majority of |
| 7 | saben anglès ara/ people knows English now/ |
| 8 | ST9 perquè és lo que volen incultar\ this is what they want to |
| 9 | (0.5) com que manen els de dalt i inculcate\ (0.5) as the people in |
| 10 | volen ficar això (…) charge want to establish this (…) |
| 11 | ST10 jo crec que no ens hem de tancar I think we shouldn’t limit |
| 12 | sols en en parlar l’ànglès\ sí que ourselves to speaking English\ |
| 13 | l’ànglès et pot ajudar (0.3) a que English can be useful (0.3) for |
| 14 | si estàs en algun lloc i no saps instance if you are in a place and |
| 15 | ben bé com dir a que si no saps you don’t know how to speak |
| 16 | ben bé parlar aquell idioma que that language you can defend |
| 17 | et puguis defensar en anglès i yourself in English so they can |
| 18 | que t’entenguin\ o sinò doncs understand you\ otherwise you |
| 19 | mira a gestos\ can use gesture\ |

Speaking English as the only foreign language emerges as a personal limitation because the relevance of English may be transitory (lines 1–4). This could be interpreted as a way in which these students, who may expect to learn Italian while abroad, emphasise the need to speak languages other than English and thus legitimate their own linguistic repertoires. Furthermore, a disaffiliation with the dominant role of English emerges in the interaction (lines 8–10). ST9 adopts a critical stance and states that the majority of people speak English as a result of the top-down policies that ‘the people in charge’ (lines 9 and 10) are trying to implement.

Conflicting categories: Europe vs. comfort languages

In Section 2 of the questionnaire, item 18 asked the participants to respond to the following: ‘In the future, I would like to work in another European country.’ While this item does not specifically address the European identity construct, it may elicit the degree to which the students’ minds are present in the students’ minds, thus signalling a potential mental barrier that might prevent them from considering a job opportunity in another European country. The mean response to this item was high before the mobility experience (PRE-Q: \(x = 4.27\)) but clearly lower after returning from SA (POST-Q: \(x = 3.93\)). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed that the results were significantly different (\(p < .05\)). Students thus appear, paradoxically, to be less willing to work in another European country after having spent some months abroad. It is as though instead of promoting European integration and a greater sense of proximity to other European countries, the mobility experience had resulted in a greater sense of distance and separation.

However, this should be contrasted with the outcome of Section 5 of the questionnaire in which students were asked to indicate how willing they would be to move to different settings for work (see Table 2). The results point to a clear preference for some destinations over others. For instance, it is striking that the most favoured option in the Pre-Q is an English-speaking country within Europe closely followed by Catalonia, Northern/Central Europe and North America. Other countries that might arguably be seen as culturally closer to the students receive lower scores. Such is the case of Spain (excluding Catalonia)
Table 2. Questionnaire results from Section 5.

| Rate (from 1–5) how willing you would be to go and work and live in these places in the future | Pre-Q | Post-Q |
|---|---|---|
| out of my city but within Catalonia | 3.87 | 4.22 |
| out of Catalonia but within Spain | 3.52 | 3.85 |
| to any Romance-language-speaking European country | 3.59 | 3.96 |
| to any English-speaking European country | 4.20 | 4.24 |
| to any Northern or Central European country | 3.91 | 4.09 |
| to Latin America | 2.70 | 2.96 |
| to the USA and Canada | 4.00 | 3.89 |
| to Asia | 2.60 | 2.65 |
| I’ve never considered the possibility of living abroad | 1.48 | 1.48 |

and European countries where the official languages are from the same Romance group as the students’ L1 and major L2. Finally, the Latin American countries, perhaps surprisingly given that Spanish is the predominant official language there, clearly trail behind the rest as potential places to work. In the Post-Q, results are slightly different but still English-speaking European country is the preferred option. Overall, this question seems to point to English as the important element in deciding possible destinations for work outside the home area.

When we looked at this issue in the focus group sessions, we found that students who had completed SA in the UK and Denmark showed no preference for EU-countries despite the different attempts by researchers to elicit that kind of response through references to the practical advantages of belonging to the EU. The presence of English in the host country emerges again as a determining factor regardless of whether the country is within the EU or not. When students did express a preference to move within Europe, it was either because such a move would involve less red-tape, or because European countries are perceived as being safer than South America. Extract 6 is a clear example highlighting the role of English and safety in students’ preferences.

Extract 6. English and personal safety (pre-Denmark)

1 JMC al vostre passaport no només hi diu Espanya sinó que hi diu Unió
2 diu Espanya això a vosaltres fa sentir especialment tranquilis no e mira ara estic molt bé en un àmbit de una certa unitat política (…)
3 ST6 jo ni m’ho plantejo’s
4 vull dir no sé’ I don’t give it any thought\ I mean\ outside the European
5 ST11 sí’ yes’
6 ST5 sí’ yes’
In Extract 6, JMC, one of the researchers, reminds students that their passports include the words ‘European Union’ and that the EU is in effect a political entity (lines 1–6). ST6 is the only student to react to this question saying that she has not paid much attention to it (lines 7 and 8). JMC and ELL then reformulate the question and ask whether the students would move to European countries where English is not widely spoken, such as Lithuania, or any other in the world (lines 9–19). In the next turns, the students reply that they would move to countries where English is spoken, but whether these countries are within Europe or not does not really matter. Together with the presence of English, personal safety is mentioned as an important factor in their decision-making (lines 20–38).

However, in the pre-Italy and post-Italy groups, the presence of English is not such a prominent factor in determining a future place to live. The typological similarity between Italian and students’ major languages (i.e., Catalan and Spanish) does appear as a factor that conditions the sense of proximity between cultures and, therefore, influences the students’ willingness to move abroad. Similarly to the previous focus group sessions, the geographical distance or the fact of moving inside or outside the European Union remains mostly in the background. In the following extract, student ST13 states that she would not live in Germany, because of the difficulty of learning the language rather than the cultural distance, while ST14 emphasises cultural distance as a reason for not choosing Germany as a likely destination.

### Extract 7. You can adapt to the people but not to the language (post-Italy)

|   | ELL   |     | ST13 |     | ST6   |     | ELL   |     |
|---|-------|-----|------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|
| 1 | ELL   |     | m’he de buscar la vida\ he de buscar feina fora tu dieu osti podeu |     |      |     |      |     |
| 2 | ELL   |     | buscar feina fora tu dieu osti podeu |     |      |     |      |     |
| 3 | ELL   |     | anar a qualsevol lloc\ però ara  |     |      |     |      |     |
| 4 | ELL   |     | ara  |     |      |     |      |     |
| 5 | ELL   |     | segons on quines persones són  |     |      |     |      |     |
| 6 | ELL   |     | vull dir farieu distincions/ o |     |      |     |      |     |
| 7 | ELL   |     | no/ |     |      |     |      |     |
| 8 | ELL   |     | mhm\ home ja saps que |     |      |     |      |     |
| 9 | ELL   |     | (...)
| 10 | ELL   |     | són diments\ però |     |      |     |      |     |
| 11 | ELL   |     | hi pots anar igual\ |     |      |     |      |     |
| 12 | ELL   |     | bueno\ sí\ vull dir que us |     |      |     |      |     |
In this extract, both students agree on rejecting a country like Germany, which they perceive as culturally and linguistically distant. We cannot determine which factor is more important here, either language or culture, but we do suggest that these students, who had chosen Italy for their Erasmus SA, express a higher reluctance to moving beyond their linguistic and cultural comfort zone.

European allegiance

This section explores the ambivalence in the discourses associated with European identity and citizenship. Whereas sometimes a shared cultural identity is emphasised, on other occasions, it is the practical benefits of being a European citizen that constitute the keystone of ‘Europeanness’ for the students interviewed. Another focus for analysis is the students’ affiliation to Europe in relation to other Western countries and national identities.

Section 2 of the questionnaire included four items (23, 24, 25 and 26) that directly addressed students’ own sense of identity in connection with each of the following categories: Catalan, Spanish, European and global-cosmopolitan. No significant differences were found between students’ responses on the pre-stay v. the post-stay questionnaire, but clear differences that deserve comment were found among the four categories suggested. The students tended to agree more that their identity was Catalan (response of around 3.5 at both pre-stay and post-stay on item 23), whereas support for the idea of just being ‘Spanish’ (item 24) was low, at an average of 2.4. Interestingly, when they were asked about ‘European identity’, the response (3.24 before and 3.07 after the SA stay) was weaker than for Catalan identity but stronger than for Spanish identity. ‘Global and cosmopolitan identity’ (item 26) received about the level of support as ‘Catalan identity’ (around 3.5). This suggests a clear stigmatisation of Spanish identity among Catalan university students, an aspect that is likely to be related to the current political climate of distrust and lack of understanding between Catalonia and the rest of Spain at the political level.3

A further group of nine items in Section 2 (items 1, 2, 4, 8, 13, 14, 27, 31 and 37) dealt with other aspects of European identity. No significant differences between pre-stay and post-stay results were found. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used for the comparison, with negative, though insignificant, results in all cases. This suggests that there was a slight tendency for the students to express less pro-European views after their SA than before. There were no items in this group with scores above 4 at either pre-stay or post-stay, thus suggesting a general lack of enthusiasm for aspects related to European identity. Interestingly, however, items 4 and 14, which were reverse-phrased meaning that high scores indicate detachment from the idea of Europe and low results show support for it, received notably low ratings both before and after, which has to be interpreted as indicating at least a
base-level trust in the viability of the European project. Respondents disagreed clearly with the idea that border controls should be re-established (item 4), thus positively valuing the current open borders situation. There was general disagreement that the European project was doomed to failure (item 14), yet it should be noted that after the stay abroad, the level of agreement with the pessimistic vision of the European Community does increase significantly (Table 3).

The items in Section 3 dealt with European identity by asking students to rate different elements according to whether they could be considered characteristic of European identity (Table 4). Here, it is not surprising to see the importance attached to the mobility factor, which increases significantly after the Erasmus experience. The other factor that also shows significant increase is ‘ democratic values’, which suggests that the study abroad may have led students to identify Europe more strongly with such values.

In the analysis of the focus group sessions, two main themes were identified: first, the difficulty in differentiating European identity from the broader category of Western identity; second, the clash between a European identity and a traditional national identity.

**European vs. Western identity**

Across the three focus group sessions, feelings of cultural proximity and a shared identity among Europeans do emerge, particularly in opposition to students’ perceptions of Asian cultures. The students point to communicative and cultural differences to justify these affinities and dissimilarities. One example of this can be found in Extract 8, from the UK pre-stay focus group.

Extract 8. European vis-à-vis Asian identities (pre-UK)

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | ST18 a part de Xina i Índia | apart from China and India |
| 2 | que són dos continents també allí\ | which are two continents also\ |
| 3 | però són molt molt no | but they’re very very\ they don’t |
| 4 | surten\ es relacionen poc\ | go out\ they socialize little \ |
| 5 | [laughs] | [laughs] |
| 6 | ST3 molt diferent a l’educació i una | very different in education and |
| 7 | altra cultura | another culture |
ST18 presents European identity in contrast with Asian identity using China and India as examples (lines 1 and 2). Europeans appear as homogeneous, sharing a common way of being and living, which contrasts with the people in China, India, South Africa and South America, who emerge as perceptibly different (lines 3–19). In the post-UK group, feelings of European identity appear in stronger terms than before. The issues that characterise this discourse are the perspective of Europe as a common culture and common set of values, expressed by one of the students through the idea of having a common ‘Christian heritage’ (Extract 9). Even though only a single student links the idea of Europe to Christianity, the message echoes the recent debate in the European media (see above) regarding whether a European constitution should include a reference to Europe’s Christian (or Judeo-Christian) values or not.

Extract 9. European common values (post-UK)

ST17, the student who adopts the stance that Europe has a common Christian heritage, hedges his statement by recognising the old-fashioned nature of this perspective. Even so, he claims that ‘we (Europeans) are all Christians’ (line 10). He elaborates by referring to more or less shared (European) values, which are different from those in places like Turkey, Ukraine and, surprisingly, Latvia. This student’s exclusion of Latvia from European values is somewhat puzzling and may be due to the old division between Eastern and Western Europe, (the former corresponding to the ‘Eastern bloc’ of countries under Soviet influence) or simply to a limited understanding of European cultural history and geography.
European vs. national identity

The Erasmus experience appears to strengthen students’ positive feelings towards the culture of the host territory and also towards the home country, but not towards Europe as a whole. This is expressed in different ways in the three post-stay focus group sessions. In the post-UK session, mixed feelings about the British culture emerge. The UK appears as the least European country of all and the students suggest that they would probably experience a deeper feeling of ‘Europeanness’ in countries such as Belgium or Germany (Extract 10).

Extract 10. Some places are more European than others (post-UK)

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | ST17 | jo afegia abans la identitat before I added European |
| 2 |    | europa i la continuo afegint però identity and I continue to do so |
| 3 |    | a mi a UK ha sigut com com lo contrary that is it is not that I’m |
| 4 |    | contrari o sigui dir no es que em contrary or not is that I’m |
| 5 |    | deixi de sentir europeu not feeling European anymore |
| 6 |    | però clar és el pais menos but of course it is the least |
| 7 |    | europeu de tots\ és el país European country of all the |
| 8 |    | més especial de tots de fet es el fact there has always |
| 9 |    | que es el que sobre el qual sempre most special country of all in |
| 10 |    | hi hagut algun temor been a fear whether they will |
| 11 |    | sortirà o no llavores si leave or not then whether there |
| 12 |    | es fa el referèndum o no\ is a referendum or not\ |
| 13 | ST16 | i ara al revés\ and now the opposite |
| 14 | ST17 | et sents molt més europeu si you feel much more European if |
| 15 |    | vas a Brusel·les si vas a you go to Brussels if you go to |
| 16 |    | Berlin trobo llocs més Berlin there are places more |
| 17 |    | europeus que Cardiff\ European than Cardiff\ |

ST17, who had previously expressed a view of Europe as culturally homogeneous (i.e. referring to ‘Christian values’), suggests here that the stay in the UK has made him a bit more sceptical about the European project. This appears to be a consequence of the lack of European allegiance he has sensed in the UK as opposed to what he imagines he might experience in places such as Brussels or Berlin (lines 14–17) which, from his own perspective, better represent the idea of Europe. ST16, the other student, aligns with ST17’s view by stressing that after being in the UK their sense of affiliation to Europe is less strong.

For the students who spent SA in Italy and Denmark, the experience abroad did not affect their sense of European allegiance but did contribute to strengthening their sense of national identity. Extract 11, from the post-Italy focus group, illustrates this point. Students avoid the category ‘Europe’ and point to strengthened national identities (i.e., Catalan and Italian) as a consequence of their stay abroad.

Extract 11. More Italian and more Catalan (post-Italy)

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | SMA | tu diries\ jo sóc catalana\ you’d say\ I’m a Catalan\ |
| 2 | ST13 | (…) sempre preguntes de et sents (…) you always ask\ do you feel |
| 3 |    | més europeu i tal i pensava jo more European and I think I |
| 4 |    | no\ però si jo ara en tot cas em don’t\ but in any case I |
| 5 |    | sento més italiana\ perquè he feel more Italian\ because I have |
| 6 |    | viscut all\\ però dels altres pos lived there\ but about the others |
| 7 |    | sí que coneç gent de tot arreu yes I know people from all over |
| 8 |    | però no but I don’t |
| 9 | ST15 | no\ no\ em sento catalana\ (…) no\ no\ I feel Catalan (…) |
In Extract 11, ST13 seems to complain about the repeated attempts by the researchers to make her take a position on her feelings about belonging to Europe (lines 2 and 3) and she adds that, if anything, her identity has become more Italian than before because she has now lived in Italy (lines 4–6). She clearly defines her experience at a national, rather than a European, level. Although during her SA she says she has met people from all over (and we assume ‘all over Europe’ is implied), she still rejects the notion of feeling more European. ST15, in contrast, categorically declares feeling more Catalan in identity. In both cases, it is the national dimension, rather than the supranational/European dimension, that is stressed.

**Conclusion**

This paper has explored how Catalan students who participated in an Erasmus study-abroad programme, experienced aspects of the notion of European identity and citizenship. The results show that, after the SA experience, the students certainly felt less insecure when using a foreign language (mainly English, but also Italian in the case of students who went to Italy) and that this was an empowering experience as it meant that they felt capable of moving abroad again in the future. By promoting students’ confidence in functioning in a foreign language and in reinforcing motivation to continue learning it, the Erasmus SA certainly contributed to one of the ‘pillars’ of construction of European identity (Byram 2008). Paradoxically, however, students also appeared to feel less inclined to work abroad after the Erasmus experience than before it, which clashes with one of the objectives of the Erasmus programme, namely to promote labour mobility. Further research may be needed to explore this somewhat anomalous finding in greater depth. Further investigation is also needed with respect to the impact of students’ networks on their perceived identity.

Students in all three SA contexts also appeared to be highly sensitive towards the role of local languages as indicators of identity. They felt that plurilingualism in Europe needed to be promoted, and emphasised that English, the most widely spread lingua franca in Europe and the world, was ‘not enough’. They also positioned themselves against according official European status to a limited set of languages that might force all European citizens to learn them. Thus, English emerged as a bridge and an indispensable element in establishing a ‘comfort zone’ abroad where students could move without experiencing too much difficulty. Yet, while they felt that being able to use English as a lingua franca made other countries more attractive as potential working destinations, they still expressed the view that, given Europe’s high degree of diversity, English was not enough to be able to function fully in other European countries. This defence of linguistic diversity, which was unchanged from pre-stay to post-stay, could be a side effect of the fact that most students in this study were Catalan speakers and thus likely to be highly aware of the role and importance of smaller languages in their local contexts. Similar studies with students educated in officially monolingual contexts, where efforts to preserve minority languages as signs of identity are less present in society, might produce different results. A comparative analysis looking at the views of students from different European regions (namely, Northern Europe or Eastern Europe, for instance) would contribute further to our understanding of the Erasmus experience and the construction of European identity.

Our study also suggests that after their stay abroad, some of the students became more sceptical about the European project (e.g. students who completed SA in the UK), while others expressed stronger feelings of allegiance to their home area, Catalonia (students in Italy and Denmark) and even towards their host nation (Italy). None reported greater identification with Europe, thus calling into question the premise that living in a different European country would enhance feelings of European identity and citizenship. This may be due
to the nature of immersion in the host culture, which no doubt teaches students more about the specificities of that culture than about Europe as a whole. Even though we might see Europe as the sum of all the cultural and linguistic diversity that it contains, the perception of individual European countries as part of a bigger multicultural entity is still far from being a reality. Yet this study also found that a sense of European identity is felt when the students position themselves in contrast to other supranational entities, such as Asia, or countries seen to be outside the ‘Western’ bloc. These students seem to see themselves not as distinctively Europeans but rather as ‘Westerners’, thus leading to a potential conclusion that what is promoted through the Erasmus programme may not so much be a European identity as a more general ‘Western’ identity. The students identified general values which they saw as being shared by some countries, but also singled out other countries (i.e., Germany, Latvia, Ukraine, Turkey…) as examples of cultural and linguistic distance. These students’ mental frames seem to be determined less by geographical distance or political boundaries than by the language(s) spoken in those countries, and in particular, the prevalence of English, either as an official language or as an established lingua franca.

Though our findings suggest predominantly non-committal attitudes among this group of students to the idea of a European identity, one positive view which did intensify after SA was that European identity is associated with democratic values. This may be interpreted as a potential foundation for developing a sense of European citizenship among Erasmus students but our findings make clear that the simple fact of spending some time abroad is not enough to change deeply rooted attitudes and views relating to identity and culture. This is in line with views expressed by Papatsiba (2006), Byram (2008) and Kalocsai (2014) with regard to the need to prepare students carefully prior to their mobility experiences. Home institutions no doubt need to think more seriously and imaginatively about preparatory programmes prior to the students’ departure, rather than leaving the impact of the Erasmus experience to the simple encountering of random experiences by students.

Acknowledgements

We are most grateful to Josep M. Cots and Sònia Mas for their invaluable contribution in the data gathering, Vasilica Mocanu for their help in the elaboration of the questionnaire, the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and David Block for editorial support. Any shortcomings are exclusively our own responsibility.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The research on which this article is based was supported by: (1) Research grant [FFI2012-35834], Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad, Interculturalidad, ciudadanía europea e inglés como lingua franca: entre las políticas y las prácticas en los programas de movilidad internacional universitaria, January 2013–June 2016, and (2) the Agència de Gestió d’Ajuts Universitaris i de Recerca de la Generalitat de Catalunya [2014SGR 1061].

Notes

1. Available at http://www.fpa.es/en/princess-of-asturias-awards/laureates/2004-the-european-unions-erasmus-programme.html?texto=discurso&especifica=0.
2. See, for instance, http://www.debatingeurope.eu/2015/06/22/christian-europe/#.V0XTGmwaTIU and http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/jonathan-wynne-jones/7601398/Europe-has-neglected-its-Christian-roots-says-Church-of-England.html.

3. In recent years, Catalonia has experienced a surge in the popular support of independence from Spain and this has created an unprecedented feeling of disaffiliation towards Spain.

References

Ammon, U. 1994. The present dominance of English in Europe with an outlook on possible solutions to the European language problems. Sociolinguistica 8, no. 1: 1–14.

Ammon, U. 2006. Language conflicts in the European Union. International Journal of Applied Linguistics 16, no. 3: 319–38.

Beacco, J. and M. Byram. 2007. Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe main version. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Guide_niveau3_en.asp (accessed 25 May, 2015).

Billig, M. 1995. Banal Nationalism. London: Sage.

Blackledge, A. 2000. Monolingual ideologies in multilingual states: language, hegemony and social justice in Western liberal democracies. Sociolinguistics Studies 1, no. 2: 25–45.

Bliesener, U. 2003. European language policy – frustration and hope: a personal view of the state of affairs. In Europäische Sprachenpolitik. European Language Policy, ed. R. Ahrens, 75–98. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter.

Block, D. 2015. Researching language and identity. In Research Methods in Applied Linguistics, 2nd ed., ed. B. Paltridge and A. Phakiti, 527–40. London: Bloomsbury.

Byram, M. 2008. From Foreign Language Education to Education for Intercultural Citizenship. Essays and Reflections. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Carlson, J. and K. Widaman. 1988. The effects of study abroad during college on attitudes toward other cultures. International Journal of Intercultural Relations 12, no. 1: 1–17.

Cash, R.W. 1993. Assessment of study abroad programs using surveys of student participants. Paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research Chicago, IL, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No ED 360 925.

Council of Europe. 2001. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/Linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (accessed 24 April, 2014).

Council of Europe. 2006. Plurilingual Education in Europe: Fifty Years of International Cooperation. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/PlurilingualEducation_En.pdf (accessed 25 May, 2015).

Davies, I. 1997. Education for European citizenship: a review of relevant documentation. In Developing European Citizens, ed. I. Davies and A. Sobisch, 97–120. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University Press.

European Commission. 1995. White Paper on Education and Training. Towards the Learning Society. http://europa.eu/documents/comm/white_papers/pdf/com95_590_en.pdf (accessed April, 2015).

European Commission. 1996. The Obstacles to Transnational Mobility. Green Paper. http://aei.pitt.edu/1226/1/education_mobility_obstacles_gp_COM_96_462.pdf (accessed April, 2015).

European Commission. 2013. European Union Citizenship, Flash Eurobarometer, 365.

European Commission. 2015. Erasmus + homepage. http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/discover/index_en.htm (accessed April, 2015).

Garrett, P. and L. Gallego-Balsá. 2014. International universities and implications of internationalisation for minority languages: views from university students in Catalonia and Wales. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development 35, no. 4: 361–75. DOI:10.1080/01434632.2013.874434.

Gramsci, A. 1971. Selections from the Prison Notebooks. New York: International Publishers. http://facultyfiles.deanza.edu/gems/kaufmancythia/gramsci.pdf (accessed 10 May, 2016).

Habermas, J. 1992. Citizenship and national identity: some reflections on the future of Europe. Praxis International 12, no. 1: 1–19.

Hobsbawm, E.J. 1990. Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Irish Society for Christian Civilisation. 2009, 31 August. Nine reasons why a conscientious catholic citizen should reject the Treaty of Lisbon. http://isfcc.org/2009/08/31/nine-reasons-why-a-conscientious-catholic-citizen-should-reject-the-treaty-of-lisbon/#1 (accessed 1 June, 2016).
Kalocsai, K. 2014. Communities of Practice and English as a Lingua Franca. A Study of Erasmus Students in a Central European Context. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Kauffmann, N.L., J.N. Martin, H.D. Weaver and J. Weaver. 1992. Students Abroad: Strangers at Home. Education for a Global Society. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

King, L. and J. Young. 1994. Study abroad: education for the 21st century. Unterichtspraxis 27, no. 1: 77–87.

Lasagabaster, D., J.M. Cots and G. Mancho-Barés. 2013. Teaching staff’s views about the internationalization of higher education: the case of two bilingual communities in Spain. Multilingua 32, no. 6: 751–78.

Lever, P. 2003. The future of Europe: will we all speak English? In Europäische Sprachenpolitik. European Language Policy, ed. R. Ahrens, 101–12. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter.

Llurda, E., J.M. Cots and L. Armengol. 2013. Expanding language borders in a bilingual institution aiming at trilingualism. In Language Alternation, Language Choice and Language Encounter in International Tertiary Education, ed. H. Haberland, D. Lonsman and B. Preisler, 203–22. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Llurda, E., J.M. Cots and L. Armengol. 2014. Views on multilingualism and internationalisation in higher education: administrative staff in the spotlight. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development 35, no. 4: 376–91. DOI:10.1080/01434632.2013.874435.

Mancini, G.F. 1998. Europe: the case for statehood. European Law Journal 4, no. 1: 29–42.

Martin-Rubió, X. 2011. Identity Construction in 2 Bilingual Communities: Clashing Nationalist Discourses. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag.

Milstein, T. 2005. Transformation abroad: sojourning and the perceived enhancement of self-efficacy. International Journal of Intercultural Relations 29, no. 2: 217–38.

Papatsiba, V. 2005. Political and individual rationales of student mobility. A case-study of ERASMUS and a French regional scheme for studies abroad. European Journal of Education 40, no. 2: 173–88.

Papatsiba, V. 2006. Study abroad and experiences of cultural distance and proximity: French Erasmus students. In Living and Studying Abroad, ed. M. Byram and A. Feng, 108–33. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Phillipson, R. 2003. English-Only Europe? Challenging Language Policy. London: Routledge.

Rubenstein, R.L. 2011. Islam and Christianity: the roots of Europe’s religious identity. New English Review. http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/frm/102790/sec_id/102790 (accessed 17 May, 2016).

Shore, C. 2004. Whither European citizenship? Eros and civilization revisited. European Journal of Social Theory 7, no. 1: 27–44.

Smith, T.W. and S. Kim. 2006. National pride in comparative perspective: 1995/96 and 2003/04. International Journal of Public Opinion Research 18, no. 1: 127–36.

Vlaeminck, S. 2003. A European strategy for linguistic diversity and language learning. In Europäische Sprachenpolitik. European Language Policy, ed. R. Ahrens, 33–43. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter.

Weiler, J.H.H. 1999. The Constitution of Europe: ‘Do the New Clothes Have an Emperor?’ and Other Essays on European Integration. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wood, L.A. and R. Kroger. 2000. Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for Studying Action in Talk and Text. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
Appendix 1. Questionnaire (English translation)

Section 1
1. In what country will you carry out your study abroad?
2. Why did you choose this country?

Section 2
Rate the following statements from 1 to 5 (1 = totally disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree and 5 = totally agree).
1. Europeans will gradually identify more with the common European project
2. When I travel around Europe I feel at home.
3. When I have to travel on my own, knowing that I will meet many people who speak English whenever I go to any European country makes me feel better.
4. I think it would be good to get back to establishing controls at the borders between the different EU countries.
5. Europe is an eminently white continent.
6. I think that speaking two or three foreign languages is important to gain a European identity.
7. I consider people from other EU states living in my country as immigrants as those who come from outside the EU.
8. Spanish embassies should offer the same services to all citizens of the EU as to Spanish citizens.
9. The EU should pass more European laws that overrule national laws.
10. I believe that national states should transfer to the EU the power to regulate in national security matters.
11. European identity is more defined by politically agreed practical issues – like the single currency or the free mobility between countries – than by a shared civic culture.
12. Everything will work out better the day Europeans can vote for a president with full executive powers.
13. Europeans have a clearly differentiated identity from the rest of Western countries.
14. The European project will eventually fail.
15. The idea of a United Europe favours the elites but not ordinary people.
16. Europe is a multicultural reality formed by people of different origins.
17. I believe that all European citizens should speak the same common language, democratically chosen (Esperanto, English …) in addition to their own language.
18. In the future, I would like to work in a different European country.
19. When there are European elections I am interested in the results as much as when the elections are in my country.
20. I think that English should be the only official European language.
21. I think that Europe should have 3 official languages: English, French and German.
22. I believe that all languages in Europe should have the same official consideration.
23. I consider that my identity is fully Catalan.
24. I consider that my identity is fully Spanish.
25. I consider that my identity is fully European.
26. I consider that my identity is fully global and cosmopolitan.
27. Between Northern and Southern Europe there is more that separates us than that unites us.
28. If we were not in the EU our life would be much worse than it is now.
29. If I went to live in a different European country, I would feel like an immigrant and consequently, I would identify more with people coming from outside the EU than with the actual citizens of the country.
30. I believe that the feeling of national identity does not change during a lifetime.
31. There should be a single passport and nationality for the whole EU, with a unique international voice and European embassies instead of individual ones for each country.
32. If in the future all Europeans people ended up communicating in English, we would have to agree on using a type of English different to the one spoken in England, adapted in order to be more comprehensible at an international level.
33. The more we integrate in Europe, the less we will have to debate identity issues between Catalonia and Spain.
34. I consider the possibility that my perspective concerning topics regarding national identity might not be the most accurate one.
35. When I hear other people talking about European political and economic issues, I like to join the conversation.
36. I am aware that the vision I have about my own country is limited and I need to talk with people from other countries in order to get a wider perspective.
37. I would like that the local media carried more news about Europe and less about Catalonia and Spain.
38. I think that learning languages is my duty as a European citizen.
39. I think that after my stay, my point of view concerning many political and economic issues will have changed.

Section 3
Rate the extent (1–5) to which these aspects characterise European identity
1. Mobility
2. Democratic values
3. Social welfare
4. Cultural level
5. Economic power
6. Multilingualism

Section 4
Rate the extent (1–5) to which these aspects make you feel European:
1. Linguistic diversity
2. Political, legal and social system
3. Historical background
4. Culture and traditions
5. Common borders
6. Single currency

Section 5
Rate (from 1–5) how willing you would be to go and work and live in these places in the future
1. out of my city but within Catalonia
2. out of Catalonia but within Spain
3. to any Romance-language-speaking European country
4. to any English-speaking European country
5. to any Northern or Central European country
6. to Latin America
7. to the USA and Canada
8. to Asia
9. I’ve never considered the possibility of living abroad.

Appendix 2. Transcription conventions
rising intonation /
falling intonation \
pause of 0.5 seconds (0.5)
text missing (…)
paralinguistic information [text]