

ERASMUS AS AN EMERGING EDUCATIONAL SPACE IN TURKEY:
EXPLANATION OF A NEW REALITY AT THE NEXUS OF EDUCATION,
YOUTH AND CHANGE

by
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Abstract

ERASMUS AS AN EMERGING EDUCATIONAL SPACE IN TURKEY: EXPLANATION OF A NEW REALITY AT THE NEXUS OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND CHANGE

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Keywords: Erasmus, education, change, culture, capabilities.

What this thesis aims is to reveal different experiences and facets of the Erasmus exchange program- an important tool of the European educational policies- from the point of view of students towards analyzing students' study abroad period as well as contrasting images of before and after. Between the hopes of constructing a positive and/or different experience abroad and the various means and difficulties of realizing such an effort, Erasmus student narratives underline some critical topics vis-à-vis the positionality of students from Turkey who study in Europe through the Erasmus exchange program. Erasmus has become the ideal venue to consider multiple student experiences, capabilities as well as change in an expanded, (trans) national and porous social space with the inclusion of numerous actors. I suggest there is far more specificities associated with the students' experiences based on their social, cultural and academic capital as opposed to the crude expectations on Erasmus generated at (trans) national levels. Moreover, the experience makes students face a different and sometimes new reality in terms of the socio-cultural, academic environment, which in turn transforms the whole experience into a powerful learning context.

Özet

YENİ BİR EĞİTİM ALANI OLARAK TÜRKİYE'DE ERASMUS: EĞİTİM, GENÇLİK VE DEĞİŞİMİN KESİŞTİĞİ NOKTADA YENİ BİR GERÇEKLİĞİN TANIMLANMASI

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Anahtar kelimeler: Erasmus, eğitim, değişim, kültür, yeterlilikler.

Çalışmanın amacı, Avrupa eğitim politikalarının önemli bir ayağı olan Erasmus tecrübesiyle ilgili farklı deneyimleri ve görünümleri, öğrencilerin bakış açısından yansıtarak, öğrencilerin yurtdışında geçirdikleri eğitim dönemini analiz etmek ve deneyimin öncesi-sonrası arasındaki farklılıkları ortaya koymak. Olumlu ve/ya farklı bir tecrübe yaşayacak olmanın verdiği beklentiler ve bunları yaşarken gösterilen çaba ve baş edilen zorluklar arasında, Erasmus değişim programı Türkiye'den programa katılan öğrencilerin pozisyonuyla ilgili kritik konuları ele alma fırsatı sunuyor. Erasmus, farklı öğrenci deneyimlerini, yeterliliklerini ve değişimini genişletilmiş, uluslar ötesi ve değişken bir sosyal yapı içerisinde farklı aktörlerin katılımıyla birlikte değerlendirme fırsatı sunduğu için ideal bir alan. Erasmus hakkında resmi söylemler bir yana, öğrencilerin anlatıları sayesinde bu tecrübenin çok detaylı ve taraflı olduğunu ve öğrencilerin edinmiş oldukları sosyal, kültürel ve akademik altyapıyla ciddi olarak şekillendiğini söyleyebiliriz. Aynı zamanda Erasmus öğrencilerinin farklı ve bazen yeni bir gerçeklik ve çevreyle karşılaştıklarını, bunun tüm tecrübeyi güçlü bir öğrenme sürecine çevirdiğini söylemek mümkün.

In the name of all those who try and accomplish making a difference; for the hopes of a social space with more questioning, resistance, and respect...

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EC- European Commission

EHEA- European Higher Education Area

ESN- European Student Network

EU- European Union

GPA- Grade Point Average

HEC- Higher Education Capability Forum

HEI- Higher Education Institution

1. INTRODUCTION

European Union and its various policies are commonly debated at the national and transnational level that usually take into consideration the institutional issues as well as concerns for the European citizenship; however, we are less likely to witness discussions on the status of youth and education. Moreover it gets less likely to observe active participation of the youth in such debates. What this thesis aims is to reveal different experiences and facets of the Erasmus exchange program- an important tool of the European educational policies- from the point of view of students. Thus the study involves first defining the Erasmus space and then explaining students' positionality within that space. My second aim is to demonstrate that official discourses on Erasmus- such as Erasmus on the way to employability, multiculturalism, networking- are too general to capture the specificities of the lived experiences of Erasmus exchange students and that there exist a far broader range of subject positions, experiences and concerns as may be gleaned from students' narratives. While trying to analyze students' experiences, I also relate to some important patterns as well as tensions and opportunities with respect to the status of youth in Turkey.

I became acquainted closely with the Erasmus program when I started working for the EU Programs of a foundation university in Turkey in Spring 2006 and I have been in this position for about 2 years. As I have been more involved with the procedures, students, their experiences and thoughts on embarking on such a program of study abroad, I realized that Erasmus would provide me with an extraordinary opportunity to explore important issues related to the status of youth and education in Turkey. Such research would be fruitful because Erasmus has become a phenomenon in Turkey with increasing number of students involved since its first launch in 2004. As has been announced by the Turkish National Agency, during the *2004-2005* Academic Year, *1142* students studied abroad with the Erasmus program whereas during *2005-2006*, *2852* students have been abroad. In *2006-2007*, this number jumped up to *4438*

students.¹ This increase in a way shows how Turkish students and institutions have become aware of Erasmus and higher education institutions have started to extensively implement it, which requires adopting certain rules and proceedings, transfer of credits between institutions, transparency, close international communication and increased academic information sharing with international institutions. Besides the adoption of certain academic rules, people also started to appreciate the social and cultural impact of exchange. So, Erasmus may be considered to have created an alternative educational space for students, and may even be referred to as a gateway to various opportunities from the eyes of students, not only with its academic character but also socio-cultural environment. Thus it becomes crucial to focus on the various socio-cultural and academic aspects of Erasmus and relate them to students' experiences towards really understanding this expanded web of relations and how it affects students' experiences. Such an approach must go beyond country positions, institutional targets and crude generalizations on the outcome of Erasmus experience.

Erasmus has expanded over to 30 countries and reached out to over 1.5 million students all over Europe after its initial start in 1987. Out of presently active 32 countries, only 11² countries were participating back in 1987 with 3244 students. By 2006-2007, there were 1.683.928 students from more than 32 countries participating in Erasmus. Amongst the participating countries, Turkey's share is 0.50% whereas Germany and France occupy 15% and Spain occupies 14% in terms of student exchange.³ Turkey's share may seem to be low; however, we have to underline few points. One is that Turkey has been participating since the 2004-2005 Academic Year. Secondly, number of participants from Turkey has been increasing at a rate that is much higher than the average increase.⁴ From the official stance "Erasmus, the EU's flagship

(<http://www.ua.gov.tr/index.cfm?action=detay&yayinid=45050908629B860D164FBBEA176AE5F658115>)

² Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, United Kingdom.

³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/stat_en.html

⁴ Turkey, Hungary, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania demonstrate annual increase above 10% whereas this number is between 0.1-5% in members like Cyprus, Spain, Greece.

education and training programme, emphasizes student and staff mobility and European co-operation involving higher education institutions and other key players in the knowledge-based economy. It supports the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through increased mobility. This aims for more innovation, growth and jobs in the EU. Over 1.5 million students have participated so far with a goal of reaching 3 million by 2012. Together with an enriched study experience, Erasmus also provides exposure to different cultures.”⁵ Analyzing the official discourses such as this reveals the fact that we observe emphasis on some numbers, statistics and concepts like “markets, competition and employability” very often. When we take a look at the previously conducted official studies on the impact of Erasmus, we generally see studies on employability and career development of students, language learning as well as macro level developments pertaining to the Bologna Process. Plus, having considered some academic work on the evaluation of Erasmus, I have come across studies that evaluate the evolution of education and training policies in Europe as well as some surveys depicting the nature of Erasmus students. So, even such a socio-cultural space like Erasmus is predominantly defined in terms of numbers rather than explanations of the multiple socio-cultural aspects of it and subjective accounts vis-à-vis the students’ lives.⁶

A recent publication on the ‘Erasmus success stories’ indicates that “ERASMUS can be a key asset when it comes to finding a job. A study period abroad is seen as valuable experience by today’s employers in an increasingly interlinked world, since it improves communication and cooperation skills and the understanding of other cultures.” The same document advocates that ERASMUS has been, and continues to be, a driver for change in European higher education towards reshaping the face of higher education systems in Europe by inspiring the Bologna Process, a major initiative to simplify Europe’s diverse higher education systems.⁷ So, as can be inferred from these, Erasmus has a very particular position amongst other study abroad programs and

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/index_en.html#4

⁶ See Maiworm (2001), Teichler (2004), Pepin (2007).

⁷ Report on “Erasmus Success Stories” prepared by the European Commission Education and Training Directorate.
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/index_en.html#4

internationalization of education efforts. This arises from the institutional setting of Erasmus, which covers a wide range of issues, geographies, actors and activities.

It has a strong institutional back up provided and supported by multiple parties such as the European Commission, national governments and higher education institutions. Despite the fact that Turkey joined the European educational partnerships later on in 2004, Erasmus has created enormous interest on the side of students, academics as well as policy makers in Turkey. That is why while trying to understand the student narratives it is necessary to relate them to some of the institutional developments as I have briefly done in this thesis.

We can observe Erasmus has created a new space in the lives of many students and institutions with its own rules and proceedings- institutionalization from the orientation programs to the arrangement of credit systems. Not only students go abroad and become part of a new system, but each country and institution provides special tools, services for these students for better orientation purposes. Furthermore, these activities are strengthened at the polity level. Erasmus space, as a result of the massive student mobility, has been experiencing a regrouping and reproduction of a new form of group identity. So, even if Erasmus students are temporary visitors in their host countries, their distinctive group identity resembles the characteristics of post territoriality and change. Appadurai (1991, 48) uses the word “ethnoscapes” to define some of the “brute facts” (in his words) of the twentieth century. He advocates that “Central among these facts is the changing social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity. As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic projects, the ethno in ethnography takes on a slippery non-localized quality, to which the descriptive practices of anthropology will have to respond.” Erasmus has emerged as an alternative socio-cultural and academic venue, for this reason it is crucial to reflect on to the experiences of students in a new locale as well as some institutional structures that are involved in these processes. Motivations on embarking such a plan to study abroad, students’ positionality when they arrive in the new socio-cultural fabric (adaptation and shock) and contrasting images of before and after when they come back from abroad constitute the backbone of my analysis towards understanding Erasmus students’ positionality that cannot simply be explained as “European” vs. “non-European”. Analyzing the students’ experiences abroad first requires understanding their identification within shifting and different networks of relationships.

2. A CULTURAL LOOK AT EDUCATION

Education, in its very broad sense, is both the venue and methods of how certain systems and beliefs are transmitted to a certain group of people. That is why it is considered to be very cultural in various ways. Firstly, it is meant to transfer certain ways of thinking and knowing, which usually becomes the result of the dominant cultural system(s). Levinson (1996, 1) argues that as has been articulated by Durkheim (1956) and others, modern schools have served to inculcate the skills, subjectivities, and disciplines that undergird the modern nation-state. Secondly, education is one of those areas where we appreciate contributions of the ‘theory of practice’, which has become central to the change in social theorizing as well as culture during the 1970s and takes a different approach to the agency-structure relationship. The relationship between agency and structure is unique in education since it is both the ultimate aim and means for change. Quoting Levinson (1996, 14) “For while the educated person is culturally produced in definite sites, the educated person also culturally produces cultural forms.” Thirdly, various forms and establishments of education create a fundamental social space where the youth spends considerable time and period of their lives from early childhood onwards. That is why, no matter in what forms and shapes it comes, education becomes a powerful venue that (re)shapes identity formations. Fourthly, education not only has a central role in our lives towards indoctrinating the views of the prevalent culture but it also has its own cultural tenets and gets further intertwined with other institutions in the society.

Surprisingly enough, considerable convergence on the views that emphasize the need for education exists, but huge divergence on its attainment. Education is a complex issue that involves numerous actors and processes and it has not always been confined to formal schooling at all times and places. While trying to discuss some important literature of anthropology and cultural studies with respect to my primary research question- education and youth, I hope to show that it is important to appreciate the gradual interest in the study of education from an anthropological point of view. Such an approach will be useful for further research since anthropology provides a venue to question the cultural (re)production of the educated person in numerous ways. That is why considering Europe’s unique socio-cultural and academic space- Erasmus- towards

understanding the cultural reproduction of the educated person at national and transnational education schemes is significant.

A New Phase in Social Theorizing

The 1960s is an important period for evaluating the importance of education within anthropology due to a few reasons. Despite the fact that the merging of anthropology with educational studies seems to have increased in the post 1960 framework, also taking strength from growing literature on critical education and sociology, the real leap seems to be as of 1980s. Until the 1960s, anthropology's relevance to education seems to have emerged from concerns for understanding the other's systems of transmitting their values to the next generations. Such approaches also welcomed the inclusion of anthropology within the educational curriculum so that students would get to know more about the "other" culture(s). Read (1951) has advocated anthropologists and educationalists obtain more extensive research and intensive studies of the process of socialization, both in tribal areas and in those where the cultural pattern is not within a tribal structure. Following a similar line of thought, Quintana (1961) underlines one of the important meetings of educationalists and anthropologists in 1954 where the inclusion of anthropology and sociology into the school content was underlined. A relevant report, for example, states that students should know about at least one non-western culture such as African, Asian, Latin American, Near Eastern or Slavic. From these studies we can infer the critical position of the 1960s that anthropology is required for education in order to better understand the local culture(s) and better appropriate it to the mainstream curriculum. Such an approach of course, falls short of the real contribution of anthropological work to education since it still recognizes the us vs. them distinction and it further strengthens the appropriation of "the other".

In one of the most comprehensive and earliest studies on anthropology and education, as opposed to previous discussions, Hoebel (1955) discusses four levels at which the relationship of anthropology and education can be considered: 1- the anthropological content of subject matter taught in elementary and secondary schooling; 2- effect of anthropological theory, methods, and techniques on educational theory and practice, and also with respect to their uses in improvement of understanding of school and society as socio-cultural phenomena; 3- the role and place of anthropology in higher education; 4- utilization of anthropological knowledge and methods in organized

programs of folk education and the initiation of social and technical change.¹ His explanations on the effects of anthropological thought seem to be much more comprehensive that have consequences both at methodological and substantive levels from elementary schooling to higher education and informal education. It also includes the role of anthropology in the evaluation of school-society relationship and overall socio-cultural change. After Hoebel's reflections in the 1950s, in line with what he suggests, in the 1960s the theoretical discussions started reflecting how anthropology maybe considered in relation to other disciplines of social sciences and humanities as well as in relation to the reorganization of the higher education institutions from content to methodology. At that point we especially come to see how anthropology is considered relevant to the discussions on social theorizing and educational studies. Paulsen (1961) underlines the influence of anthropology on the professional development of education. His main questions posit this relevance "what insights does cultural anthropology afford the educational leader of the mid-twentieth century and what principles of anthropology have emerged which have import for the administration of educational programs?" Anthropology of education should transcend these towards studying the cultural production of the educated as well as uneducated person.

Finally, as of the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, we come across more studies underlining the significance of cultural approach in explaining social phenomena and the discipline of anthropology, as the study of cultures, gets much more involved in such debates.⁸ Bruner (1986) reflects the importance of interdisciplinary work between anthropology and human studies in general by giving the example of their "Unit for Criticism" at the University of Illinois where scholars from various fields would get together every other week as of 1977 in order to discuss about the content of their teaching. He also states that even their departmental meetings were not inspirational enough to talk about the exiting materials; rather the interdisciplinary discussions of the "Unit for Criticism" had provided more room for them in evaluating the relationship of education and higher education institutions. Having accepted anthropology as an interdisciplinary field, he ends his piece with a very puzzling and challenging remark:

⁸ See Read (1951), Kroeber (1954), Paulsen (1961), Coleman and Simpson (2001).

“The problem now is how anthropologists acquire the specialized cross disciplinary knowledge necessary for their work at the same time that they and all of us maintain the unity of it as a discipline.”

As we approach the 1990s, we come to observe that discussions on anthropology and education started to reflect not only theoretical debates that bridge the gap between the two disciplines but rather important concerns of numerous teaching environments such as diverse teaching methods, debates on multiculturalism, varying classroom practices. More importantly, studies are increasingly conducted that reflect educational processes to be not value free, involving politics to an important degree. As we will see in the upcoming discussions, anthropology has the potential to contribute to the provision of a comparative look in education that takes into account schools, students, courses and relevant socio-cultural spaces vis-à-vis notions of culture, power, identification, history. Modern educational institutions and their teaching/organizational characteristics seem to be under scrutiny as well with the increasing work on anthropology of education. One of these reflections has been where Rosaldo (1993) discusses the developments in higher education and changes related to cultural citizenship and educational democracy in his introduction to *Culture and Truth*. His remarks underline the importance of anthropology in institutional change from administration to the arrangement of content and methodology of courses at higher education institutions. Rosaldo talks about change in reading habits, classroom relations, diversity and multiculturalism in educational institutions with the influence of anthropology. He also emphasizes how the discipline’s research agenda has shifted from studying structures towards theories of practice that explore the interplay of both structure and agency. Levinson (1996) argues that anthropologists recognize all societies as providing some kind of training and some set of criteria by which member can be identified as more, or less knowledgeable. We come to see that different societies and groups within societies may have different ways of describing the educated person. Thus it is necessary to discuss and analyze the culturally specific characteristics of educational formations. Following a similar line of thought, Andrew Russell (1998) discusses the urgent need for teaching staff to address the power imbalances and devise fresh alliances and better communication channels with students, who are the future of discipline and are themselves often reluctant to be treated as utilitarian ‘consumers’ of a ‘product’ from a university ‘outlet’. He discusses that anthropologists should apply their social skills in order to identify their own institutions

as truly 'communities of learning'. This may be considered as an important internal critique towards understanding the teaching-learning environments through the lenses of an anthropologist.

Practice theory offers high relevance in explaining the relationship of education and anthropology and having read Bourdieu's influence throughout the 2000s has been inspiring. Reed- Danahay (2004, 38) states that Bourdieu studied power primarily through the lens of education in its widest sense- including both formal and informal modes of cultural transmission, as well as studies of knowledge more broadly- its circulation, valuation, and transmission. She further quotes "the sociology of education lies at the foundation of a general anthropology of power and legitimacy". Bourdieusian notion of habitus, and cultural capital become very much relevant in explaining how early childhood is influenced even before compulsory education and the primary habitus is challenged by the secondary one as the formal schooling starts. Ortner (2006, 3) discusses that 'practice theory' in the 1970s took up the challenge to overcome the opposition of structure vs. agency. She argues this method of theorizing restored the actor to the social process without losing sight of the larger structures, which in turn paved the way for the study of two in a dialectical way. She asserts "It grounded cultural processes- discourses, representations, what we used to call symbol systems- in the social relations of people on the ground." Reflections on the influence of practice theory are important since it has contributed to consider the particular in relation to the overall system within an expanding web of relations. Education is the most significant structure and tool in which the agency gets appropriated and culturally reproduced; it becomes the main focus for control as well as the ultimate goal to achieve. Moreover, the most central part of education is thought to be its practice of teaching, which makes it impossible to relate to the practice theory.

Future Prospects

Despite its close relevance to the study of education and existence of various views on the contribution of anthropology to the educational field, anthropology in the past seems skeptical to engage with it. It may even be correct to observe negligence in this area up until very recently. Levinson argues that this negligence may be due to few reasons: historical legacies that take education as a positive process, education being seen as a practical rather research oriented discipline, the prevalence of Western schooling making it harder to question, the media getting more important in the

discourse, adult centrism in education, and lastly schools as being difficult sights to enter into.

The connection between the two disciplines, anthropology and education, is significant; however, as can be observed from the literature it has never been free of any tensions. This tension may have contributed to the negligence on the educational work being carried out by anthropologists. Anthropology has always been considered as the offspring of the educated modern West where education-schooling had already been taken as the norm. Levinson (1999) argues that even as formal schooling became regularized, early studies of anthropology excluded schools and included other forms of education. This important gap thus emerged since schooling becomes the foremost bearer of appropriation and discussion of the modern-traditional debate. Levinson, in his article, also proves an opposite trend in the recent years; where, this time, studies on anthropology of education are confined to school ethnographies and anthropologists, in general, do not really consider the role of modern schools in structuring identities and power relations both locally and globally.

Firstly, recognizing change within the discipline of anthropology as of 1960s is crucial in understanding the interplay of education and culture. The classical notion of anthropology and culture conflict with novel approaches since contemporary cultural understanding does not take educational premises as granted and questions the very essence of it. Moreover, Levinson (1999, 13) states that cultural production in anthropology has come to have a meaning broadly similar to that in educational studies-culture as a continual process of creating meaning in social and material contexts. Secondly, change also highlights the rise of “cultural studies” as a new arena to discuss issues of culture in relation to power. All these shifts in the understanding of culture, coupled with the critical work in sociology of education, have come to represent the merge of these various disciplines. Thirdly, the growing importance of anthropology of education involves not only culturally specific ethnographies of the other and school ethnographies but the need for an overall look at the educational subfield. Despite the fact that there have been increased efforts in these areas such as the effects of cultural studies and enriched critical educational research, Levinson (1996, 596) states that the significance of schools as sites of identity formation has fallen short of the increased interest in media studies. Herzfeld (2001, 2) when discussing the evolution of anthropology, suggests that it has learned as much- and can therefore teach as much- by

attention to its mistakes as by the celebration of its achievements.⁹ He states that anthropology started to question the commonsense of Western social theory, as well as providing alternative lines of thought for the arenas of opinion formation and questioning centers of power.

Marcus and Fischer (1986) discuss anthropology is not the collection about the exotic, but the use of cultural richness for self-reflection and self-growth. Such an approach involves a balanced purpose of ‘cultural critique’ that plays off other cultural realities against our own in order to gain a more adequate knowledge of them all. This approach is very crucial for appreciating the change anthropology has been experiencing and what it has to contribute to our lives and contemporary cultural formations. As was the case with Herzfeld’s (2001) discussions, the two authors also try to underline the importance of anthropology in raising questions and critical thinking with respect to our own culture and comparative forms of power relations. Such a critical approach becomes central for analyzing and deconstructing the educational phenomena since educational formations in our contemporary society are taken granted by every faction of the society and for that reason it gets difficult to question how they resonate in the lives of the youth. As the result of a very didactic and rigid learning environment in Turkey, people have not really questioned the nature of acquired socio-cultural capital via schooling until the very recent years. Thus analyzing the narratives of the youth is highly crucial towards revealing the existing web of relations in the socio-cultural and academic realms youth engages with and how their perceptions may change when faced with an alternative set of relations.

Cultural Studies as a New Opening

Between the essentialist views on studying culture and the views that advocate dropping the culture concept completely, cultural studies has emerged as a significant and powerful platform for the study of culture in relation to social phenomena. Cultural studies may be thought as an academic space that contributes and further develops the changing notion of culture. Ortner (2006, 13) shows, novel approaches to culture, one of that being the cultural studies, have significance in a few ways. Firstly, cultural studies see power relations as an important instrument and culture as highly politicized.

Secondly, they try to loosen up the relationship between culture and specific groups since culture is quite mobile. She also adds that it has helped to understand culture is both enabling and constraining at the same time.

Important similarities and connections exist between two lines of work- education and cultural studies- and it has become inevitable not to develop a cultural understanding of educational theory and practice. Giroux (1994, 3) underlines the fact that all of the founding figures of cultural studies (Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall) started their careers, and their intellectual projects, in the field of education, outside the university system, in the extramural departments and adult working-class courses. This is an important note in trying to understand the close and organic affiliation of both areas of work. Grossberg (1994, 10-11) discusses conjunction of cultural studies and education expanded our understanding of education, so that, at its most problematic, education becomes identified with culture itself, leaving open the task that it be rearticulated, respecified. Moreover, if pedagogy dictates us what should be taught and what should be the methods in doing so, then it would be short-sighted not to analyze these lenses through which the pedagogy is created and teaching is performed. One of cultural studies' biggest contributions to education is the rejection of the notion of pedagogy as mere techniques and neutral skills. Pedagogy can only be understood through considerations of history, politics, power and culture. Also, according to Giroux (1997, 233) cultural studies challenged the self-ascribed ideological and institutional innocence of educators by mapping out how teachers act within historically and socially determined relations of power. Cultural studies have contributed to the changing notion of culture and analyzing culture in relation to a number of important concepts such as power and representation. Ortner (2006) underlines the fact that, though practice theory of the 1970s has had contribution to the development of the understanding of culture and power, it needed a much more fully developed conception of culture and its role in the social process.

Erasmus as an Emerging Multidimensional Educational Space

The joint study of anthropology and education has emerged especially in the post 1980s, to reflect on to the important issues of teaching, learning, culture, and identity in a much more flexible and comprehensive framework. Anthropology of education helps scholars and practitioners to consider education as a real continuous and inclusive process/space rather than a restricted venue of actors, time periods and tools. So, from

an anthropological perspective, education is considered not be confined to certain practices and age cohorts even in the modernly designed educational formations. Flanagan (2006, 12) underlines that concept of teaching and learning is much richer than any particular instance of educational theory or practice. Moreover he discusses that history of educational thought, from Athens in the fifth century BC through to the radical critics of the 1960s, is a history to attempt to influence the way in which society initiates and socializes its young, the way it forms and controls them. In light of all these discussions on the anthropology of education as well as the critical work on education, I have come to consider Erasmus as a unique space of educational formation. Having considered literature on the anthropology of education has assisted me in a few ways. Firstly, it made it possible to consider Erasmus as an expanded educational space, which is not solely confined to some formal aspects such as schools, classrooms, teaching techniques, textbooks, and exams. Thus it made it possible to analyze the socio-cultural aspects of the Erasmus experience as part of the learning experience next to the purely academic ones. It assisted me to consider the cultural reproduction of the educated person in a multidimensional space, including the influence of individual dispositions as well as the new socio-cultural and academic atmosphere.

Erasmus brings an interesting twist and opening in the already existing educational systems since its (trans) national character is embedded in the national systems, and it seems to offer a unique learning environment and opportunity of socio-cultural and academic (ex) change for students from all over Europe. It provides a unique space in explaining the cultural reproduction of the educated person- at national and transnational levels- since it helps us to analyze the changing perceptions of students when faced with an alternative academic, social and cultural space, different from their home institutions and social space. Erasmus experience entails a different academic system, new social arrangements, and an international atmosphere of many students from different countries, all of which result in a new configuration for students going abroad. Moreover the atmosphere of new higher education institutions, distinct characteristics of the Erasmus space as well as the characteristics of the countries students reside in all contribute to the multidimensionality of this experience. In such a multidimensional space, difference, change and learning become central themes of the student narratives, which make Erasmus a powerful learning context. As the authors suggest “In most vernaculars, schooling has come to be equated with education; to be ‘educated’ means to have more schooling. Yet, by looking at education historically-

how different teaching and learning modalities have unfolded over time- and comparatively- how different societies have attempted to educate their members- anthropology forces us to regularly distinguish between education and schooling.”

Considerable number of recent work on the anthropology of education underlines the importance of anthropology in improving educational standards from content to methodology at all levels of education, not only in “the other” cultures but “our own culture” as well. Levinson argues that the anthropology of education should transcend school ethnographies and be comparative towards expanding educational spaces and accommodating diverse models of the educated person. Erasmus student narratives provide an outstanding venue to question the emergence of a new educational space with (trans) national characteristics, its participants as well as the participants’ positionality. Such a space also contributes to studying diverse models of the educated person since we observe a variety of student experiences, institutions, and teaching practices as well as socio-cultural practices in a number of settings, all of which are important elements in the socio-cultural and academic construction of the educated person. This situation has further repercussions for considering the capabilities and various skills students develop within the course of their time abroad.

Erasmus seems to have created a space where we observe the existence of numerous identities that may or may not gain new meanings within the course of this experience. Erasmus is transnational in the sense that many countries, students and institutions with distinct characteristics participate where the idea of (ex)change becomes the primary activity. Despite the fact that the idea of internationalization and multiculturalism has become concerns for Erasmus at the institutional level, social, national, ethnic, sexual, religious ties seem to gain different and more complex meanings within the Erasmus space. Thus contextual and individual factors seem to matter to an important extent in trying to frame the Erasmus students’ positionality abroad. Giroux (1994, 33) refers to Rosaldo’s argument where he says “questions of culture seem to touch a nerve because they quickly become anguished questions of identity”. That is why reflecting how Erasmus students identify themselves and their social, symbolic existence would be important exploring towards a better understanding what the outcome of such a transnational educational experience mean for students.

Analyzing Erasmus student narratives will also help to analyze the emergence of new forms of knowledge that establish spaces and subjections with respect to the “European” case. Having considered the combination of anthropology and education,

analyzing the increasing significance of European educational space, especially Erasmus, for higher education institutions and students seem to be a recent opening. Culture has become a very central debate for the European case not only it involves existence of numerous cultures but also contributes to the social and historical construction of European culture. Ferrarotti (2002, 49) discusses that “What is most important in order to define a European educational space is the awareness that what is needed is not the choice of a culture against the other but rather, the understanding that there is only one culture and that this basically unitary culture rests on a new kind of sensibility; that is, on a special ability to see each cognitive fragment into a global set meanings.” Thus the Erasmus student narratives from different backgrounds with various experience will be an important contribution to discussing this “one culture and new kind of sensibility” towards understanding its real implications. Erasmus seems to have created a new common space and set of relations at different levels where the idea of “(ex) change” and “experience” become important factors but there are still distinctions played out at individual and national levels. On the one hand, from the eyes of students, there is increased emphasis on Erasmus values and identification with the international Erasmus space, on the other hand, there are variations based on students’ already acquired skills.

European educational space, as can be observed in any socio-cultural space, is partial, highly discursive, and political. That is why it is necessary to analyze its implications at various levels. I chose to focus on this issue from the eyes of Erasmus students who get the exposure to multiple sights and sounds that bring together “the familiar” and “the strange” in terms of socio-cultural and academic environments. Such an approach will be useful in transcending the official targets and quality controls towards understanding the socio-cultural reproduction of the educated person at (trans) national levels.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The material presented in this research is based on in-depth-interviews conducted with 18 students of varying profiles who have attended the Erasmus program as of the academic year 2005-2006 for one or two semesters from four different institutions. My interviewees consist of 11 women and 7 men in their twenties, 4 of whom are graduate students (out of these 4 students, 2 students have attended Erasmus as graduate students). I have completed the interviews in various parts of the city. Some are conducted in the university campuses whereas some are conducted in random cafes; I tried to identify the places most convenient for my respondents that is why the places vary. Interviews usually last from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. There have been few interviews that lasted about 2 hours. In some instances I have carried out two interviews, one before the students leave and the second after they come back. My respondents are from 4 different institutions, and I have reached quite an interesting sample with varying socio-cultural and academic backgrounds. Their prior education, fields of study, host countries are various. Few of the commonalities are the city they live in, imprints of the transnational youth culture, the general outlook of their Erasmus experience in terms of some themes such as change and capabilities. I will be providing a detailed explanation on these in the upcoming sections.

I contact interviewees via various means such as EU Offices, Erasmus Student Network associations and personal contacts so that I could reach students with varying backgrounds and experiences. I also had informal group gatherings and extracurricular activities with these students which gave me the opportunity to understand their environment better. All my informants were comfortable and positive about carrying out such an interview; some even said it has been a way to reconsider their time abroad as well. Their destinations were varied, including 9 countries from all over Europe. Besides in-depth-interviewing, participant observation constitutes an important aspect of the research. I have had the chance to closely watch Erasmus students, procedures they go through as well as attending to official meetings on Erasmus during a period of two years while I have been working as the EU Programs Coordinator of a foundation university in Istanbul since 2006. My positionality as an employee in this field, mainly my professional and personal experiences with the students, have provoked me to

further question Erasmus and develop an ethnographic analysis since it helped me to know the field and its actors very closely as well as giving me the access to a wide range of student body with multiple experiences. The fact that I am also a student made it easier for my respondents to freely and easily communicate with me; I was not just “an official” asking questions about their study abroad period. I also believe being in proximity in terms of age has been an important factor towards receiving responses in a wide range of matters, including personal statements.

I decided to include foundation and public higher education institutions in Istanbul since the institutional structures may show different patterns. While basically talking about and focusing on student narratives in this thesis, I also tried to take into consideration the institutional background supported at different levels such as universities, the Commission and the National Agency.¹⁰ Understanding such implementations is crucial since Erasmus activities do not happen in a vacuum and there is some structural transformation associated with them. While deciding on the institutions I aimed at choosing two institutions that implement Erasmus from its very early stage; Institutions-1 and 4 have been implementing Erasmus since the pilot stage of the 2003-2004 Academic Year. Institution-3 implements it from the first extensive launch in 2004-2005, whereas the second one is a very recent implementer as of 2006-2007. Out of 8432 students, between the Academic Years 2004-2005 and 2006-2007, Institution-1 contributed with 528, Institution-2 with 5, Institution-3 with 80, and Institution-4 with 153 students. We have to underline that number of exchange students highly depends on the number of student population as well as the institutional expertise. As institutions disseminate the activity amongst students and as they have more partners, number of participating students seems to increase. I also tried to include institutions with different orientations and reputations in order to increase my chances of meeting with various students and to understand the extent of students’ experiences vis-à-vis the institutional variations. The fact that each university offers a different socio-cultural and academic space is the foremost reason to pick a diverse set of institutions.

¹⁰ The governing body of all European educational activities and Erasmus established within the State Planning Organization.

Institution-1, one of the leading public institutions in Turkey has been one of the first implementers of Erasmus and has a huge student population interested in this program. As a public institution, Institution-1 has also been a very close promoter of educational reform and internationalization in education from the physical atmosphere on campus to research and teaching facilities in the past few decades. I thought it would be important to interview students with different backgrounds from such a well-established institution. I have interviewed a total of 3 students from this institution. My other institution, Institution-2, has been a more recent implementer of Erasmus amongst the foundation universities. The administration very much supports Erasmus as a main driving force for opening up and internationalization. I have interviewed with 7 students from here. The third institution, Institution-3, is also a relatively recent foundation university of the post 1990s; however, it has been a very keen promoter of internationalization and Erasmus activities. Institution-3 is known as acquiring a religiously conservative background and networks. Institution- 3's reputation does not extend to its students; not all students who attend to this institution are religiously conservative nor does the institution itself impose a certain way of thinking in terms of religious beliefs. However, since the institution acquires relationship with some conservative circles, I thought it would be important to consider it due to concerns for inclusiveness. I have got in touch with 3 students from Institution-3. Institution-4 is one of the foundation universities established in the 1990s and has become one of the leading institutions in the promotion Erasmus and various internationalization agendas. Institution-4 gives great importance to international research, projects and networking activities and some of the important concepts to define its educational atmosphere would be flexibility, interdisciplinarity and participation. I interviewed a total of 5 students from here.

Universities and social dynamics involved in each institution may differ but there is a possibility of talking about a "youth culture" in which Erasmus has become a distinct social, cultural and academic space for the youth. Chapter 2 discusses the status of youth and their capabilities and freedoms in detail. However, for now, it would not be misleading to state that the youth culture nowadays depicts a controversial picture; dynamism, more opportunities, more opening up through international experiences on the one hand, and severe competition, lack of financial capital as well as lack of various other opportunities to meet most of the attractions on the other. As I reconsidered the experiences of youth in our contemporary times, I discovered the term "border youth"

offered by Henry Giroux, which provides an explanation to the complex positionality of young people vis-à-vis the postmodern conditions. In order to be able to reflect on to the students' experiences I tried to take a comparative look between before and after, from more general narratives towards specific ones. The first few questions of the questionnaire are designed to be semi-structured since they are aimed at receiving a general perspective and students' first thoughts on embarking such a plan to study abroad. The second part of the questionnaire is more structured in order to trace back the changing perceptions and positions of students on various issues. The second part is targeted towards better understanding students' presence and outcome of their experiences. I mostly tried to carry out individual interviews except the few group activities undertaken with Erasmus students. Only the interviews at Institution-3 were not individual interviews because of the setting my respondents chose, a room of cubicles where there were some other students who entered and exited during the interviews. A few of these guest students were very interested in our interviews and even listened to the flow of interviews and contributed a few times. In general, I did not encounter lack of communication with my respondents, most of the questions and rationale of implementing such a study has been clear to them.

4. CONSIDERATION OF ERASMUS STUDENTS' POSITIONALITY

Discussions on the so-called “European and non-European” gain extra magnitude as we witness the changing perceptions on the definitions of what Europe is and who Europeans are. These debates have come to be bolder, especially in Europe, as issues of immigration, citizenship, and religion occupy the political, social and economic agenda. Education is highly important for/in Europe, as can be seen in the massive launch of community programs in the past few decades with an increasing pace, since European education policies and tools are pronounced to be highly crucial in the construction of common European values, culture and identification as well as European citizenship. After all, as Soysal (2002, 55) suggests, “Europe requires Europeans, otherwise, the legitimacy crises of the very process of European integration and project, the argument, goes.”

As many scholars accept across different disciplines, “Europe” is still in the process of building itself and culture, education, and youth policies have come to occupy a strategic presence in this process especially in the last decade or so. The Commission even has one special directorate dedicated to these three thematic issues.¹¹ As Coulby and Jones provide in their very comprehensive discussion of Europe, identities and education, “the boundaries of Europe are constructed and manipulated and this needs to be communicated to the students as well as those who teach them”. At this point emerges the debates on cultural reproduction of the educated person at the European level in the existence of many culture(s), histories as well as social processes. Narayan (1997, 121) broadly refers to the “Third-World” individuals within the “Western” contexts in four categories: as individuals from Third-World countries temporarily living and working in Western contexts, individuals who are immigrants to the West from Third World countries, individuals who were born and have lived in Western contexts but have social identities that link them to immigrant communities of color, and all individuals who are members of communities of color in Western contexts and do not have any sense of immigrant identity. One could of course debate the very

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/policies/index_en.htm

existence of categories such as “the Third World” since they are discursive and reflect various power relations. On the other hand, as Narayan suggests, what all the above-mentioned individuals have in common is the fact that their communities and culture have not been regarded as part of a ‘mainstream Western’ culture.

In line with the arguments suggested by Narayan, we could easily conclude that Erasmus students from Turkey, studying temporarily in Europe, might fit into the first of these categories since Turkey’s position is still open to harsh debates with respect to the “European” values and process of “Europeanization”. Even though Turkey is still not considered being compatible with the European values despite its associative status for quite some time and Turkey is still observed to be “non-European” in social and cultural aspects, the status of Turkish students attending the Erasmus program depicts a rather complicated outlook which cannot be simply identified within a framework such as European vs. non-European. While trying to explain the positionality of Erasmus students as much more individual, multiple, and contextual, I also recognize the existence of a judgment in place, from the eyes of students, which welcomes values such as “(ex)change” and “living the experience”, which differ less by nationality but more with individual dispositions and varying degrees of socio-cultural capital.

Both students’ previously acquired skills as well as the unique socio-cultural and academic atmosphere of Erasmus space seem to affect their positionality as they enter and live in a different socio-cultural and academic fabric. That is why it gets very misleading and naive to describe the students as “the other, non-Western” interacting with “the West”. In trying to understand students’ positionality, Bourdieusian notion of dispositions become very essential since socio-cultural and academic affiliations and acquired capital in terms of these affiliations become very determining within the course of students’ experience abroad. For instance, especially, academic background, religion, ethnicity, social status seemed to be important in the case of my respondents. Students who have studied in particular schools and had prior international experiences were thinking of the study abroad period as more of “an experience and change” whereas students with less exposure to such occasions thought of it as more of “an opportunity and a new opening”. For instance, my respondents who study at Institution-4, one of the prominent foundation schools in Turkey, believe the exchange period abroad was not extraordinary for them; I have to underline that students from this institution were mostly exposed to international environments/activities previously and their university environment is quite open to such lines of activities. Also, students with

prior international experiences and who are from the so-called more “privileged” institutions were thinking in a similar fashion; as I. from Institution-1 put it “You should talk to students who are originally from outside of Istanbul. They would provide you a much more interesting sample.” One minor point with respect to my respondents’ positionality has turned out to be the national and linguistic affiliations; only in a few cases I came across with students who had spent considerable time with other Turkish students and who clearly stated the nationality card as a preference. One of my respondents who studied in Finland mentioned that “there was the motivation for Turks to find Turks.” I also suggest it gets difficult to hierarchize among these two categories since they are very much personal and contextual; their influence vary from person to person and from occasion to occasion.

I propose the existence of such a multifaceted web of relations and importance of personal dispositions render the discussions on “Europeanness vs. non-Europeanness” weaker. Consequently, we cannot simply put Erasmus as a tool/strategy to strengthen the European dimension, identity and connection of Turkish students who have been to Europe since the unique characteristics of the Erasmus experience involve the “transitoriness” and “impreciseness” of various explanations of Europe today that render such categorizations weak. The foremost characteristic is the fact that Erasmus leads to the formation of a distinct space in different countries, distant to the local cultures and providing the students with a new form of identification. According to Coulby (2002, 38) the European educational space is increasingly structured by networks and pathways rather than regional, state or continental boundaries. And Erasmus space seems to reflect this situation to an important extent with the participation of students, actors from different countries where the values and rules of exchange become prevalent.

Erasmus in Relation to the Attributes of a (Trans) national Educational Space

The global educational outlook turned out to be remarkable and very controversial at the same time, which paved the way for new opportunities, collaborations, actors as well as challenges. European policy making and higher education institutions are amongst the most active members of this space due various reasons such as keeping up with the global competition and formation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). According to the European Commission “EHEA is a target to be reached by 2010 and is an important part of the Bologna Process towards creating a common

educational area where students can choose from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses and benefit from smooth recognition procedures.” As has been advocated by Coulby (2002, 41), within the space of flows in/of Europe, knowledge brings the universities to the center of the debate. Higher education institutions are setting up international networks of various sorts such as research and mobility partnerships) at departmental/institutional levels. There is the emphasis for knowledge economy, increased information sharing and an associated international educational space that is beyond the nation-state all over the globe. Such a view might imply there is total freedom with respect to the flow of knowledge and educational activities; however, what we experience in practice is paradoxical. There are still serious borders drawn in terms of educational aspects; be it language, national education schemes, financial matters as well as bureaucratic procedures and increasing competition. Erasmus program aims transcending these problems but at the same time lives through them very closely. Thus I find the views proposed by Soysal (2002, 60) very illuminating where she emphasizes “We need to reconceptualize the transnational as integral to the very structuration of the national. In other words, transnational and national should be seen as constitutive of each other, engendering new identity positions and practices.” Focusing on the Erasmus space and student narratives seem to contribute to explaining the emergence of such a transnational space.

Referring to Foucault and Geyer, Borneman and Fowler (1997) underlines “Europe is not a stable, sovereign, autonomous object but exists only in historical relations and fields of power.”¹² This situation creates new forms of subjections and web of relations for the actors. For instance, as Borneman and Fowler (1997) discuss “If people become Europeans, their identities no longer turn around categories of religion, folk, or national defense but around categories of exchange, difference, and value.” The two authors suggest that nations are being brought into new relations with each other, creating new formations and that this process of Europeanization may be fruitfully studied in five domains- language, money, tourism, sex, and sports. Erasmus as a significant social, cultural and academic space- involving exchange, difference, and valuation- may be considered as one other domain in the process of Europeanization. It is considered to be an important policy tool that cuts across multiple countries and cultures with its own rules and proceedings, on the way to a more integrated Europe.

¹² See Pg, 489.

Moreover, in line with the suggestions of Borneman and Fowler, Erasmus seems to exist as a distinct form of identification for the students coming from different countries and backgrounds in the sense that it involves the values of “exchange” and “difference”.

Erasmus has become a distinguished educational space with its transnational, national characteristics, rules and proceedings followed by different institutions, students, academics all over Europe. Some of these include: European credits, full transferability of credits and academic recognition, inter-institutional agreements, and orientation programs for students. It is a transnational activity embedded in the national education schemes and all institutions follow a similar agenda towards strengthening their implementations. Besides its formal aspects, Erasmus has resulted in the creation of various groups such as European Association of Erasmus Coordinators and Erasmus Student Network (ESN).¹³ These groups are very active networks with various meetings and certain activities where they try to keep their members informed about the recent implementations in Erasmus. These formations also seem to bring (re)openings and/or support to the national decisions and macro level implementations. For instance, students in an institution establish a student club connected to the European level network, and carry out student activities for Erasmus students, all of which aim “strengthening” the position of Erasmus students abroad. It also contributes substantially to the formation of a distinct Erasmus space for international students and their concerns. In most of my interviews, the ESN formations were mentioned by the students as “providing social and cultural support to Erasmus students” throughout their stay. My interviewees also mentioned that the local students who are in contact with the international students were mostly ESN members/students that have experienced Erasmus at some point in their lives. ESN is a very active organization all over the participant countries not only through student clubs but also continent wide meetings and annual programs; they have an elected body at the national and transnational level that coordinates many of these activities. ESN also contributes to the functioning of Erasmus with their research activities carried out amongst the youth.

¹³ **European Association of Erasmus Coordinators** is based in Cyprus and was officially established in 2005. It organizes annual conferences and fairs for Erasmus coordinators all over Europe towards increased information sharing and promoting mobility. **Erasmus Student Network (ESN)** is a non-for-profit international student organisation centered in Belgium and it functions in each and every European country through student clubs. Their mission is to foster student mobility in Higher Education under the principle of Students Helping Students. (<http://www.esn.org/>)

Even if the general rules of Erasmus are common to all, institutional and local implementations such as ESN may bring along important differentials. Such examples help us to evaluate how macro level policies resonate in local and transnational settings.

Emergence of a Postmodern Youth Culture

Neyzi (2001) suggests that the rise of a global youth culture in recent decades suggests greater convergence of the experiences of young people in global cities. Despite the fact that all points of destination¹⁴ may not exactly be referred to as “global” cities, they are important centers of attraction, exposed to global actors and processes as well as international students. Neyzi (2001) continues saying that Turkish youth are torn between hopes of constructing a more participatory public sphere and disillusionment with the nation-state as the embodiment of modernity. These two explanations coincide with the term “border youth” offered by Giroux (1996, 67-68) where the author refers to the programmed instability and transitoriness widespread among a generation of 18 to 25 year olds, mainly due to the tension arising from more recent postmodern discourses and already existing modernist narratives. Giroux suggests:

“This instability and transitoriness is inextricably rooted in a larger set of postmodern cultural conditions informed by the following assumptions: a general loss of faith in the modernist narratives of work and emancipation; the recognition that the indeterminacy of the future warrants confronting and living in the immediacy of experience; an acknowledgment that homelessness as a condition of randomness has replaced the security, if not misrepresentation, of home as a source of comfort and security; an experience of time and space as compressed and fragmented within a world images that increasingly undermine the dialectic of authenticity and universalism. ... This is a world in which one is condemned to wander across, within, and between multiple borders and spaces marked by excess, otherness, difference, and a dislocating notion of meaning and attention. ... No longer belonging to any one place or location, youth increasingly inhabit shifting cultural and social spheres marked by a plurality of languages and cultures.”

It is possible to apply Giroux to explain the complex and changing status of youth who have been to Europe for a few semesters. A general loss of faith in the modernist narratives of work and emancipation can be observed in the way students question their environment in Turkey with respect to their socio-cultural and academic space and

¹⁴ Cities and countries include Darmstadt, Germany; Barcelona, Spain; Vilnius, Lithuania; Den Haag, The Netherlands; Siena, Italy; Milan, Italy; Stockholm, Sweden; Uppsala, Sweden; Paris, France; Helsinki, Finland; Stuttgart, Germany; Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Vienna, Austria.

opportunities (having too much responsibility, being very busy in terms of school work, questioning the education they get). Moreover, their positionality amongst/as the Erasmus crowd seems to be beyond the modernist explanations of the nation-state and national concerns; being quite random, experience-oriented, and depending on the contextual factors. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, we cannot simply identify Erasmus students with their nationality, mainly by being Turkish since there emerges different lines of differentiation with respect to students' individual dispositions. Plus, students usually have a temporary notion of being abroad and happy to be far from their attachments such as family/ home. As Burcu, a female student who studied in Sweden, mentioned the most significant difference abroad was the fact that she did not have her mother telling her what she should do. Other students, as well, confirmed as an important gain, the significance of being away from their families during their study abroad period. Also, feeling of change, travelling, wandering becomes quite dominant in the student discourses; almost all the students mentioned the significant time and effort devoted to travelling around Europe. In some cases, travelling even seems to become a priority rather than any other activity since students usually think not acquiring this opportunity in their home country. Moreover, time-space differentials become significant in showing the unfixed status of the youth; Erasmus period as a radical break or continuation of their lives seem to be very contextual. In terms of spatial characteristics, borders and students' positionality may change in between local and international spaces, and one observes students as insider and/or outsider where there are changing forms of belonging. There is feeling of familiarity amongst the Erasmus group whereas more of strangeness lies with the local people/students in their host environments.

Erasmus experience of the Turkish youth clearly reflects the feeling of transitoriness, instability, and change as a common denominator amongst the youth. It becomes possible to trace back feeling of aspired change in routine and practice of the students in their social, academic and cultural lives. This need for change is not necessarily unpleasant and negative but rather a process where the youth question and explore more about their lives at home and host countries. The experience may be defined as change since the new socio-cultural and academic space is new, different and quite international as opposed to their home country/ institutions. Even if activities being carried out may not differ from their normal routines to a certain extent, the general atmosphere is defined to be different in terms of the way people socialize and

carry out academic work. As a result of this process of change and feeling of transitoriness, students seem to question their positionality, capabilities and freedoms more often. In the upcoming parts we will analyze in detail students' descriptions of experienced change vis-à-vis their capabilities.

Theoretical Look at Students' Positionality

When referring to the positionality of Erasmus students, I recognize their existence at the nexus of a multifaceted web of relations and shifting networks that can be explained with the influence of postmodern discourses as well as the Bourdieusian approach. On the one hand, flexibility, contextuality and change are at the heart of explaining their positionality rather than a rigid form of identification. Stuart Hall (1996, 17) describes identities as not essentialist but rather strategic and positional. He further discusses that "Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies." The fact that Erasmus space involves numerous actors, institutions, discursive processes at different levels, and the fact that all these change, make it critical to analyze students with respect to this complex web of relations. Coupled with the arguments on the condition of youth vis-à-vis postmodernity, Erasmus space provides a unique setting to analyze the complex positionality of the youth. Moreover, the existence of a distinct and powerful Erasmus space and close identification of students with this space is an interesting characteristic of the Erasmus study abroad period. On the other hand, we cannot simply explain students' positionality with concepts of fluidity and postmodern discourses since there is the influence of acquired individual capital. At that point emerges the importance of interpreting Bourdieu.

I have come to recognize the strong influence of the acquired socio-cultural and academic capital over students' experiences and study abroad period. Thus it becomes impossible to draw a one way and univocal explanation of the students' perceptions since they are situated in an expanded and changing web of relations and actors, influenced by both their dispositions as well as the social space. As Reed-Danahay (2004, 22) refers to Bourdieu "In its place, Bourdieu argued for a view of life trajectory that sees it in terms of "a series of positions successively occupied by the same agent (or same group) in a space itself in flux and undergoing incessant transformation." (1986a:

71)” She further explains (2004, 23) that according to Bourdieu life trajectory comes about as an outcome of the various social fields and their attendant value in the overall economy of symbolic exchanges, in which the person operated. Erasmus students live through a number of different environments- a different country and culture, international Erasmus space, academic environment, socio-cultural life, etc. Within all these spaces, their acquired capital becomes of great importance in terms of adaptation, choices, survival, and the extent of gained experience.

Following a Bourdieusian line of thought, I would like to underline the characteristics of Erasmus as a multidimensional space where students’ already acquired capital determines the outcome of their experience besides the academic, social and cultural character of the Erasmus environment. According to Bourdieu (1984, 110) individuals do not move about in social space in a random way partly because they are subject to forces that structure this space and partly because they resist these forces with their inertia, that is their properties, which may exist in embodied form, as dispositions, or in objectified form, in goods and qualifications etc. So, habitus- as both a system of schemata of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices¹⁵, acquired through various processes such as family relations and later on schooling- also become important in defining students’ positionality. Reconsidering Bourdieu is useful since students going through the Erasmus program are university students, usually in their early twenties, who have fairly established tastes, likes, and dislikes. One other important point that makes Bourdieu relevant is that in such a multidimensional social and educational space, the possibility of attaching to different positions and/or adhering to an Erasmus identity also becomes the norm rather than the exception but the extent to which this change happens seems to depend on the previously acquired skills. Last but not the least, as has been discussed in the first part, educational formations have crucial existence in the theorizing of Bourdieu where he studies positionality of individuals in relation to them.

I find the following two arguments by Appadurai and Levent Soysal, which consider Bourdieu, very relevant and progressive in explaining the positionality of Erasmus students. Appadurai (1991, 55) discusses “Bourdieu’s idea of habitus can be retained but the stress must be on his idea of ‘improvisation’ for improvisation no longer occurs within a relatively bounded set of thinkable postures but is always

¹⁵ See Bourdieu (1990, 131).

skidding and taking off, powered by the imagined vistas of mass-mediated master narratives.” The “European” educational space and its characteristics may be considered as such an imagined space since it goes beyond the existing national boundaries, also being recognized by them all and at the same time continuously changing phases. Following a Bourdieusian line of thought Soysal’s notion of ‘transposable dispositions’ also applies to the status of Erasmus students. Soysal uses this term in referring to the status of the migrant youth culture in Germany where more attachment to the hip-hop identity is observed, albeit the influence of different identities may overlap and change in time. The author further discusses this notion as reflecting neither creolization, nor diasporic ties and mere ghetto narrative. I have come to observe that most of the students whom I interviewed with recognize a distinct Erasmus identity and they accept to be part of this along with other categories. So while attaining the Erasmus identity, at the same time, they may have a closer circle of their own depending on a number of things: nationality, language, socio-cultural status, religion.

While trying to reflect on to students’ positionality, we have to try to understand how/when it changes, and what kind of discourses they cling to. With these questions on my agenda, I tried to focus on students’ new socio-cultural and academic setting, their experiences and how these (not) contrast with their previously acquired experiences. One of the important themes that emerge is whether their existence abroad has any meanings attached to it. This maybe a significant factor from the beginning of the experience (even at the decision stage) until the end and it may stem from various sources such as themselves, close friends, relatives, professors and/or social encounters abroad. One other important concern has been whether the time abroad turned out to be more of a radical break or continuity of their at home routine. All this provided an important source of information to evaluate the change and familiarity encountered by Erasmus students from Turkey. Last but not the least students’ positionality vis-à-vis other Erasmus students as well as the locals become a very significant factor to consider while explaining students’ time abroad.

Murphy-Lejeune (2001, 31) talks about the kaleidoscope of the stranger and within her scheme student travelers are considered to be a “new form of stranger”. She tries to describe a more extended notion of the stranger by ascribing it a postmodern twist and by recognizing the blurred boundaries between the insider and outsider in the contemporary world, in which strangeness becomes a way of life. On the other hand, the categories in which she discusses the stranger/ student traveler- spatial positioning,

discontinuities in time, social eccentricity of the stranger, symbolic ambivalence, fragmented identities- make me question how applicable it is to use the concept to the Erasmus students. Such an approach, at first, was very illuminating for my research in explaining the experiences of exchange students to a certain extent; however, it may get misleading to evaluate Erasmus students as a new form of stranger due to a few reasons. Firstly, the nature of Erasmus is evolving institutionally; it is getting more comprehensive and familiar to the students as well as institutions. For instance, the processes students need to go through before departure and after arrival such as orientation programs are meant to minimize difference and exclusion. Plus, situating Erasmus students as stranger vis-à-vis the European case is also complicated due to the continuous evolution of the idea of 'Europe' and advancement of its education policies. We could easily frame Turkish exchange students as strangers since they are studying abroad in a different country and they may be considered "non- European" compared to their European counterparts. On the other hand, what I try to show in this thesis is that it is far more complicated to discuss the positionality of Turkish Erasmus students studying abroad for a few semesters. Lastly, existence of a powerful Erasmus space and the solidarity amongst its members complicate the concepts of strangeness and familiarity.

How to Explain the Positionality of Erasmus Students' from Turkey

I suggest that students posit a complex form of identification, which is highly affected by their socio-cultural and academic affiliations as well as the unique environment of Erasmus. So, they are neither the mere representatives of Turkishness- although they have at least heard this from a close relative or instructor- nor the passive bearers of Erasmus and European ideals. We have to recognize that ethnic, religious and various socio-cultural differentials and relationships affect students' positionality within the Erasmus space. Moreover, the difference between the local and Erasmus space also becomes more significant, which cannot simply be explained with the afore-mentioned opposition and students' identification with(in) the Erasmus space clearly stands out as an important distinction.

Students attending to the Erasmus program are basically defined by their nationalities at the official level. So each and every citizen from Turkey is coded as "TR", which is the code for Turkey. These codings and numbers are important since European Commission tries to keep up-to-date statistics about the evolution of its

activities. However, these numbers also turn into a harsh competition amongst the countries/institutions as well. At the country level, “the most desirable places” and “the most mobile students” in Europe are identified in this way. No need to mention, as the number of students increases in Turkey, especially when this number is much more compared to other European countries, it becomes a point of national pride and success. However, as we will discover in the upcoming part, national identification is not significant and adequate in explaining the students’ positionality abroad; there is a totally different culture of Erasmus and students’ various dispositions play an important role. For instance, despite the fact that students from Turkey are categorized and coded as “Turkish”, they may depict a closer affiliation to their ethnic kin rather than their national identification.

We may follow the importance of students’ ethnic identification and their (re)affiliation to these identities under certain circumstances, such as the case for Arman who is a 23 year old male Turkish Armenian and a graduate of a French high school in Istanbul. During our conversation Arman said to have felt closer to African or Far Eastern students rather than French Armenians while his study abroad period in France. The student clearly stated African students and Arabs were very warm and they were all buddies whereas he was a stranger for the Armenian French and even more stranger to the French. Having said these, he also stated to have attended some occasions that he does not have the chance to do in Istanbul, such as church chorus as well as courses on Armenian history. I think his example also shows how (re)affiliation takes many forms even in the case of one person, therefore contributing to the idea that students’ positionality is complex, changing and cannot be framed as simply “Turkish and/or non-European”. In the case of a male Turkish Cypriot student from Istanbul, Can, we observe a more strategic decision in his ethnic (re)affiliation. Can who was born and spends a considerable time every summer in Cyprus says he felt much closer to the Greek Cypriots because it was his first real encounter with them for a long time. The student continued saying “after living with them abroad, being separated is much more meaningless”. Can mentioned that he stopped saying he was Turkish after having seen some behavior of the male Turkish Erasmus students. He completely started to identify

himself as a “Cypriot” after having seen “Turkish” males carrying the so-called “Natasha”¹⁶ conversation about Lithuanian girls.

In other cases students’ acquired socio-cultural capital- prior experiences, high school, prior international activities, religious views- as well as their thoughts on embarking such a plan to study/live abroad become very defining in explaining their positionality amongst Erasmus students. For instance, students with prior international experiences do not really view their time abroad as an outstanding opportunity for improvement and internationalization. İdil - a female undergraduate student who had studied at another French high school in Istanbul- said that she had prior international experiences and she has been an active member of an international student body at her university so she knew what this experience would entail and the outcome has not been a surprise at all for her. She also added “It could have been more interesting if you talked to someone who is not originally from Istanbul, who did not have such experiences.” Similarly, students who have graduated from schools with comparable opportunities, such as various American, French and German high schools, and/or students with international linkages do not view it as a unique experience. So for these students, the period abroad is more like “an experience”, whereas it proves to be more of an outstanding and unexpected one when the student is not very much familiar with international environments and encounters. One feels “excitement” and “accomplishment” in the narratives whose real first international experience has been Erasmus; students who have not had similar experiences before see it as an important opening in their lives. As one of my female respondents, Göze argues “It was part of a long-lasting dream for me. So, it was very satisfactory enough to achieve studying abroad.”

Religious and academic characteristics also become defining factors of explaining students’ study abroad period rather than their “presumed” and “common” national identification. Religion has been an important point of departure as in the case of a male student from a small village in Anatolia, Fehmi. The student underlined that he chose to

¹⁶ “Natasha” is the widely used nickname in Turkey for women from Russia and all Post-Socialist States. It has become a very common name, used especially in the aftermath of the demise of the Iron Curtain and socialist states, when there has been considerable immigration from these locations to Turkey. Some of these women were in prostitution in order to make a living and/or support their families abroad. So, the term has quite a negative connotation in the Turkish context when referring to women, even though it is an actual name.

socialize, due to religious ties, with his roommates only, who are Turkish immigrants in France. He stated “French and international students do have a different way of living and even eating habits change so he preferred to be with his Turkish friends.” This student suggests he is conservative and thus takes care of his cultural values. So in this case, religion becomes a significant way for him to organize his social encounters abroad. I also recognize students’ academic positionality as an important line of differentiation and identification since almost every student mentioned “having felt superior” abroad compared to other students from all over Europe in terms of academic matters. Most of the students were very comfortable and almost all of them said they had a very strong academic background acquired in Turkey compared to the rest of the student body. One of my respondents who studied in France underlined how successful she was compared to other students, but French students, for instance, were very experienced in doing presentations. Simge, a student who studied in Germany said “The time abroad was relaxing since I did not have too much of school work and the general academic environment was flexible. For instance, attendance to classes was not required, exams were not so frequent. People at school were more tolerable to Erasmus students. As a result of all this, my GPA has increased.” Students also confessed to have experienced different ways of lecturing and teaching environments but in general the level of courses was not that high. As Eda, who studied in the Netherlands discussed “I did not find what I expected academically speaking, but the ways in which courses were conducted were useful. Interactive, group work, responsibility to all, presentations... I have not found people very intellectual in general.” She also mentioned “You expect Europeans to be well educated and/or less prejudiced but it is not the case. However, they were curious.” Murat who studies engineering said “Universities are not competitive in Sweden so they were rural.” It is important to underline that respondents from different institutions explained their “academic superiority” abroad in somewhat similar ways. As can be observed, there are various story lines that show how students felt stronger in term of academic matters and these stories seem to be important leverages for them in explaining their status. I do not think by making such a differentiation students mean to contribute to the so-called “European vs. non-European” opposition or redefine it, but rather it is a way for the students to identify themselves amongst the group of Erasmus students in terms of academic credentials. However, one other important point, as has been advocated by one of the students, is that Europe and Western form of schooling is usually taken as a reference point in

Turkey in terms of the nature of education. That is why having come across a contradictory picture seems to dismantle the already existing categories in their minds with respect to the academic superiority of European countries.

Another important attribute about students' positionality has been the way sexuality is represented in the student discourses. Usually sexuality related matters are quite an invisible category or very restricted in nature in association with the status of youth; consequently people do not expect the youth to talk about it. However, I came to observe that sexuality is an important category to consider when it comes to Erasmus students in general, not only confined to the experiences of a restricted group of students from certain countries. Most of the Turkish students, except a few, underlined the strong existence of sexuality within the Erasmus space, especially when it comes to opportunities for sexual encounters, where people from different places get to meet and socialize through "traveling" and "partying". Özlem, who has been to Spain suggested that "Erasmus students think they will never see each other again, they have a limited time so they want to make the most out of it and have fun. There was craziness, too much alcohol and people were partying just to have the opportunity for sexual encounters and everyone was cheating on their partners while studying abroad." She thinks students who are normally under family pressure and control as well as those who have not been to such environments are more likely to be in this situation of getting caught with the flow. One of the most striking examples to define the study abroad period has been "Five months of hook-up"; Yonca who is a female student of 22 years old answered my question "What does Erasmus mean to you?" directly in this way. Having come across such similar thoughts with most of the students, I have to confess that receiving reflections on this subject was not possible in each and every single interview. Even if I have received clues, not every student openly talked about its details and dimensions. I also realized that when talking about sexuality, students try to distance themselves and they do not talk about their own experiences but rather give clues about what goes on in the social space. Students whom I think were more conservative in terms of religious and cultural matters or introverted did not really mention anything related to sexuality; whereas students who were very open and comfortable about the subject even pronounced "hook-up" or the fact that the student himself was sexually being harassed by the females. Can, the Turkish Cypriot student, told about the incident when he was harassed by the females when waiting for the traffic lights, he also continued saying "Males are very cold in Lithuania that is why females

may be acting like this to get attention”. In a similar fashion, Yonca has been very comfortable when talking about the hook-up incident. On the other hand, Fehmi, the student from a small village in Anatolia, has not really provided information on this. The case was a similar one with Murat, who was more introverted, and did not provide any reflections on sexuality related matters.

My respondents seem to accept the strong existence of sexuality in the lives of Erasmus students; however, few of my interviewees also depicted a different picture where the students’ previously adapted behavior may show controversies with the so-called liberal atmosphere of the Erasmus environment. Can, for instance, talked about a group of Turkish males who were having a “boy talk” amongst themselves in a very vulgar way on the street about Lithuanian girls that he did not even bother talk to them after that day. In another instance, Burcu, a 22 year old female student who has been to Sweden, has mentioned that few male Turkish students abroad were talking about some preceding Turkish female students who had acted “out of control” in terms of sexual matters and other Turkish students studying abroad had thought “the girls lost control because of being away from their country”. One of my other female interviewees, Bilge, who is also 22 years old and studied in the Netherlands, approached the issue from another angle, taking a comparative look after she came back. She had heard people talking about “a miniskirt worn by their friends at a party in Istanbul and how improper it was to wear it”. She suggested that in Europe such discussions were not even on the agenda and people acted as they wish, without thinking what others will say. Bilge was telling this story to show how comfortable the social environment was in every aspects in the Netherlands, even with respect to issues related to sexuality. So, students’ stories depict a very liberal Erasmus space in terms of the representation and practice of sexuality but it brings along some conflicting views as well vis-à-vis students’ already acquired and experienced socio-cultural capital.

At this point I would like to add one more dimension to the issues of sexuality and socialization. I have not identified gendered differences in the student narratives with respect to two fields; both male and female students mentioned similar concerns and experiences about their time abroad. Having said this, I must recognize that females in general have been more comfortable, and open about describing the general situation about sexuality. So, even if I first ask introductory questions about sexuality related matters, females seemed to be more quick, candid, and comprehensive in providing detailed and direct answers such as the example with “hook-up”. This openness made

me further ask questions about the situation, whereas in some cases, students may not be so responsive to the questions and just reply me back with a “yes, there has been such an agenda”. This directness may, of course, stem from the fact that I am also a woman. Or another reason might be the fact that sexuality is especially more of a taboo for women in Turkey and they feel the need to reflect more on this matter, which they are not expected to in general in their home country.

In explaining students’ positionality, it gets crucial to recognize the differentiation between Erasmus space and the local culture and how students engage with the both. There is an Erasmus space, as well as the local culture students get in touch with; however, not many students seem to be fully integrated in to the latter. Even the ones who choose to socialize with mostly Erasmus students may seem to have rearrangements of their own depending on language, prior contacts, religion, social status, similar likes, all of which may not necessarily be directly related to their national identity and/or attachment to “European” values. For instance; some students state that after a while people from the same countries and/or geographical locations (i.e. Greece, Turkey, Spain, Italy, etc.) may start socializing more often and get closer. Especially in the existence of Turkish students, some of my interviewees confessed/said at some point they socialized more with the Turkish students. As Bilge puts it “ In the beginning we were all mixed within the Erasmus group, after a while, maybe because of boredom, we as Turkish students started to withdrew ourselves by forming our own group.” Consequently, Faruk who has been to Finland mentioned there was the motivation for Turkish students to find other Turks. Özlem who studied in Spain gave the example how students may get more nationalistic where they try to promote their own nationality and nation, which has been the case for a few of Turkish students that she observed. “People may get more nationalistic abroad; they try to show their country better and more modern than it really is. Some of the students within my circle did so.”

Identification With(in) the Erasmus Space

Positionality of Erasmus students is not clear; we cannot really categorize them as an insider, outsider within their social environments, or clearly identify the period abroad as a radical break or continuation of their routines. This situation also makes it irrelevant to consider the debates on being European or not. The existence of a distinct Erasmus space in terms of spatial and social matters seems to create a gray area for all students, distant to the local culture. Even though some students mentioned the fact that

they tried to avoid spending all their time with the Erasmus crowd to learn more about the country they live in, the existence of such a space was a strong reality in very case. This in turn brings along identification with the Erasmus group, which is a multicultural space formed by students from all over. One very important distinction arises with respect to their positionality amongst the local people and Erasmus students since there is a clear divide between the two groups. Erasmus students usually feel much more as an insider amongst the Erasmus students and almost all of them, except a few, underline that Erasmus students do not really get mixed with the local people/students (only with locals involved in ESN activities, classmates, etc). When we consider Erasmus students vis-à-vis the local people, we see that these two groups have a rather restricted contact in terms of social and spatial matters. Unless Erasmus students have a strong urge for being amongst the locals, arrangements- such as dorms, classes- make them spend time with other Erasmus students and/or locals who choose to be with international students. That is why I suggest students feel more as an outsider and/or in between with respect to their positions in the local culture. Only a few students who had had prior contacts and who had strongly decided to socialize with the local people told to have spent considerable time within the local culture.

As has been stated before, Erasmus space results in the creation of a different Erasmus identity where a unique form of solidarity exists amongst Erasmus students from different countries. Mostly, Erasmus students stick together due to the distinct arrangement of social space such as courses and dormitories as well as number of activities arranged for them. Some of the interviewees also said it was impossible for local students to keep up with the Erasmus students' programs due to a few reasons: one that Erasmus students are abroad for a limited time and they try to make the most out of it by means travelling and socializing; second, local students already have a routine and cannot reformulate their lives according to the Erasmus students. In this sense, I find their positionality very strategic; students with different ideals, ideas and backgrounds come together for a short period of time and experience a different way of living where they seem to have a social, academic and cultural sphere of their own. The need and importance of such a distinct Erasmus sphere may stem from the fact that they need a distinct identity to reformulate their existence abroad. This may be problematic when done through the nationality cards, plus students themselves may not feel attached to their national identities. According to Bourdieu (1986, 241-58):

“The profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible. This does not mean that they are consciously pursued as such, even in the case of groups like select clubs, which are deliberately organized in order to concentrate social capital and so to derive full benefit from the multiplier effect implied in concentration and to secure the profits of membership- material profits, such as all the types of services accruing from useful relationships, and symbolic profits, such as those derived from association with a rare, prestigious group.”

What Asad (1997) argues may prove to be another explanation to this form of reorganization at the (trans) national level: “Modern world is actually full of boundaries; social, political and intellectual boundaries after all are central to the politics of institutions, a major component of what such politics are about. Thus Erasmus might initially be thought as a space that transcends the boundaries; however, in practice we observe new form of boundaries with the institutionalization and spread of Erasmus across Europe and cultures where a distinct Erasmus identity and students’ possible distance to the local culture they live in become the general practice.

First Encounters with the Erasmus Space and Students’ Expectations

Students usually hear about Erasmus from their friends and/or relatives and that is how they decide to apply. Few of the students mentioned that their professors had suggested it as an option to consider. The two very broad and common reasons that influence students to consider studying abroad through the Erasmus program are: getting bored in their socio-academic environment and the need for change. Also, the survey conducted by ESN in 2006¹⁷ provides some clues as to how we can group Erasmus students’ orientations: career-oriented and experience-oriented. Experience-oriented students compose 53% of the group who are aimed at experiencing something different socially and culturally, whereas career-oriented group, 47%, is aimed at improving its academic knowledge, enhance future employment prospects and practicing foreign language. What also becomes important is to include the analysis of students’ orientations in line with their already acquired skills. Thus in my discussions I offer one more differentiation amongst the students; students who see the study abroad period as “an experience for change” and “an opportunity”. Experience, also used by the ESN survey, depicts a more general concept to connote change and difference in my

¹⁷ The research was conducted between May-July 2006 amongst 12.000 exchange students as well as foreigners studying at European universities. Participants were filled in a questionnaire where 90.7% of the respondents was Erasmus and 9.3% was non-Erasmus students.

research, whereas “opportunity” is used to show a much more focused set of aims and targets.

I suggest that most of my respondents were experience oriented, that is wishing to live in a new place, experiencing a different socio-cultural academic life away from their families. Can, who has been to Lithuania especially had wanted to be in an unconventional country to start with and his concerns for going were more social and cultural rather than academic. Moreover, as he put it, he had always been aspiring for international opportunities since he was raised up that way thanks to his multicultural Cypriot roots. One of my other interviewees, Göze, had always wanted to pursue an international experience yet again never had the chance to do so. When her mother had seen about Erasmus on the papers and told her daughter to go for it, she decided to research. The fact that they give financial aid for Erasmus students was also an important factor for her decision; she never thought it professional or academic wise, was just part of a long-lasting dream for her. One other student’s prior concerns before departure were also “being away from the family” as well as “the wish to having a different experience”; he was curious and the whole thing had looked challenging to him. He also said the whole experience would give him the chance “to observe his life and country from outside”. He said “it was the opportunity to face real problems before real life starts”. As we can infer, this first group of students considers the study abroad period as “an experience” and as a “gateway for change”.

There were also some students with professional aims such as language and academic study. Bilge who has been to the Netherlands, had initially thought of this experience as a “contribution to her CV”. Since international experience and language are two of the required skills in getting a job, she thought Erasmus would be a good opportunity for distinction. Another student who has been to Italy said her prior concern for going abroad has been improving her language since she had lived in the country and learned the language previously. One other student, Simge, who is a graduate of a German high school and has been to Germany said “My cousin was going to Austria and I was bored of my school so I decided to go. My primary concerns were more professional- academic and language oriented.” Another female student who does not have any prior experiences said “There has always been the dream about Europe; we wonder about it and we criticize our own country vis-à-vis Europe.” So one of the reasons why she decided to go was to better understand “what Europe is vis-à-vis her own country and experiences.” My respondent, Armen, who is a member of the

Armenian community had also said the time period had been the second unique experience for him in his life, the first being having gone to study at a French high school that made him get out of the Armenian community for the first time. The time period abroad exposed him to a totally different socio-academic and cultural environment where he has improved himself in many ways. Also, graduate students seem to be more professional and strategic in terms of the way they decide studying abroad and entering a new life style. This does not mean they think in terms of their resume but graduate students seem to be more focused and oriented towards what they think career-wise. One of my graduate respondents, Funda, who studies architecture had decided to go to Germany since the country offers good resources about her thesis subject. As few of the graduate students advocate “It seemed to be more of a vacation time for the undergraduates.” This second group depicts a more different outlook where students are more focused and geared towards certain aims that may range from academic gains to more social and symbolic ones. The study abroad period is not only a random change but an opportunity and reopening. I suggest such a differentiation exists mainly due to the students’ acquired socio-cultural and academic capital; students with similar prior experiences do not have big expectations whereas students who are not experienced in terms of such affairs view it as an important opening in their lives. Also, attaching a valuation system to studying abroad and to Europe turns out to be as an important point of differentiation.

The Meaning of Erasmus Experience

While I was trying to understand students’ positionality abroad, I tried to see whether these students had any symbolic meanings attached to their existence abroad. This is important since, in Turkey, the general discourse is that if someone is going abroad then he/she becomes the emissary of the Turkish nation and has to represent the country in the best way. I observed not every student entail such a position; however, there were few such instances. Göze who is a female undergraduate student mentioned “I have showed them the modern Turkish female.” Erasmus was the first real international experience for her. Funda - a female graduate student whose first real international encounter is Erasmus- following a similar line of thought, also said that “The feeling of representation puts pressure and motivates you”. The student thinks one might not care so much about the period abroad if he/she does not feel responsible towards someone and the feeling of representation, thus, makes people care more. One

important point in terms of the meaning of Erasmus experience is that students had mostly heard from a close relative or someone from their academic environment “You will represent us in the best way; I have no concerns about that.” Another subject regarding the issue of symbolism for some of the students are judgments about the “value of being in Europe”. Fehmi underlined that Erasmus experience has been significant since, as a student from a village in Anatolia, it gave him the right and opportunity to go and live in “Europe”, which made him more prestigious in the eyes of others- mainly friends and relatives. So, having studied abroad through the Erasmus program has been a tool that made him stand out amongst his fellow village members. One other student, following a similar line of thought, said “the unreachable abroad experience and Europe became reachable in this way”. Erasmus had been the most significant and first international experience for all these individuals.

From another perspective, even if the students do not identify themselves as bearers of certain values and identities of “Turkishness”, the local people they encounter with may do so. So, even if students may (not) attribute certain values to living and studying abroad, local people and some Erasmus students may posit certain values to their existence abroad. Especially people, from/in countries where there is considerable amount of Turkish immigrant population, approach Erasmus students with their preconceived ideas of Turkishness that include certain forms of socio-cultural essentializations. Few of the foremost ones are: “You do not look like Turks in our neighborhood! Why do you consume alcohol; because you are far away from home? Why do not you wear a headscarf? Your dialect is different from what I have heard so far!, What do you do in Ramadan?” Rana who has been to Italy even faced questions with respect to her religion, and ethnicity when trying to rent an apartment. One other student’s example shows how Turkey was perceived as a Middle Eastern country amongst the international crowd during his orientation program. In the orientation program organizers were asking where students are from, Faruk did not raise his hand up when they pronounced both Europe and the Middle East. So people stared at him and asked “why he is not raising his hand up when they said the Middle East”. I suggest the positionality of Erasmus students go beyond the explanations of a simple “European, non-European” dichotomy; however, it becomes possible to view such an opposition in a few instances. These cases are mostly when students experience Erasmus as the real first international experience, or they hear from their environment about the “importance of being in Europe”. So they acquire a symbolic meaning to studying and

living in Europe. Another similar source is the preconceived ideas of the local people they meet.

When trying to evaluate students' positionality, I realized they do not really essentialize the culture they lived in or people's lives in that particular country. Such an approach became crucial towards evaluating whether students themselves realize such a distinction as "European vs. non-European". Some students told to have some preconceived ideas and stereotypes before departure but they realized how misleading they may get and some even confessed that they tried to overcome these prejudices as they are opening to a new experience. Belma who has been to Austria mentioned "You really understand the way people live and that helps to make sense of what and why they do things in a certain way." Mahmut who has been to the Netherlands and who is not experienced in terms of international experiences said that "Usually people say Europe is over, there is no family life and sincerity but I realized, on the contrary, relationships were sincere and people were warm. I had said to myself I have to erase all my prejudices and started to think/wonder about what I will see." One other student who has been to Lithuania and quite experienced in terms of international experiences discussed "Stereotypes are dismantling because one sees alternative examples in a different setting." I believe issues related to stereotyping become more of a problem on the side of local people since they seem to approach students with their own ideas of "Turkishness". Some of the students seem to use the word "Avrupalılar" [Europeans] when talking about the people they met in social, academic and cultural life; however, this may stem from the fact that they were mostly involved in international environments populated by Erasmus students from all over.

Naming people "*Avrupalılar*", only in a few instances, may be explained with what Asad suggests as this oppositional construct between the West and the non-West. Asad suggests that there is actually such a differentiation which is marked by the term civilization. Asad (1997) does not try to formulate a moral judgment; however, he tries to reflect on to the existence of such categories and how they have been naturalized in an ordinary and historical fashion. The author suggests that:

"I want to make two disclaimers here. First, no moral judgment is directly intended when I refer to Western hegemony. ... I repeat: To talk of hegemony does not commit one to the view that the hegemonized world is socially and culturally homogenous. It implies only that modern political, legal, moral, and aesthetic principles are (variously) given priority throughout the world. In other words, Western categories of politics, law, morality, and aesthetics become fundamental to arguments about social practices."

I suggest few of my respondents adhere to such an approach and describe their host countries- France, Finland, the Netherlands- as “modern” and “developed” in terms of life standards, educational level and relationship between people, so we actually get to observe the above-mentioned *prioritization* of these countries. Faruk who has been to Finland believes the reason why their life standards are so high is due to the high level of education in the country. Arman suggested that “The way I looked at Turkey, while I was watching Turkish channels from France was very different. It was as if I was looking at Azerbaijan from Turkey when watching the Azeri channels.” In a few other instances, amongst students who emphasize the superiority of the countries they have been into, security related issues (feeling safe when living in the city), nature of activities being carried out (doing activities they can not get a chance to do so back in Istanbul), communal relationships (the way people greet each other, the way they are being kind on public transportation), as well as public policies (transportation system and the way they are being utilized, equality, infrastructural matters) turn out to be the optimistic characteristics of their experience abroad.

In terms of time orientation, I have observed various patterns, shifting between a radical break and continuation of students’ routines. Some of the descriptions used by various students were “like a dream, a more modern version of Turkey like 50 years from now, a different time zone coming out of a time period”. These students mostly identify that the period abroad has been a radical break, like a holiday and a touristic trip, where they mostly encountered with activities they would not be able to carry out in their daily routines back in Turkey. In their jargon, ‘extensive travelling’ (both within the country they reside in and around Europe) and ‘partying’ are two of the most significant amongst these activities; in some cases they are the only activities being carried out. Most of the students who describe this period as a radical break seem to be not having experienced similar lines of activities or have never been previously exposed to an international environment. Students who have had a previous exposure, on the other hand, explained that their routines have continued except they tried to do activities they did not have a chance to do so back in Istanbul. I believe these examples strengthen the difference between two groups of students; students who see the time abroad as “an experience” and those who view it as “an opportunity”. Fehmi, the male student from a small village in Anatolia, who experienced going abroad for the first time, has described the period abroad in the following way: “Erasmus now means Paris to me. The two

have totally become equal.” I guess this situation shows the very restricted notion of the Erasmus experience for him. This student mentioned to have socialized only with his Turkish friends who are immigrant workers in France and was mostly eating Turkish food; “I was living with a few immigrant Turks and we mostly ate Turkish food and cooked for ourselves. I was mostly hanging out with them, it was difficult to hang out with foreigners since they eat pork. We were socializing like our famous authors who used to live in Paris; sitting in cafes, etc.” On the one hand he mentions to have lived and socialized in Paris but on the other, the way he has handled his study abroad period seem to be very limited compared to the narratives of other students. For instance, no other student has defined the exchange period abroad and Erasmus only in terms of the city they lived in.

Students do not seem to have experienced a ‘culture shock’, in their own words, as they first arrive in a different setting. They usually seem to be well prepared to the experience thanks to the orientation programs provided by the institutions and former Erasmus students that warm them up to the new social fabric as/before they enter. Their entrance and integration is provided/ smoothed out by certain group of people- students, staff- in the local community. Surprisingly, one of the students underlined that after coming back he encountered more difficulties to adapt to his life in Istanbul. One of the students said that she seems to feel restricted after she got back; there are certain types of people here, and certain categories, over there all the categories dismantle.” Murat who has been to Sweden mentioned that “I have seen some things that are normal for us here are not that normal. For instance, there is ‘model Turkish’ here in Turkey, in Sweden there are lots of dialects and no hierarchies in terms of this. There is always search for a model here in Turkey.”

While talking about the way they describe their time abroad, students underline some of the difficulties/limitations of living in Istanbul, which make it hard for them to participate in what they would like to do. These concerns have been commute, prices, lack of choices, lack of student discounts, existence of more responsibilities in Istanbul, amount of excessive school work, limited campus environment, Istanbul being too crowded. Life in Istanbul seems to connote more responsibilities, familiarity, inertia, as well as too much ambition due to the existing relations amongst students. “Ambition” has especially been stated by students of Institution-4, which is one of the prominent private institutions receiving students with good educational background from prominent schools. “Boredom” was also another distinct characteristic of students from

this institution. It becomes possible to observe ‘change’ in what students think of this experience before departure and after completion of their period abroad; sometimes students imagine this experience as more of an added-value to their CV and/or academic skills before they leave but at the end it turns out to be associated with more of social and cultural gains.

Change turns out to be a very central theme in the student narratives but the extent of this change is highly shaped by students’ individual choices as well as previously acquired experiences and adapted behavior. That is why instead of talking about the Erasmus experience as an “overall outstanding period abroad” or discussing about the “general expected gains of the students”, it is necessary to analyze the particular stories in relation to students’ previous experiences and already acquired skills. Such an approach will provide a better account of the Erasmus experience and will be useful towards pointing out to the real concerns for the youth rather than some crude country statistics and policy notes. Students’ positionality is far more complicated- various and changing- than we expect it to be, which cannot be simply explained by their nationalities and/or adherence to “European” values. There is an expanded web of relations, actors and processes involved that get affected by students’ socio-cultural and academic dispositions as well as the atmosphere of Erasmus space. In the upcoming chapter I try to focus more closely on the experiences of Erasmus students; what changes and what does not change and how we can relate this experience to student capabilities. Such an approach will also help to question the basic premises of Erasmus- leading to unique opportunities for students in terms of employability, learning about multiculturalism- as well as problematizing some of the issues- education, change and capabilities- with respect to youth related issues in Turkey.

5. REFLECTIONS ON CAPABILITIES, FREEDOMS, AND CHANGE

Murat is studying computer engineering in one of the private institutions in Turkey, Institution-4 and studied at a well-known university in Sweden through the Erasmus program. He is the graduate of a prominent boarding science school in İzmir and he has been living away from his family for quite a long time. He thinks classes and campus life were getting boring at his institution, he heard about Erasmus from his friends and decided to apply. He had also seen his sister's experience but his period abroad turned out to be quite different from hers. Murat believes "Universities are not competitive in Sweden so they were rural. But academically speaking, I took graduate courses so it was beneficial." He thinks it was fun and full of travelling but was not much of a radical break for him. "It was not like a magic stick that changed it all and led to miracles. I do not think that such a thing is possible after a certain age. Plus, I have been living away from my family for quite some time anyways." He also adds "It is such a short time that, I do not believe there could be such significant individual change at this age. For me it was like a vacation." Murat had wished to go to a much more crowded place since the school was geographically dispersed. Also, age differentials amongst the students were huge. Despite the fact that it was countering his expectations in some ways, academically and socially speaking he has been happy with the experience in the overall.

Eda is the graduate of a high school in Anatolia that provides religious education and currently a graduate student in Institution-3. She has been to the Netherlands for a semester during her undergraduate years as an Erasmus student. She said "There has always been this dream about Europe; we wonder about it and we criticize our own country vis-à-vis Europe." That is how she decided to go. Her expectations again were not completely met. "I did not find what I expected, academically speaking. But, the ways in which courses were conducted were useful. Interactive, group work, responsibility to all, presentations, etc..." Eda has not found people very intellectual in general; "You expect Europeans to be well educated and/or less prejudiced but it is not the case. However, they were curious." According to my respondent, she did activities she liked but could not find a chance to do back in Istanbul. These include social

activities during the day as well as extensive travelling. She underlines to be self confident and not feeling scared during her time abroad. “I have broken the ‘unreachable Europe’ thought.” Also thinks, “European culture is a plus; no concerns for security, you could be outside till 3am. Here in turkey there is gendarme, id controls, etc.”

The first student mentioned above has already been to selective schools in Turkey, and has been living away from his family since his high school years. He had a prior international experience when he was younger, which was quite a different experience for him back then. So, he did not have huge expectations or any dreams about the study abroad period; his discourse clearly shows the idea of “boredom” and “aspired change” in pursuing Erasmus. So the exchange period does not necessarily entail any symbolic values, and expectations for him; he had envisioned the period as an “experience of change”. I have observed similar patterns with students coming from the same institution as well as from students who seem to be exposed to similar lines of international activities throughout their schooling or social encounters. The second student, on the other hand, depicts an opposite outlook. In a way, she reproduces the image that people have the “European” dream, which in turn makes them question their own culture. Even if the student states her criticisms about “Europe” and “Europeans”, she seems to attribute more of positive values to the “European culture” and sees the period abroad as an important gain in her life. I suggest her stance strongly contributes to the long-lasting debates on “Turkishness vs. Europeanness” besides reproducing the predictable representations of Europe and the West as points of reference for different cultures. As can be inferred from these two cases, Erasmus experience and its outcome seem to be highly contextual and influenced by personal dispositions besides the influence of the communal atmosphere of Erasmus. The student who has been exposed to international environments and who has studied in prominent schools see the experience “as just an experience to overcome his boredom” whereas the other student who has not had any prior exposure and who is from a small city in Anatolia reviews the experience as “an opportunity to improve and an achievement”. We will analyze such distinctions in detail in the upcoming parts.

Thus the status of Erasmus students reveals a complex and essential socio-cultural space to discover due to the interplay of multiple actors and issues. In the following parts, I will first discuss the reasons of having considered the youth in my research and then will draw its connections with the debates on the emergence of a postmodern youth

condition, and the learning context of the Erasmus environment. The upcoming parts will provide a more detailed account of Erasmus as an educational atmosphere, which is multisided, porous, and thus will focus on student capabilities and freedoms in an inclusive fashion.

Some Basic Concepts and Reasons for Focusing on the Youth

Erasmus, right at the nexus of youth, education and culture, is a very vibrant and multifaceted space to explore in terms of evaluating the positionality of the youth vis-à-vis important concepts such as freedoms and capabilities as well as characteristics of a transnational and postmodern youth culture. Capabilities and freedoms mentioned in this thesis, inspired from the work of Amartya Sen, refers to the “valuable beings and doings”¹⁸ of an individual. While trying to analyze students’ study abroad period vis-à-vis their acquired capital and experiences, I also try to consider the universal developments in the status of youth in terms of social, cultural and academic matters. When talking about Erasmus students, some concepts become crucial to refer to such as transnationalism and the postmodern youth condition. Transnationalism corresponds to the outlook of Erasmus space and its participants since the activities and most of the student experiences demonstrate being beyond the national boundaries, with the inclusion of actors and processes from different geographies and orientations. In Europe educational formations are still national but the Erasmus space seems to have brought a unique reopening with its policies, implementations and increasing number of participants from different countries; this can even be observed in the strong existence of a distinct group of Erasmus students. Moreover, the discussions on postmodernity vis-à-vis the youth bring an important opening in trying to analyze the “feeling of transitoriness” experienced by the Erasmus youth. Erasmus experience seems to provide an important example to the discussions on border youth, suggested by Henry Giroux.

In light of all these discussions, there is the need to conduct more studies on the status of youth in Turkey due to several reasons. Firstly, “Turkey will acquire the highest number of young population (between ages 15-24) amongst the European countries by the year 2010”.¹⁹ Nevertheless we still observe an inadequate way of

¹⁸ See Saito, Madoka (2003) and Walker, Melanie (2005a).

¹⁹ Report on “The Value of Education and Youth”. <http://genclik.bilgi.edu.tr>.

approaching youth related issues. Secondly, there has always been an emphasis on the status of youth in the republican discourse but this seems to be rather limited to acquiring youth the necessary skills so they become good/quality citizens of the future, very much in line with the traditional and historical understanding on education that underlines education as the training of future citizens.²⁰ Ayşe Gül Altınay (2004, 120-121) draws a comprehensive picture of the situation in Turkey where she discusses the idea of nationalizing education and raising loyal citizens have been going on hand in hand since the early times of the Republic. She further explains that “The role of education, as perceived by the founders of the Republic, is stated clearly in the introductory text to an exhibition on education opened in 1933: ‘Republican education is an instrument to raise nationalist citizens.’ (Maarif Sergisi Rehberi, 1933)” As has also been discussed by Sam Kaplan (2006, 10), when referring to the education system in Turkey:

“Raising the new generation of children as the *raison d’état* is closely linked to perceiving youth as a preparatory phase to adult citizen life, as the object of the historical destiny of a nation, and as the subject of the political vitality of the state. ... The national community is embodied metonymically in the classroom: all members of the polity are characterized as fraternal citizens bound with the same language, culture, and ideals.”

Neyzi suggests that the emergence of “youth” as a distinct category and stage in the lifecycle is linked to the history of modernity in Europe. She emphasizes that this category is constructed in multiple forms outside of the Euro-American context. “Youth” has been an indivisible part of the discourses on “modern” Turkey and its modernization project that speeded up in the aftermath of the establishment of the Republic. Since education has also become a primary venue and tool of discourses on modernity, it becomes impossible to detach these concepts from each other. “Youth” and “studentship” may not be perfectly corresponding categories; clearly, not every young person is obviously a student. However, youth in this thesis, is represented as the university students who are in their early-mid twenties. Thus the two categories- youth

²⁰ Flanagan (2006, 3) discusses that “Since the earliest ruminations of the Greeks, education has been recognized as the process of inculcating the necessary discipline and self-control, transforming the utterly self-regarding infant into the socially conscious and morally aware citizen. Society cannot subsist in anarchy, however benign: in order to survive human societies must generate a foundational consensus regarding central values and beliefs.”

and student- are used interchangeably. Plus, as has been advocated before in the literature review, education has mostly been conceptualized as the process of inculcating the youth with certain skills, so the two notions become closely associated for my area of research matter.

An important dimension of social change, that is, the status of youth in Turkey has been shifting drastically in line with the socio-cultural, political, and economic events. Youth has been associated with values of the Republican regime since its establishment and with rebellion from the 1960s onwards. After the 1980s, on the other hand, youth has been identified with apolitical views and new consumption patterns since global consumption and neoliberal views have become integral parts of Turkish daily life. Through these decades, some issues such as education and social change, involving the status of youth have become very controversial in Turkey; for instance educational matters have always been confined to a closed circle of policy-making that is far from accommodating the multiple needs of the society. Moreover, education has always been described as “the ideological state apparatus of the other side” by every faction of the society, but the debates in fact are usually confined to the main line of differentiation in our political agenda that is the secular vs. religious dichotomy. Through all these years, we have not really heard the voice of the youth as we should. Such a silence indicates a need to review the status of youth vis-à-vis contemporary events and carry out research with a critical eye towards understanding their experiences, changing perceptions and capabilities. Within all these debates, relations with Europe have become particularly important since Europe has always been an actor- perceived as a friend and/or a foe- throughout Turkish history, especially with respect to the processes of social change.

The strategic role of education within the European policy making, shifting notions of Europe throughout history and how former has been contributing to the latter have come to be debated more often in the last decade or so. European educational programs have correspondingly become quite visible and noteworthy within these debates. Especially with the leverage gained as a result of the developments of 1990s and after the Lisbon Summit-2000, educational targets and implementations have gained momentum towards achieving the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). However, we should also situate these educational developments and how they have been evolving in relation to culture and cultural reproduction of the educated person at (trans)national levels. It becomes much more complicated to analyze when an educational phenomenon covers wide range of geographies, cultures and persons. That

is why, talking about Erasmus student experiences is a useful but also complicated venue to consider. Moreover, Erasmus has become such a space that educational aspects are thought to be secondary as opposed to its social and cultural aspects. That is why an analysis should go beyond national positions, strategic decisions that target a holistic European educational area, and quality controls on education; rather we should take into consideration the individual positionality in an expanded framework.

Erasmus in Relation to Capabilities, and Freedoms Enjoyed by the Youth

This chapter also provides an analysis of the experiences of the youth vis-à-vis the capability approach, which has been a more recent and revolutionary approach in social theorizing, first created by Amartya Sen and then developed by his followers across different disciplines. The notion of ‘capability’ broadly refers to the ‘valuable beings and doings’ of an individual and what Sen tries to highlight is that “we have to go beyond considering the functionings and focus on the freedoms individuals enjoy towards really understanding them”. So, Sen underlines the importance of means rather than the ends. Capability approach seems feasible in evaluating the individual vis-à-vis various forms of learning environments since it helps us to go beyond the “human capital approach”, by incorporating different kinds of individual capabilities, potentials and related environments that give the students the opportunity to realize their potential and/or change. Capability approach also gives the opportunity to review individual spaces as multidimensional and not dominated by certain factors such as economic or social. Walker (2005b: 20) provides differentiation between two lines of explanations for capabilities: Sen’s notion of human capability and Higher Education Capability Forum’s approach. According to the author, Sen’s approach is much more comprehensive that includes capabilities as both skills and opportunities. She states that “Capability is of course a fairly everyday term and this generates the possibility for confusion in higher education where the notion of capability has been claimed by HEC as skills, competence, experiential and work-based learning and a thin, largely uncritical notion of the ‘autonomous learner’ as a self-managing consumer.” So, as opposed to the definitions like HEC’s, which seem to take capabilities in a rather restricted way, capabilities are much more complex, and intertwined. Statements about freedoms, capabilities, and experienced change abroad constitute the backbone of student narratives that is why it has been crucial for me to consider the comprehensive and multidimensional approach to capabilities in analyzing students’ experiences.

Saito (2003) discusses that there are two roles of education in relation to the development of capacities: first one is enhancement of capacities and opportunities; second one is the development of judgment in relation to the appropriate exercise of capacities. Erasmus emerges as a new opportunity that leads to the enhancement of students' social, academic and cultural capabilities in various ways. As we will discover in this chapter, students openly discuss having become much more capable in numerous ways. Erasmus also seems to have effect at the second level, towards enhancement of students' judgment, which in turn affects their choice and exercise of free will. The way students compare two spheres and evaluate their positionality may be considered a perfect example to this. As Walker (2005a) discusses "Education is in itself a basic capability that affects the development and expansion of other capabilities. Having the opportunity for education and the development of an education capability expands human freedoms. Human agency is also central to the capability approach, and central to human agency is having the capacity to make informed and reflexive choices." Since Erasmus is aimed at creating a "common" European educational space with its own rules and proceedings and due to the process/aim of individual and societal change involved in Erasmus, capability approach becomes very relevant in evaluating the individual capabilities and freedoms. Socially, academically and culturally speaking, Erasmus seems to create an environment of freedom, execution of free agency and human flourishing for the students. The fact that they gain new linguistic, academic abilities, being exposed to difference and diversity, and exercise of agency (deciding to go abroad, preparation stage, adaptation, experienced change and coming back) are all part of students' individual development. Students become aware of the differences between various socio-cultural spaces and develop and understanding of why this may be so, which in turn assists them in evaluating their own positionality.

I also suggest that the capability approach helps us to evaluate and reconsider the Bourdieusian notion of capital and dispositions since these concepts are closely related to the extent of capabilities and freedoms enjoyed by the individuals. For instance, with respect to my research subject, the amount/nature of capabilities experienced and exercised by the Erasmus students abroad, highly depends on their previously acquired skills and different forms of capital. As Walker (2005b, 33) takes note of Sen, she mentions "human diversity is central to and explicit in his approach to equality, not an add-on factor." She continues by saying "People will differ along (a) a personal axis (e.g. gender, age, etc.); (b) along an intersecting external or environmental axis (wealth,

climate, etc.); and (c) along and inter-individual or social axis which will generate differences in people's ability to convert resources into valued outcomes." So, capability to convert resources into valuable beings and doings is highly relevant to individual dispositions, the already acquired agency positions along personal, external and social axis. As I was trying to explain in the preceding chapter, students' dispositions become very important in explaining the capabilities, freedoms they enjoy and develop while studying abroad. For instance, in the case of Erasmus students, their socio-cultural capital- such as prior exposure to international experiences, attended schools, preferred ways and means of socializing- become determinant of their study abroad period. Uyan-Semerci (2004, 1) similarly discusses that "the goal of the capability approach is to provide the necessary conditions for capabilities to develop but how it would be satisfied and functioned depends on each person. Given the diversity of both social and political conditions, people live in their own personal characteristics, priorities and skills." So, in the light of all these arguments, we may conclude the existence of an Erasmus space, a new socio-cultural and academic reality, in which students get the opportunity to improve their professional, personal and academic skills, but the extent of change depends on their past experiences and acquired skills.

As has been recognized by scholars of anthropology, nature of education shows differences from society to society. Higher education institutions have been considered very crucial players within the modern societies due their relevance to the successful and professional reproduction of the educated person geared towards societal, economic development. Moreover, the higher the level of education the more people are considered to be qualified in our contemporary times. Higher education is very much involved with issues of providing resources for students/ society, diversity of people and ideas, so that individuals can express, improve themselves and become beneficial to their society; however, from the more liberal point of view and with the influence of market developments, higher education is perceived to have a strategic position associated with career-wise achievements, as well as economic and social development at the macro level. Because of all these reasons policy work on higher education management has become an important line of work. On the other hand, taking higher education institutions as cultural systems and reflecting on the space by taking the individual at the center is a less common practice. Walker (2005b: 18) discusses that "The capability approach raises crucial questions for what we mean by '[educational] development' and how we might compare the quality of the higher education

experiences between students by considering their own valued achievements, rather than achievements as measured by policy-makers or institutions, or input-output measures (Unterhalter, 2003a).” Erasmus student narratives give the opportunity to carry out such a comparative study from the eyes of students towards understanding their positionality, concerns and valued achievements rather than the national targets and quality controls. Various forms of change and discussions on freedoms and capabilities may be closely surveyed within the student narratives that include reflections on their social, academic and personal skills at home and host institutions.

I also think that Erasmus space and students’ experiences will contribute to the rethinking of the capability approach with respect to education since education in this thesis is framed as a more comprehensive framework, not confined to certain actors and places. Just like literature on cultural studies, capability approach enables us to review pedagogies in a broader fashion, including socio-cultural arrangements as well. As Walker (2005b, 38) discusses, “Pedagogical boundaries are porous, as much institutional as they are the single biology or literature class, as much about the disciplinary knowledge structures as the individual physics lecture, as much about social structures of class, gender, ethnicity, as about the individual student. Pedagogy is situated and contextual and educational identities shaped by social and institutional norms.” So the academic characteristics of Erasmus as well as the socio-cultural environments in which students live reflect the complex and comprehensive pedagogy of the study abroad period.

When we consider the institutional pedagogies related to students’ intellectual and academic capabilities, students generally seem not to have found what they were expecting academically from the Erasmus experience and they do not think the exchange period has substantially contributed to their academic enhancement. It is also not difficult to infer this from their narratives since their stories mostly involve various forms of socializing rather than the academic achievements. I may also suggest students do not really differ with respect to their stance on this matter; no matter what institution they come from similar concerns were pronounced. One student who is studying at a prominent engineering program in Turkey, Murat, named his university environment abroad as “being rural and slow” but he benefitted from this environment by taking graduate courses. Another student who studied in France, Göze, said she was very successful compared to other students in class in terms of the subjects but French students, for instance, were very experienced in doing presentations. Few of other

students confirm this situation such as Eda and Mahmut who have been to the Netherlands. They suggest the fact that courses offered were not extraordinarily good and this situation is countering what most people think: “Europe acquires a sound academic system and vast amount of educational opportunities.” Özlem who has been to Spain thinks this experience has been as she expected it to be; her primary concerns have been language and socio-cultural rather than academic and career oriented, and according to her the whole experience lived up to her expectations. One of the graduate students who have been to Finland mentioned not having big expectations about academic life and considered it to be mostly a socio-cultural experience and it turned out to be that way. However, even though academics was not his prior concern, he recognizes the existence of creativity and group work.”

Some students, on the other hand, mentioned about the way courses were conducted and described the learning-teaching environment as more student centered giving room for presentations, group work and creativity. This emerges as an important line of differentiation between home and host institutions. One important point is that students generally underline the existence of too much and frequent school work (exams, projects, and weekly assignments) in Turkey whereas in Europe, systems seem to be much more flexible and relaxed. Some of the characteristics of the courses abroad were: attendance is not being required, students preparing presentations, and being more active in the classroom. Students also underline the importance of having learned a new language and/or improved their already acquired language skills. As can be inferred from these, Erasmus appears as an important educational space; it gives the youth to study in and experience a different academic setting and students appreciate this even if they do not necessarily think the academic systems in host institutions are strong. That is why the pedagogical implementations seem to matter from the point of view of students.

Freedom becomes an important part of the discourse of the youth who have experienced (ex) change period abroad and students’ experiences based on their previously acquired skills, on this subject, shows greater variation compared to their judgments on the academic systems. Freedom maybe associated with experiences in a wide spectrum, ranging from means of socializing to carrying out simple daily responsibilities by themselves (bureaucratic procedures, registration in a different academic system, banking, shopping, etc.), all of which underline the exercise of free will. Students who live with their families in Istanbul mention, as a result of having

experienced being alone, they have become much more capable of handling their lives, including all the problems and responsibilities. So their notion of freedom is more personal. One of the female students, Göze, described the period abroad as “Living alone and stepping on your own feet”. Bilge who has been to the Netherlands explained her position in the following way: “I have a family here in Istanbul and they meet all my needs when I go home during the weekend, whereas I did not have such a thing while I was abroad. All my choices belonged to me.” The student also underlined the importance of having other responsibilities besides school work such as shopping and trying to manage her monetary affairs, all of which influenced her in a positive way. As Burcu clearly mentioned, freedom is being away from the family influence: “The time abroad was not much of a big difference except the fact that I did not have my mother telling me what to do.” In a similar fashion, one other student had mentioned her mother saying “Your only responsibility here is doing your school work so concentrate on that. You can only be independent when you earn your own finances.”, whereas during her study abroad period she understood this is not the case. So, family relations and families’ approach to their children become quite important in trying to evaluate students’ experiences and what capabilities and functionings students value in expressing themselves. I have to put a parenthesis here and state to have observed this amongst a wide range of students with varying backgrounds. Students who believe exchange period has not really turned out to be a radical change in their lives are students who have been living away from their families already or those with prior international experiences. For instance, Murat mentioned to have received prior education at a boarding school during his high school years so Erasmus has not been the first experience where he lives away from his family.

For some students freedom may be associated with various socio-cultural opportunities such as travelling, going out at night, having no security concerns, doing activities they do not have the opportunity to do so in their normal routines, entering university without high security control, or not being obliged to turn in homework/projects so often. Some of these themes were common amongst my respondents with varying backgrounds, such as travelling, socializing, and security. Simge who has been to Germany said she felt very secure in general while studying abroad since she does not find Istanbul very secure. Mahmut mentioned that “Life here puts pressure, relationships are ordinary and not sincere, and there is too much insecurity between people. European culture is a plus; no concerns for security, you

could be outside till 3am. Here in turkey there is gendarme, id control, etc...” Freedom may also be associated with activities one does not have the chance to encounter with in his/her normal routine. As one graduate student put it, the study abroad period gave her the opportunity to review her life and devote sometime for her own likes by stepping back from her responsibilities in Turkey. Some students also mention the general socio-cultural environment as an important source of freedom. Faruk who has been to Finland said that “Socially speaking everything is in order, they care for people, and all these make you feel capable. They think of the elderly, disabled, mothers, etc...” He said it is nice to feel the freedom, and he associates this with the level of education in that particular country. In general, we can say students feel relaxed even if their daily and professional responsibilities seem to have increased due to a new set of rules and social codes, and this can be explained with the increased capabilities and freedoms youth enjoys in a variety of ways.

Having mostly belonged to an international and distinct space like Erasmus, students’ distance from the local culture was a common and distinct factor. This is worth analyzing from the point of view of student capabilities and freedoms since most of the students have not really talked about any particular racist or exclusionary event targeting their existence and freedom.²¹ On the contrary, they seem to be content with the Erasmus environment’s exclusiveness to international students and interested local students. Most of the students talked about the existence of stereotypes and how such an international atmosphere helped them to overcome the stereotypes they had. So the recognition of the differentiation between international Erasmus space and the local space was a common denominator for all the students. However, students with prior experiences and contacts seem to transcend this difference towards integrating the local people into their lives who are not part of the Erasmus community. Also, students who were curious and wanted to question the existing stereotypes seem to be eager towards creating such a participatory space.

One other argument very much closely related to the capability approach is that, according to the student narratives, socio-cultural environment in their home

²¹ About a few months after our interview, Can- the Turkish Cypriot student- informed me about a physical attack in a bar in Lithuania. He said the reason is because he is a “foreigner”. He also mentioned few such instances were experienced by other Erasmus students from various countries. It has been difficult for me to evaluate what kind of an assault it is; is it purely a racist one targeting foreigner’s existence or does it involve characteristics of some “random” bar fight.

universities seems to be constrained, even in the environment with relatively more opportunities. Some students mention that one of the reasons why they decide to go abroad is getting bored in their school environment, which is always the same; they clearly state they got bored of their social and academic environment, needed change and then decided to go. I think this feeling of restrictedness is an impediment to the exercise of agency and capabilities to the full extent. Also, some students think their lives in Istanbul are generally monotonous and dull. These students also advocate that even the nature of discussions amongst the youth seems to change abroad; the existence of students from various countries and cultures matters since it gives them the chance to be exposed to “difference”. So, “difference” turns out to be an important part of their narratives and it is conceptualized as a progressive process as opposed to “boredom”. Having considered the origins of the institutions my informants come from, I was trying to make sense of their critique of their socio-cultural environment in Turkey since some of these institutions are known to be exemplary in terms of the importance given to student activities and lives. Moreover, the universities are located in Istanbul, which gives students extraordinary opportunities for involvement. So, we may not talk about institutional differences at this point but mostly students who see the study abroad period as “an experience” seem to refer to “getting bored and being in need of change”; whereas students with a set of targets and/or students who acquire a symbolic meaning to studying abroad seem to explain the situation as more of “an opportunity”.

Students’ criticisms and general stance against the “static, boring” life in their home institutions seem to get bolder after having seen the alternatives and having experienced change. Their social encounter in home institutions are usually with certain types of students and these groups seem to be not as diverse as the ones they meet abroad. Thus cultural diversity becomes an important characteristic of the social environment for students. As a result of all this exposure, categories seem to shatter; for there is more diversity and in their own words “they can no longer fit people into certain existing categories”. As Yonca who has been to the Netherlands underlined “The person who looks like a homeless person turns out to be your classmate and is writing a thesis at the same time; whereas, in Turkey, probably I would not even talk to him.” Another reason is, by entering a new social space, students learn about new routines and activities that they have never been exposed to previously. So, being in a new place, meeting different people and stories may transform the students’ already existing categories on their minds, which further contributes to the questioning of their socio-

cultural and academic environment back in their home institutions. Besides experiencing living alone, learning about different cultures and languages, “different points of view” seem to matter significantly for the students. As some students underlined “it was important to experience difference in terms of thinking”; they further explained “the ways in which one thinks may be different and you get the chance to see different ways to thinking”.

Uyan-Semerci (2004) discusses the conceptual framework of the capability approach with the findings of a research conducted in a socio-economically less disadvantaged neighborhood of Istanbul, in relation to the status of rural migrant women living in the squatter settlements. Whereas I try to apply the approach to 20 year old university students living in Istanbul and attending to an exchange program that allows them to live abroad for a short period of time. The socio-cultural orientations of the two mentioned groups may be different but it shows how the approach may be used for multiple sights and sounds and as the founder suggests there is not a predetermined set of human capabilities. Uyan-Semerci (2004, 1) suggests students of the capability approach must engage in a more dialogical process, sensitive to the claims of different peoples in order to enrich the perspective of the framework. That is why I suggest application of the approach to new fields is a necessity that takes into account voices of the people.

Erasmus Described as a Venue/tool for Change, and a Learning Context

Youth who have studied and lived abroad add a particular important dimension to the study of education and youth since it allows us to carry out a comparative work by taking into consideration students’ views of their socio-cultural and academic space in different locations and cultures. I realized that students’ understanding of their academic, social, and cultural environment in Turkey is very defining in deciding to study abroad with the Erasmus program and these views may change after the study abroad period. I am not trying to understand to what percent students’ expectations are met, or to what extent Erasmus has achieved its goals, but rather aim at mapping out and analyzing the range of their expectations, outcomes of their experiences and how we can characterize the experienced change. Such an analysis is aimed at going beyond defining the Erasmus experience as satisfactory-unsatisfactory.

One important theme of the student narratives has been the experience of change. Change is conceptualized as a process which includes strangeness as well as familiarity

compared to the past experiences during a transition to a new social, cultural and academic setting. It not only brings along new ideas and ideals but also an adaptation process and a related feeling of strangeness. Erasmus provides a perfect setting to evaluate change experienced by the youth when exposed to a different locale. One may classify these individuals as travelers and/or as new groups of strangers; however, alternatively it is possible to consider Erasmus as a space to experience change and/or continuity involving the influence of personal dispositions, a new social environment as well as institutional premises at different levels (both national as well as European).

Erasmus, in a much broader framework, is an influential educational experience. This does not suggest that it is exclusively academic and positive. Educational spaces and actors not only involve classrooms, distant learning courses but also other forms of educational aspects. As anthropologists of education advocate, we have to differentiate between education and schooling and take into consideration the former in a much more expanded framework. Being exposed to a new locale and set of relations bring along the process of learning and change, which means learning is not only confined to academic circles but is also shaped by socio-cultural factors. Erasmus is an academic space with new forms of instruction, research as well as the school environment; however, it also seems to be the new socio-cultural environment that affects students' learning process significantly. Students underline "having experienced things they would not be able to do otherwise" and most of these included reflections on their socio-cultural capabilities and freedoms. Erasmus is of course educational since some of the students go abroad to study in a different academic system, learn different method of teaching-learning, and improve their language. However, at the same time, Erasmus offers a new social and cultural learning atmosphere for the student that makes it highly educational. As one female student who studied in the Netherlands put it "There is confusion there and you try to learn everything; whereas, here, everything is as I expect it to be."

Stereotypes collapsing and/or strengthening, learning about new lives and making sense of them, getting to know different academic systems, trying to live in a multicultural social space with different backgrounds and social status, living alone and handling your life all by yourself, improving a second language have been some of the gains pronounced by Erasmus students. Few of the students underlined that Erasmus is "living the difference, and getting to know others as well as yourself much better". İdil who has been to Italy had prolonged her undergraduate education in Turkey since she failed all her courses abroad, but she openly said that "Even if people say I lost a year, I

did not. I had a great time and learned a new language.” So even if academic concerns may be of secondary importance and even if students do not find the academic environments as challenging, there is a much more comprehensive and powerful learning context which in turn makes it possible to talk about student capabilities and freedoms. As Göze describes “I had always been a strict person, but now I am very flexible after having experienced Erasmus. I think people should be happy the way they like. Individual likes precede the society.”

The Official Discourses on Erasmus and Student Experiences

Having analyzed the experience of Erasmus students vis-à-vis capabilities, freedoms, and a postmodern youth condition in detail, at this point I would like to pose the question to what extent student narratives seem to comply with the so-called official discourses. I believe this question emerges as an important one and the answer is far more complicated when we take into consideration the complex positionality of Erasmus students. We come to realize the particularities of the student experiences demonstrate how crude the official discourse on Erasmus is.

I would like to consider both European level and national level targets that underline the gains of Erasmus experience abroad. At the European level it would not be wrong to say multicultural interaction, language learning and employability are announced to be the most significant gains of the Erasmus experience. Erasmus is also seen to be the most important policy tool on the way to achieving a common European education and research area. Consequently, according to the Turkish National Agency expected gains for different actors include the following:

“For higher education institutions: international experience and reputation, education in a multicultural environment, intercultural dialogue, representation and internationalization, added value for research, extra financial support for projects, reform and quality assurance, competition... **For students:** international experience, education in a multicultural environment, getting to know different cultures, getting to know one’s own culture, making new friends, networking for future career, being a student in a different country, experiencing a different system... **For the society:** EU integration, quality assurance, economic and cultural gains to the university town, university-citizen-sector cooperation, expansion of Turkish, getting over with stereotypes, cultural interaction, Turkey’s presentation.”

As is quoted above, from the more institutional point of view, “internationalization”, “multicultural interaction” seem to be the common and expected results at all three levels. Consequently, Erasmus is explained to be an ideal opportunity

that will bring about various gains for these different actors. However, we cannot assume every single institution in “Europe” acquires the rules and regulations compatible with the values of Erasmus in the existence of multiple national systems and implementations even if there are some mutual targets and a European level framework. Secondly, we cannot assume that students are always active members of the Erasmus crowd wherever they go and that they will promote their country, language and will help to dismantle stereotypes associated with their nationality. Student narratives show that this is not necessarily the case and individual experiences as well as choices become very defining in students’ positionality abroad rather than their nationality.

Finally, I would also like to touch upon the reflections on the institutional structure that emerged from the student narratives. My main focus has not been to question the institutionalization of Erasmus activities in particular but I think it is useful to mention student narratives about these institutional implementations. The diverging and multiple implementations serve to be an example to the discrepancies amongst “European” institutions. European offices and international officers are amongst the first people students encounter with and they are usually responsible for students’ integration into the overall system but their practices seem to differ substantially even if there is an overall framework. Some of the comments from students include: people not talking in English and not being available, Eastern European countries seeming to be more eager to carry out Erasmus activities than Western European countries, institutions seeming to be slow and not as responsive even in the provision of basic services to Erasmus students. Some students even underlined that there were not enough mechanisms to keep them informed about housing, living, and academic related matters. I believe what students go through in terms of these is very striking due to few reasons. Firstly, there seems to be an environment where these people as well as HEI administrators push for the improvement of Erasmus implementations as a policy tool but there are contradictory implementations in the field. Secondly, as far as I have observed different institutions across Europe, Erasmus atmosphere involves both the spirit of cooperation but also competition where institutions do try to come up with new partnerships, cooperation methods but also have to face fierce competition in the acquisition of partnerships.

6. CONCLUSION

Reflecting on to the Erasmus space and student narratives has been a unique and complex task at the same time for a number of reasons. It has been an exceptional space in terms of evaluating its educational characteristics and powerful learning context as well as questioning the experience vis-à-vis the debates on what is “Europe” and who is “European”. Erasmus space is complex due its evolving nature and numerous actors; it also posits a transnational outlook with the eager and must participation of national structures as well as international ones in a wide geography and has created alternative spaces, organizations and valuation systems that can only be explained beyond the national and territorial boundaries. The increasing mobility of university youth from Turkey in such an ever changing space and students’ lived experiences, coupled with the above-mentioned debates emerges as an important phenomenon. Finally, it has been important for me to recognize, analyze, and juxtapose students’ experiences with respect to the characteristics of a postmodern youth culture as well as individual dispositions.

Highlighting the expanded educational space of Erasmus, discussing how it is educational on the one hand, and on the other hand showing the outcomes of the experience is diverse, multiple, contextual in line with the individual dispositions have been my primary aims throughout this study. While demonstrating students’ experiences I have observed two levels of differentiation. One important differentiation of Erasmus students- being experience oriented or career oriented- is already stated by the ESN in its 2006 survey and it is possible to follow such patterns amongst my interviewees as well. Another level of differentiation that emerges amongst my respondents is seeing Erasmus as “a change” or as more of “an opportunity”. The notion of “opportunity” may be more academic and professional or more symbolic with certain expectations and preset aims.

I also suggest that Erasmus assists in raising important questions with respect to debates on Europe and Europeanization since the space, by being an important policy tool of the process of Europeanization, provides an outstanding opportunity to take a closer look at what is going on in the field. I suggest the study of Erasmus student narratives provides an important ethnographic insight in studying the European

formation from bottom-up since it focuses on the real world implications of European level policy making amongst the youth. By recognizing Europe, as Soysal (2002, 55-56) suggests, a “cultural collectivity, subjective category and institutional unity”, I think it becomes possible to observe different implications of Europe at different levels, all of which are not mutually exclusive and may support each other. Consequently, it is possible to argue that Europe “as a cultural collectivity” is very much at the center of debates related to Europe as a subjective category and an institutional unity since the experience of Europeanization revolves around the themes of a common European culture and related set of values. Erasmus, as being part of the European project, corresponds to the three categories mentioned by Soysal that is why it is important to take a comprehensive look at the course of its realization. Research about European social and cultural policy usually focuses on the policy work at the national and supranational levels; such an approach studies the relationship of these two and explains various country positions. However, the anthropological gaze proves to be helpful in other ways in the study of Europe; it does not restrict the study to national stereotypes and their legacies, between political scientists and historians, concerned with the making of Europe in interaction with the EU. As Bellier and Wilson (2000, 19-20) advocate it is important for anthropologists and other observers to pay attention to the critical balance at the core of the European project between the theorization of Europe by the policy makers and national representatives and the management of changes by the technicians and experts. Moreover, the authors underline that Europe is being built from the bottom up, which makes it highly relevant for anthropologists to enter the field for investigation. This bottom-up approach may be considered very useful in carrying out research about the real life experiences of individuals with respect to the European order of things and system.

Some Erasmus students consider the experience to be a generational characteristic and their future, which is a very strong argument providing clues as to how a unique form of solidarity exists amongst the Erasmus students. This situation may be observed from a pamphlet of Erasmus Student Network- Sweden that states:

“Evolution is inevitable. Beware, because the future is here to stay and only the strongest will survive. Generation mobility is here to stay. Our generation has often been referred to as Generation Mobility. And we are. More rootless, more eager to go to far corners of the earth and more aware of our own world. It’s time to rewrite the evolutionary theory. Darwin’s theory doesn’t apply to us anymore. The future is spelled **Homo Erasmus.**”

This view has important repercussions in terms of the cultural reproduction of the individual since it advocates that Erasmus is a generational and central characteristic of the contemporary youth culture. The existence of a distinct Erasmus space distant to the local culture(s) and the local people students live with, in a way, complement with the above-mentioned “generation mobility” experience; because both explanations recognize the difference between Erasmus and non-Erasmus space. This scheme is, in a way, countering the “Erasmus on the way to Europeanization and cultural interaction” debates. As Ömür who has studied in Lithuania has put it “Students who become interested in Erasmus and decide to go abroad, already have something different about themselves, which makes them easily decide to go abroad and adapt to an international environment.”

As I have been going through Facebook, the worldwide on-line social utility that has also become an extraordinary activity and communication channel in Turkey in the last year or so amongst the youth, I came across an application “What Erasmus are you?”. It is a brief survey that asks questions about the Erasmus period of the students and the answers determine whether the student perceives Erasmus as holiday, work, and good time. Erasmus as holiday connotes “friends, sex and alcohol”, Erasmus as work connotes “taking studies abroad very seriously, being a grandmother, enjoying and discovering people/country/ history, whereas Erasmus as good time means just being in between the other two, “going out 2/3 times a week to discover the ambiance, and working when necessary.” Even in these examples, we observe how different the Erasmus experience may turn out to be for different tastes. Moreover, the example gave me the chance to revisit, in a way, the basic categories of students’ experiences that I have been talking about in Chapter 5. If one asked a few years ago what Erasmus meant, then I would have very briefly answered: “The European student exchange program”. As I have found myself in this huge space of web of relations and actors, I came to realize that it is much more than that, which involves many complexities and a very peculiar space for all its actors.

Fehmi mentioned, “The first time I went there everything was odd; I tried to comfort myself by saying ‘you will get used to it’. Every kind of person you saw was different; you could not understand who was American, French, African... You could not tell who was what. Having seen that much of a difference bothered me.” Though its implications differ from individual to individual, Erasmus experience makes students face a different and sometimes new reality in terms of the socio-cultural, academic

environment. It may provides us with some clues towards understanding what makes students (un)comfortable when faced with difference and what kind of mechanisms/processes support such lines of thought. There are multiple expectations, ideals and experiences of the youth that show variations within the course of Erasmus experience. Also it becomes possible to observe the feeling of transitoriness amongst the youth as an important commonality; there is the demand for change, and difference. However, the weight of the acquired academic, social and cultural capital as well as the individual choices is very influential over the students' study period abroad period as well as the effects of the general outlook of the Erasmus space.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) How did you decide to attend to Erasmus, and what motivated you? What were your expectations?
- 2) First thoughts that come to your mind when you hear Erasmus? What did Erasmus experience mean to you and how did this change before/ after/ as you have experienced it?
- 3) What do you think are the outcomes of this experience?
- 4) What has been the most surprising and unexpected part of this experience?
- 5) How would you define yourself vis-à-vis other students and the social space during your stay?
 - a. What is different spatially (in school, housing, a new social environment, etc...)? How did it feel to be in a spatially (non) distant and different place?
 - b. What is different about time, how would you define the period abroad?
 - c. How about your positionality (social, symbolic, etc) abroad? What do you think your existence abroad meant for you and for the others?
- 6) I have been hearing about different stories. But one interesting commonality has been the way students talk about/emphasize sexuality related matters in the Erasmus space. Was there really something different about the way sexuality was present in the lives of Erasmus students, if so how?
- 7) How do your family, friends, and social environment view this experience, what did they notice about you after you came back?
- 8) How would you define yourself before and after? Did you experience any clashes as/after you experienced the study abroad?

APPENDIX B

A QUICK LOOK AT THE INSTITUTIONS

	Student Population (approximate numbers) ²²	Type of Institution	Entry year to Erasmus	Number of Erasmus students so far (including 2006/2007) ²³	Interviewed students from each Institution
Institution-1	20.000	Public	2003-2004 (pilot stage)	528	3
Institution-2	2000	Private	2006-2007	5	7
Institution-3	2500	Private	2004-2005	80	3
Institution-4	3000	Private	2003-2004 (pilot stage)	153	5

²² Approximate student numbers are taken from individual institutional websites.

²³ Turkish National Agency Statistics.