

# The Erasmus program and European identity

Does studying abroad foster a feeling of European identity?

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## List of abbreviation

European Union	EU
European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students	Erasmus
Member States	MS
Uni Münster (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität)	WWU

### Abstract:

The Erasmus-program is a mobility tool financed by the European Commission for (predominantly) University students. Its aim is not only to strengthen international collaboration in tertiary education but also to help students experience the European Union and develop a feeling of European identity. This paper intends to explore whether such a feeling is generated through the Erasmus program in particular but also through long-term mobility in general. Furthermore, it checks upon identity build-up with regards to travelling and international friendships and relationships. This is done by making use of a cross-sectional survey with about 480 participants.

The study's results show that the level of European identity is relatively high among the sample (young university students) compared to the general population. However, it is not higher among those who have been abroad, be it via an Erasmus stay or another program. Instead, the outcome suggests international relationships, international friendships and frequent travels to have a small effect on the level of European identity.

## 1. Introduction

When the European Community of Coal and Steel was founded in 1952, it was done with the intention to establish a net of European cooperation based on international trade, the demolition of market barriers and economic integration. Soon it became clear that, for the European project to work, it would not be enough to harmonize economic fields. Rather, it would be necessary that people living in Europe would develop a sense of community and solidarity (Lešer & Širka, 2013, p. 2). This feeling of European citizenship was to be created by international communication, travel and (social) exchange among the peoples. One program which aims at the establishment of a European “we-feeling” is the student exchange program Erasmus (European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) which was introduced in 1987 but did only become a major mobility program after the implementation of the Bologna Process in 1999.

Today - more than sixty years down the road from the first steps of European integration - the question of European identity is one that still moves hearts and minds of scholars in various disciplines such as Political Sciences, Philosophy, Social Anthropology or History: Confronted with the problems the European Union has been facing since the economic crisis in 2008, and the long-term struggles caused by it, the question remains if the goal of a European citizenship has really been achieved. Statistics show that the number of European inhabitants who feel positive towards the EU has been dropping from 52 to 30 per cent between 2007 and 2013 (Rühle, 2015).

Much academic dispute has been arising around the question if student mobility is really causing a feeling of European identity as it was intended by the Erasmus policymakers (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998; Bologna Declaration, 1999). The following paper will contribute to this particular field of research, as no coherent answer to different investigations on Erasmus and European identity has been found. The aim of this thesis is to answer the research question if students who spent time abroad (especially in the course of the Erasmus program) feel more European due to their stay in a foreign country and the resulting international contacts and interactions. Hence, the empirical research is based on the hypothesis that students who have experienced an Erasmus stay abroad indeed are more likely “to feel” European. Besides this it will be investigated if students who spent time abroad outside the Erasmus program, travelled a lot or have many international friends feel more European than those students who do or did not.

The idea of identity and (European) identity-building is not a new one as it started to be shifted into the focus of academic writing in the 1950s and 1960s. In particular Karl Deutsch’s “social integration theory” (published in 1953), in which he basically stated that communication and international contacts will foster a level of supranational identity, became the center of attention. Deutsch’s ideas influenced several scholars, some of which will be introduced in this paper.

Identity is a concept hard to coin down to a small set of indicators, especially as it is widely accepted that every person holds a set of identities, and thus does not – and does not need to - only identify with the European Union or his or her city, country of origin, sports club or faith. In this paper, identity will be measured by making use of a Eurobarometer item which was used until 2006: “Do you ever think of yourself as not only [nationality], but also European? Does this happen always, sometimes, often, never?”. This question will be posed as part of a cross-sectional online-survey among (predominantly Münster) university students most of whom are former participants of the Erasmus program. Its two main hypothesis (those who have *studied* or *lived* abroad feel more European than students who did not do so) will be surrounded by two other hypotheses, namely

having foreign friends or partners and general travels and their effect on the feeling of attachment to Europe.

This way, another contribution to the field of European Studies in general and identity research in particular can be made. As stated above, the outcome of present research differs and authors come to different conclusions when writing about Erasmus and European identity. Furthermore, the subject also has some political relevance, as the Erasmus+ budget (which covers the years 2014-2020) encompasses 14.7 billion Euros. As it is one factor behind the program to strengthen international identity building it is worth knowing if this goal really is achieved, especially as such large amounts of money are involved.

## **2. The internationalization process of European higher education**

As mentioned in the introduction, the initial idea of the European Community of Coal and Steel was to foster peace through economic cooperation and integration. It became clear that not only the harmonization of this field but also a sense of community and solidarity had to be encouraged to receive support from the population and make the European project more accessible (Lešer & Širka, 2013, p. 2). As section four will show, several scholars started to develop theories on European identity and European social integration. One of them was Ernst Haas who foresaw that social integration had to be achieved next to economic or monetary integration (Haas, 1961, pp. 366, 367). Haas assumed that a feeling of solidarity would be created especially through international contacts and travel – a thought which the European Commission seemed to share.

In 1987, the Erasmus program (ERASMUS standing for *European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*) was launched after a ten year pilot-phase. Its aim was not only to strengthen Europeanisation and support the common market by promoting intra-European student mobility but also to let international contacts, built as young adults, create a sense of belonging to Europe (EU, 1987). One year later, in 1988, the European Commission resumed that over 3.000 student visits could be realized within eleven member states (MS) encompassing a budget of 1.1 million European Currency Units (European Commission, 1988).<sup>1</sup>

After the establishment of Erasmus, the program quickly grew in size and scope and other European countries (both EU and non-EU) were incorporated as Erasmus-partners (European Union, 2012, p. 6). In 1994, Erasmus was integrated into the Socrates-program which embodies all educational support programs in Europe. The incorporation of Erasmus into Socrates did not have many structural consequences; however, competences were passed from the European Commission towards the educational centers which were now required to formulate policy statements as well (“institutional approach”). Furthermore, universities were to find bilateral partners with whom contracts were to be worked out. This process aimed at stabilizing and formalizing the exchange and is still in practice today (Maiworm, 2001, pp. 459-460).

But Erasmus did not achieve the scope it has got today until the Bologna Process, which started in 1998 with a summit in Sorbonne held by the educational ministers of France, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy who all faced similar problems within the domain of tertiary education in their respective countries. In order to make the “Europe of knowledge” a strong actor in an internationally competitive system, the idea was to facilitate social and human growth and enrich the European citizenship by making degrees both comparable and (internationally) transferable. Furthermore, the

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<sup>1</sup> In January 1999, the ECU was replaced by the Euro, at the value 1 ECU = 1 Euro.

Bologna Process aimed at eliminating obstacles toward student mobility (Bologna Declaration, 1999).<sup>2</sup> It was the reform's ultimate goal to establish an efficient, well educated workforce capable of facing the challenges of globalization and to "strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social, and technical dimensions of our continent" (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998). This could best be achieved by supporting good education with comparable degrees which could stand internationally. Besides this, student mobility would lead to the sharing of best practices, international cooperation but also personal development of the participants. Furthermore, the goal of international student mobility was rather uncontroversial and its implementation was comparatively easy, not to speak of the political benefits this policy scheme (being beneficial for the population and thus seen positively) held (Papatsiba, 2006, p. 97; Reichert & Tauch, 2003, p. 29). The Bologna process helped to institutionalize Erasmus as it provided the framework for tertiary exchange and also increased the Erasmus funds. The number of mobile students rose from 3,000 to almost 25,000 a year between 1988 and 2012 (Agence Erasmus+ France, 2015; European Union, 2012, p. 6). Furthermore, total mobility means of about 480 million Euros per year were spent on the program in 2012 as opposed to 70 million in 1997 (European Commission, 2012).

The idea that international travel, communication and exchange would create a European community had been existing since Deutsch's *Nationalism and Social Communication* (see section 3.1). This thought was taken up in the Sorbonne Declaration: "[In a European Area of Higher Education] national identities and common interests can interact and strengthen each other for the benefit of Europe, of its students, and more generally of its citizens" (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998). Thus, literature agrees upon the fact that political reason (particularly the support of the population) were driving factors behind extending the Erasmus-program (see for example Sigalas, 2010, or section 3.2).

However, it must also be stated that the potential for integration can likewise become negative, as Arend Lijphart already remarked in 1964. If the imbalance (disequilibrium) between, for instance, the compliance of main values, is too high "an intensive interchange of persons may cause friction and frustration rather than improved mutual understanding" (Lijphart, 1964, p. 252). But as section 3 will show, the general understanding in European studies is that either a positive or no effect is generated through interaction.

### **3. Theoretical framework: European identity**

When the European project began to develop after the Second World War, being shaped by the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) and the establishment of the Western European Union (1954), scholars started to develop theories around the new phenomenon of Europe. For instance, ideas of a European social space started to evolve in the 1950s and 1960s. Likewise, the academic field of European studies emerged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its two main movements, neofunctionalism (based mostly on the thoughts of Haas, 1961 or Rosamond, 2000) and (liberal)

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<sup>2</sup> The ideas were coined into three main goals (international competitiveness, mobility and employability) and four specific objectives, namely (1) the adaptation of comparable degrees, (2) the introduction of two main cycles of study (undergraduate and graduate degrees), (3) a European-wide establishment of a system of credits (ECTS-points) and (4) the elimination of obstacles towards student mobility (This point was the most extensive among the four and made clear that mobility should not be bound to students only but also be expanded to teachers, researchers and administrative staff). Furthermore, it underlined that cooperation for curriculum-development and quality-assurance should be introduced.

intergovernmentalism (Hoffmann, 1966; Moravcsik, 1994 and Schimmelpfennig, 2015) both predict an ongoing Europeanisation. The theories differ vastly in the mechanisms and manners of explaining how and why the process of Europeanisation takes place. However, all agree upon the fact that such a process is occurring. Yet, neofunctionalism and (liberal) intergovernmentalism focus upon the economic and monetary dimension of Europeanisation and how harmonization is achieved within the market context of Europe. As the research question of this paper aims to find out if an Erasmus-stay helps to develop a sense of European identity and identity certainly is not a very materialistic concept (at least in its core idea), no further elaboration on European integration theories will take place in this paper. Instead, the following section will outline which theories were established around the subject of European identity and highlight the most important research on the topic with regards to the Erasmus-program.

Generally speaking, European identity is a concept hard to coin down to a certain set of indicators or a focused definition, since it is “part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance to that membership”. This definition by Tajfel (1978, p. 63) is one approach among many towards the dealing with (European) identity. As his quote shows, identity is about a person’s own understanding (self-identity) of his or her place in a group (or a political system). Hence, it is about the person’s own emotional attachment to it. Literature largely agrees upon the fact that identities can be differentiated into personal and collective identities (Smith, 1992, pp. 55-76), and that persons can hold multiple identities (Delhey, 2004, pp. 14-18; Díez Medrano & Gutiérrez, 2001) which are socially constructed (Risse, 2010).

Academic disputes arise over the question of how such a “we-feeling” has been developing within the European Union and if the aspect of (student) mobility helps to foster attachment towards the EU.

### **3.1. Theories on European identity**

During the 1950s and 1960s intellectuals started to strongly engage with the concepts of “nation-building” and national identity. One of these scholars was Karl W. Deutsch who published books about nationalism from the 1950s onwards. About integration and community-feeling he wrote:

“By integration we mean the attainment, within a territory, of a “sense of community” and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a long time, dependable expectation of ‘peaceful change’.” (Deutsch, 1966 [1953], p. 2)

His line of argumentation is that people from different backgrounds and nationalities will assimilate due to personal contact and exchange interaction. Especially communication is a crucial factor in fostering social learning, trust and loyalty towards another group. According to Deutsch, mobilized individuals have more intercourse (due to e.g. geographical settings, social, economic or technological circumstances or developments) and can be grouped as *mobilized population* (Deutsch, 1966 [1953], pp. 123 - 128).

While Deutsch related his theory to the formation of a national identity, he inspired others, such as Neil Fligstein (2008), to build upon his basis of thought: Fligstein used Deutsch’s theory to explain the European development of the last fifty years. According to him, a European identity takes shape through the frequent interaction among citizens who will come to see themselves as part of European society and establish a European identity. It is important to note, that one does not only

belong to one social space (does not only have one identity) but can be part of several co-existing social groups, as for instance Delhey (2004) pointed out. Feeling European does not necessarily mean to not see oneself as British, Dutch, German or Polish (besides being a member of a family, feeling as part of a city, church, sportsclub etc.) as well. In fact, it is quite the opposite: together these intergroup relations make up the European social space. Both Fligstein and Delhey identify migration and international marriage as strong ties of social integration. Fligstein also classifies voluntary associations, media and education – especially the knowledge of languages and the Erasmus program – as important factors for European social integration. However, he also notes that it is still a rather small, highly educated, and often financially well-off elite of persons that engages in these activities (Delhey, 2004, pp. 14-18; 192).

In 1964, Arend Lijphart based his essay “Tourist traffic and integration potential” on Deutsch’s theory on social integration. Lijphart sees integration as “the merger by peaceful means of two or more formerly independent states into a single larger state” (Lijphart, 1964, p. 251). In his article he focuses on the aspect of international tourist flows as determining factors for integration potential among two people (other factors could be compatible values among countries, similar way of life, social communication etc.). He comes to the conclusion that the volume of tourist traffic (staying in another country for more than 24 hours) is a valuable indicator to measure integration potential and that large amounts of tourist traffic would foster closer relations among Western European countries (Lijphart, 1964, p. 260). However, Lijphart criticizes the fact that – when he was publishing the paper – too little valid data on different types and reason for travel were available. Thus he suggested to especially have a look at student mobility as this field was exploited better.

Michael Bruter investigates in how far institutions, symbols and news have an effect on European identity. A lot of research on the topic (as for instance suggested by Mitchell, 2014; Delhey 2004; Kuhn, 2012; Fligstein, 2008) assumes European identity to develop through personal interaction (so to speak “from within” the population or “bottom-up”) which of course is enabled through political will and harmonization of certain policy fields. Bruter, on the other hand, has an approach which is rather “top-down”. He finds that the establishment of symbols (e.g. a flag, national anthem, but also the logos of European bodies or the single currency) has a positive effect on the feeling of European identity (Bruter, 2005).

To conclude this sub-section, two remarks shall be made. Firstly, it could also be imaginable that traveling and living abroad strengthens personal nationalism and perceptions of the own country of origin. A sense of feeling of togetherness, the solidarity certain groups of people have towards each other (as Max Weber defined “nation”), only work if there is a certain “out-group”, from which a community can isolate itself (Weber, 1980 [1922], p. 528). Seeing and experiencing that things are done differently in other places and that people behave differently could also lead to a rise of alignment towards the own “in-group” (which in this case would be the home country). To my knowledge, none of the existing present literature support this idea. It is a commonly accepted fact that foreign travel (together with political discussions) increases the perception of European identity (see for example Spanning, et al., 2008, p. 482).

Secondly, it is important to point out that nationalism is always a path which has to be examined carefully. The lines between European identity and European nationalism can easily blur. Therefore it is important to underline that a European “we-feeling” which is emphasized too strongly will lead to nationalism. Strong nationalism can carry xenophobia (in this case towards non-EU area or citizens) and rejection of minorities. However, the situation the EU is facing today (with the aftermath of the financial crisis and its noticeable social consequences) does not seem to be threatened by a



strengthened feeling of European national pride. Quite the opposite holds true: Euroscepticism and exclusive nationalism are on the rise in many areas within Europe so that, at the moment, more European thinking means more openness and tolerance.

### **3.2. Former research and perceptions on Erasmus and European identity**

Several studies have been conducted around the research question if student mobility (in particular the Erasmus program) fosters European identity. The outcomes are diverse. Some, such as King/ Ruiz-Gelicies (2003), Fligstein (2008), Recchi/ Favell (2009), Mitchell (2012, 2014), Van Mol (2009, 2012, 2013), or Van Mol/ Timmermann (2013), support the positive effect Erasmus has on European identity. Others (e.g. Wilson (2011), Sigalas (2010), Kuhn (2012), Maiworm (2001)) doubt the relationship or suggest the correlation to be rather small.

This section will describe the work of a few authors or institutions in more detail to provide an overview about existing academic research on the topic and show why different perceptions on Erasmus and European identity exist.

#### **3.2.1. Rejecting the impact of Erasmus on European identity**

There are several authors who doubt the impact of Erasmus on the construction of a European identity. They argue that those students who already are interested in other cultures and have a more European or cosmopolitan way of thinking will apply for an Erasmus stay abroad. For example, Theresa Kuhn suggests that the Erasmus program is “preaching to the converted” (Kuhn, 2012, p. 995). She further argues that university students belong to exactly the group of citizens (young and well educated) that already interacts internationally and is proven to be more open-minded towards Europe than other people, which is shown by frequent Eurostat results. Her article does not doubt the fact that more intra-European contact leads to less exclusive nationalism, but rather advises to use programs such as Erasmus to approach residents with a lower level of education. Since university students are more open towards the EU (benefitting from an integrated market economy does its share in this regard as well), a “ceiling effect” is reached so that an Erasmus exchange hardly makes a difference. This does not mean that students do not feel European – in fact it is quite the opposite: Students feel (compared to other groups of the population) very European, but this feeling does not increase due to an Erasmus stay. Her analysis of the Eurobarometer survey shows that the relationship between cross-border mobility and networks on European identity are significantly higher among lower educated people (Kuhn, 2012, p. 1004).

Unlike Kuhn, Emmanuel Sigalas (2010) did not compare groups of people with different educational backgrounds but instead constructed a longitudinal study among British students. His research also supports the thesis that the Erasmus stay (the aim of which is to bring students from different nationalities together and let them interact and learn from each other in order to build up a sense of trans-border affection and identity) does not necessarily foster the feeling of being European and can even have a diminishing effect on it. According to his analysis, the outcome has to do with the size and composition of the incoming Erasmus group: Firstly, his findings suggest that students rather move in groups of exchange students, since connecting with fellow incomings is obviously easier than finding friends in established groups within the host country. Secondly, the level of communication within all groups (and nationalities) of exchange students is high, but high-quality conversations are

usually held with people from the own country of origin. This way, relationships towards fellow European students tend to stay on the surface and break off very quickly after the stay.

However, it is questionable if communicating with students from other nationalities really has a diminishing effect on the establishment of a European “we-feeling”. After all, it is about feeling prone to Europe and its people so in this sense it is a good thing to have as many international contacts as possible.

Sigalas’ analysis shows that overall, Erasmus did not strengthen the feeling of the participant’s European identity over time. In cases of a lot of socializing with other Europeans, the level of identity rose modestly, showing that too much interaction with co-nationals is not necessarily a good thing.

Furthermore, Sigalas study points out that age seems to play a role: Younger students were more likely to experience identity growth than older students.

### **3.2.2. Affirming the impact of Erasmus on European identity**

Most research on Erasmus and European identity affirms the fact that the former has a positive effect on the latter. Since quite a number of papers were published regarding the topic but space and content of this thesis are limited, only six authors and their work shall be introduced at this point.

A very constant contributor to the field of international student mobility is Christof van Mol who published work on the topic in 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013 and 2014. In his most recent paper he and Christiane Timmermann analyzed the determinants of intra-European Student mobility on the basis of qualitative in-depth interviews and quantitative online-surveys in six European Member States (Austria, Belgium, Italy, Norway, Poland, and the United Kingdom). They show that, contrary to the expectations, differences in the socio-economic background are not statistically significant in most MS, except Belgium as the enrolment for tertiary education is more inclusive there. Furthermore, personal reasons (e.g. aim to learn a new language), and social networks (e.g. family or friends who have spent time abroad) are important determinants of studying in a different country (Van Mol & Timmermann, 2014, pp. 470-473).

However, van Mol/ Timmermann did not go into detail on the possibility that access to tertiary education is not equally achievable for all social groups in the first place, as it was pointed out by the European Students’ Union (see chapter 3). In this manner, social exclusion could serve as an antecedent which influences the independent variable (studying) before students spend an actual thought about a semester abroad. Although the authors touch upon this topic by saying that the general access to tertiary education is more inclusive in Belgium, they do not elaborate further on this point. It is also possible that exactly because mostly people from higher socio-economic spheres enter tertiary education, money does not play that much of a role as a hindering factor to participate on an Erasmus exchange. It would have been a meaningful contribution to the paper’s outcome if access to tertiary education had been included as well.

While the study from 2014 focused on determinant factors for students to decide to go abroad in the first place, van Mol (2013) also spent some thought on the idea that mobility, and thus the mixing of (especially) young adults, would lead to European cohesion and the creation of a “People’s Europe” and European citizens. He based his research on the concept of multiple identities and the notion that “European identity should not be regarded equally as identification with the EU and its institutions [but that] Europe can be divided into multiple Europes” (Van Mol, 2013, p. 210).

Clustering the survey group (from nine universities in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Norway, and Poland) into non-mobile, potentially mobile, future mobile and mobile students, he let them rank their identification with Europe. To do so, van Mol made use of a method-mix of qualitative interviews and an online survey. He results that the degree of a growing identity through student mobility differs within the European MS which he traces back to historical factors. For instance, Belgium and Italy have participated in the European project since the beginning so students there might grow up in a context in which the EU is more established. Furthermore, the presence of Europe in the everyday life plays an important role in the personal perception towards Europe. Also, his findings suggest that the experience abroad does not necessarily foster European identification (no big differences between the groups of future mobile and mobile students). However, he concludes that through the positioning in a social network abroad (relational identification), identification processes towards Europe take place and the idea of Europe becomes more multi-layered through students' experiences abroad (Van Mol, 2013, p. 220). Concluding it can be said that although van Mol is a promoter of the idea that one aspect of reaching a "People's Europe" is student mobility, his work also underlines the fact that measuring identity is hard, as it is a multidimensional concept. Furthermore, the results show that student mobility does – but not in all cases – promote a European identity (which of course would be just another layer to the multiple identities one has).

Another investigation among predominantly British students shall be mentioned in this sub-section: a longitudinal study published by Kristine Mitchell in 2014. Bearing in mind the multidimensional phenomenon of European identity, she considered both self-identification *as* European and identification *with* Europe. She criticizes other authors such as Sigalas (2010, whose work is presented above) for studying the "Moreno question"<sup>3</sup> too exclusively. She objects to the idea that Erasmus participants already have a close attachment towards Europe and that – as a result – studying abroad does not make a difference (as for instance remarked by Kuhn, 2012). Mitchell's analysis shows that, even among students (who are the group most prone to feel European), three-quarters of participants who "never" identified with Europe before Erasmus thought themselves as Europeans at the second wave of the study (Mitchell, 2014, pp. 9, 10). Like van Mol, Mitchell also finds out that the level of reduction of exclusive national identification varies among European MS. Although her country of focus, Britain, is at the bottom of the list with a reduction of 14.6% (as opposed to a reduction by 76.3% in Italy) this nevertheless shows that the Erasmus group experienced significant positive change towards feeling more European (Mitchell, 2014, p. 11).

A paper widely discussed in the recent literature (for instance by Mitchell, 2014; van Mol, 2013) was published in 2003 by Russel King and Enric Ruiz-Gelicies. By making use of three questionnaire surveys in Sussex the team found out that the samples of those having spent a year abroad were clearly more pro-European than the comparator-groups (none year-abroad graduates, pre year-abroad students) (King & Ruiz-Gelicies, 2003, p. 242). Furthermore, students who spent a year abroad seem to be more favorable of European integration, feel themselves as belonging to Europe and have more knowledge of European affairs (p. 245)

### **3.3. Research question and hypotheses**

Most of the authors in the present literature advocate the position that student mobility has a positive impact on the feeling of European identity. Furthermore, personal experience and

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<sup>3</sup> Moreno question: "Do you in the near future see yourself as [nationality] only, [nationality] and European, European and [nationality] or European only?"

conversations with exchange students lead me to support the thesis that long-term stays abroad help to lose one's feeling of exclusive nationalism and shift the feeling of attachment towards Europe. Erasmus means interacting with students from all over the continent, from all over the world even, and holds the opportunity to build stronger and deeper relationships than a short holiday acquaintance.

The Erasmus-program was chosen to study the effect of a stay abroad on the feeling of European identity as it is one of the biggest exchange programs worldwide. It is relatively easy to access (when being a student or member of university staff) and even supports participants with a pocket money to spend. Erasmus fosters intercultural dialogue and multiculturalism, since participants travel abroad, learn (or improve) a foreign language, communicate, meet and network. As the program was established in 1988 and has been growing ever since, a lot of international partnerships and marriages (which are classified as strong ties of European social integration [Delhey, 2004, p. 17]) developed through the exchange. Often cited are the "Erasmus-babies", which the Educational Commissioner depicted at about one million in 2014 (Demling, 2014). As a result, it can be assumed that all the prerequisites to build a feeling of solidarity among the European peoples exists.

Thus, the present study is based on the (research) question if students who spent time abroad (especially in the course of the Erasmus-program) feel more European due to their stay in a foreign country and the resulting international contacts and interactions. As identity is a multi-layered concept which is hard to coin down to only "studying abroad", a set of four hypotheses will be tested. All factors may have an influence on one's self-identification with Europe.

In line with Karl Deutsch's theory of social integration, Delhey's assumption of mutual relevance through exchange mobility and the research done by (among others) Mitchell (2012, 2014), van Mol (2013) and King/ Ruiz-Gelicies (2003), I also expect that studying abroad helps to shift one's feeling of identity from a national towards a more European dimension:

Hypothesis 1: Students who experienced an Erasmus stay abroad are more likely to have a stronger European identity than students who did not experience an Erasmus stay abroad.

However, the objection can be made that Erasmus is not the only mobility tool and that university students may have spent longer periods of time in foreign countries before going to college (for instance by living abroad with their parents or by doing a high school exchange). Furthermore, Erasmus is limited to the European Union (and Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and Turkey) so that other mobility tools have to be used when wanting to spend time in other areas of the world. Thus, I am also interested in knowing if a general stay abroad (three months or more), not matter in which context, has an effect on the feeling of European identity - which I presume it does:

Hypothesis 2: Students who have experienced a long-term stay abroad of three months or more are more likely to feel European than students who have not.

University is often also called jestingly "marriage market", a joke which of course alludes to the fact that many students find their spouses during university.<sup>4</sup> The European Commission supports this

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<sup>4</sup> The average age when marrying in Germany is 30.9 years (Statista, 2015), the average years in a relationship until marrying are 4.7 years (Schneider & Rüger, 2008, p. 142). When knowing that the average age on

fact by finding out that 33% of Erasmus-mobile (and 32% of mobile alumni) are or were in a relationship with a person who has another nationality as them. Among non-mobile persons, the number lays at 13% (European Commission, 2014, p. 130).

Naturally, this effect does not only happen with regards to romantic relationships but also to friendships. Likewise, one can have very close friends (or even boy- or girlfriends) without ever having left the home turf for a longer period of time. I assume social interaction with “foreigners” to have a diminishing effect on the feeling of inclusive nationalism. This assumption is again in line with Karl Deutsch’s (1966 [1953]) and Fligstein’s (2008) communication-based argument.

Hypothesis 3: Having foreign friends or partners increases the likelihood of feeling European.

Of course, social interaction does not only happen during stays in another country for more than three months. I do not expect a build-up of European identity to be exclusively relying on long-term stays abroad but rather I predict (in line with Delhey, 2004) travel-based cross-border interaction to also strengthen the feeling of European identity.

Hypothesis 4: Traveling abroad increases the likelihood of feeling European.

The the following figure will help to illustrate the four hypotheses:

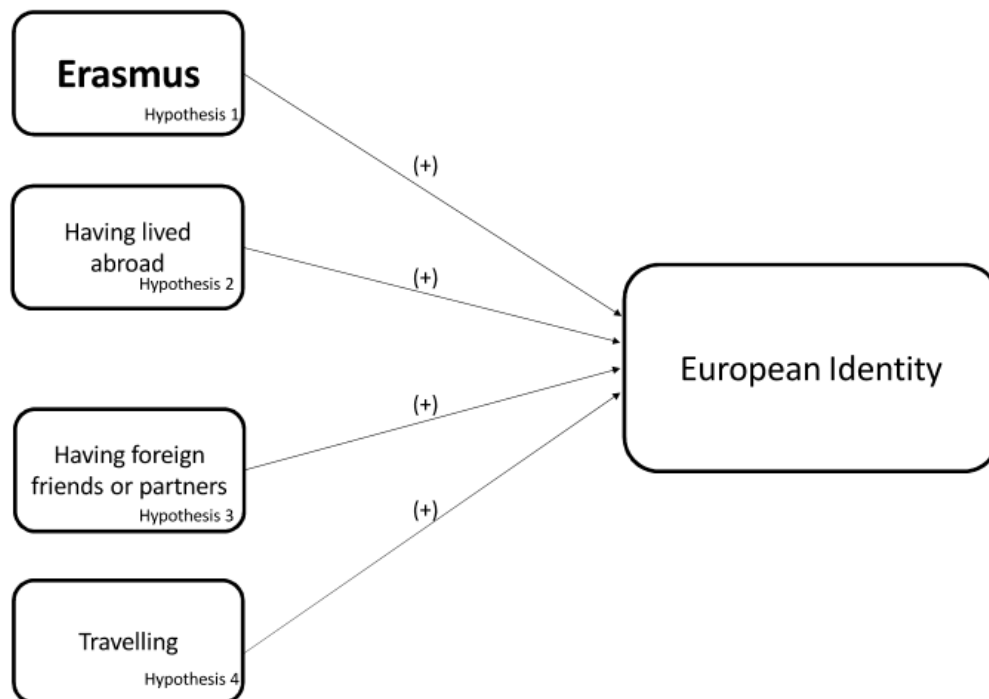


Figure 1: Display of Variables and Hypotheses. Source: own Compilation.

graduation is 24.7 years in Europe (Little & Tang, 2008, p. 3), it only makes sense that many students find their spouses during university and, thus, also during their time abroad.

In order to conduct the analysis, all of the four hypotheses presented above will be tested regarding the effect of the independent variables (X, the cause) on the depending variable (Y, the effect) which is in this case the level of European identity.

## **4. Methodology and Data-Collection**

As already mentioned in section three, different authors have different views on the relationship between social interaction and European identity (based on Karl Deutsch's "social integration theory"). Especially with regards to the direct impact of Erasmus on the establishment of a European identity, scholars disagree as in if- or how high the impact is. The variety of outcomes show that further research has to be done in order to demonstrate an existing relationship or falsify it.

In the following sections it will be described how the official public-opinion survey of the European Union asks about the feeling of European identity and how I operationalized the hypotheses described above.

### **4.1. The Eurobarometer**

The Eurobarometer is a public-opinion survey proposed by the European Commission which regularly measures the European population's perceptions on various topics. One of these topics is the feeling of European citizenship. Until 2006, the Eurobarometer asked if the participants had ever thought of themselves as not only their nationality but also as European, today it asks if, in the near future, they see themselves as Europeans. This so called "Moreno question" has become a standard item of self-identification with Europe and is posed in every Eurobarometer. Although its external validity is good due to very high numbers of cases, the construction of the question is often criticized in the literature. Especially the part holding "in the near future" suggests some vague feeling about a point of time in the (possibly) distant future. Furthermore, it is an established theory to assume every person to have a set of identities, so the question is criticized as being too narrow as there should not be a hierarchy between the different identities a person has (Bruter, 2005, p. 1153; Mitchell, 2014, p. 3). Nevertheless, Eurostat data is often used in research to either find correlations or to control own findings with the European sample as I will also do in this paper. As the new version of the question is subject of critique, this analysis will make use of the old Eurobarometer item as it was used until 2006.

### **4.2. Data-collection**

To operationalize the variables, an online-survey with twenty-three items was set up in English and German and was spread via the University of Münster's (WWU) international office, a WWU-student mailing list, and social networks. A total of 502 participants filled out the questionnaire, the cleared number encompasses 476 people, dropout rate was 9.8%. Participants were grouped into (1) people having been abroad, and (2) students without international experience, which were to serve as a control group. A difficulty posed the classification of students. It would not make sense to only focus on Erasmus mobility, since the participants could have lived abroad with their parents, went on a high school exchange, travelled or lived in another country after finishing school, be doing Erasmus at the moment, or are Erasmus alumni. Moreover, comparable programs or complete degrees which

can be done outside the home country exist besides Erasmus. Because of this range of possibilities I decided to explicitly ask for all of these options and focus the research on international mobility, but Erasmus mobility in particular.<sup>5</sup> If participants had chosen more than one option, I asked them to think about their experiences within a student mobility program when answering the questions. In the survey, a stay abroad is defined as living in a country for more than three months. This resulted in a control group of 50 students. The test-group thus encompasses 423 people, 326 of whom had been on Erasmus (although the possibility that these students also spent time abroad on other occasions cannot be ruled out).

Roughly, the questions can be grouped into four categories: (1) Erasmus, (2) Europe, (3) Family and Friends, and (4) Personal Information (see annex for all items). Since it was my aim to explore the feeling of European identity, the center item of the questionnaire was a Eurobarometer-question: “Do you ever feel yourself as not only your own nationality but also European? Does this happen always, often, sometimes, never, I don’t know?” Besides this, Europe-items also asked about interest for European subjects, and if the participant became aware of any European topics during the stay abroad.

In the category “Erasmus” a whole range of questions regarding the stay abroad were posed, some of which are not necessarily important for the outcome of the study. These items were intended to make the questionnaire interesting to answer and to not only have questions concerning the EU or European identity. For example, I asked about the importance of a number of experiences<sup>6</sup>, if the participant spent more time on free-time activities, or if he or she would recommend going on Erasmus.

The questionnaire also asked why the respondent went abroad (opportunity of personal development, learning a new language, better understanding of host country, improving career opportunities, getting to know something new, friends/ relatives go/went abroad as well) – or why he/ she did NOT go abroad (lack of support from personal environment, private situation did not allow it, costs too high, avoidance of delays in curriculum vitae, preferring a context one knows).

The category “Family and Friends” aimed at checking the participant’s social networks, since several authors showed that it matters if family and friends support the exchange or have been abroad themselves (e.g. Carins & Smyth (2011), Van Mol & Timmeman, (2014), Brooks & Waters, April (2011)). Thus, I posed questions regarding the internationality of the circle of friends, if parents or siblings had been abroad (friends were mentioned at one of the Erasmus-questions) and if the participant had ever been in a relationship with a person not from the home country.

The category “Personal Information” asked standard-items such as gender, age, city of study etc.

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<sup>5</sup> The question posed in the questionnaire was the following:

My situation at the moment (stay abroad): (1) I have never been abroad (for at least three months), (2) I have never been abroad, but I am in concrete preparation to study abroad/ go on Erasmus. Where?, (3) My family and I lived abroad. Where?, (4) I was abroad before my studies/ during my time at high school (for at least three months), (5) I am graduating abroad/ am doing a cooperation degree in two countries. Or have done so in, (6) I am abroad on an Erasmus exchange (or comparable) program at the moment, (7) I have already done an Erasmus exchange/ studied abroad.

<sup>6</sup> The following experiences were very important for my time abroad (e.g. Erasmus): (1) Stunning Nature, (2) Meeting interesting people, (3) Getting to know my own limits, (4) To find my big love, (5) Broadening my academic horizon, (6) Trips to new cities and places, (7) Social or political engagement. 1-5 scale.

## 5. Analyzing the research results

In this section the four hypotheses developed in section 3.3 will be tested in order to find out if a correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable exists. However, before doing so, a summary of the different outcomes will be given in a descriptive manner to provide an overview about the existing dataset. Afterwards, it will also be compared to official data from the university of Münster and to results from the eurostat-surveys published in December 2014 and September 2006.

### 5.1. Representativeness of the dataset

The dataset is composed of 473 cases, aged between 18 and 32. Hence, it can be assumed that the majority of the sample is still studying or has only finished his or her degree a short time ago (the questionnaire was sent around to the two last Erasmus outgoing groups, who left in 2013 and 2014). As 77% of the sample indicated "Münster" as their city of study, it is worth having a look at the statistic of outgoings from the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität (WWU) Münster and compare it with the study at hand in order to check the dataset's external validity. At the WWU, 34.1% of outgoings were male, in my sample the amount of males only accounts 28.2%. As the figures are similar, it can be assumed that the external validity of the data is relatively good. When looking at faculties, the allocation seems to be more or less equal as well: Most areas of study are represented in a similar percentage in the sample at hand. Only students of economics are represented poorly in my sample (11.7% instead of 20% WWU-outgoings), social sciences on the other hand compose 14.3% in my study instead of 8.4% in the Uni Münster statistic<sup>7</sup>. Other major irregularities can be explained by the fact that I classified students with two subjects (especially ongoing teachers) into a special group whilst they are included into the different faculties in the official statistic.

This comparison suggests that there is some comparability between the general group of the Uni Münster's outgoings and my sample, but that one has to be careful when generalizing results. This applies to generalizing among Münster students but even more so to the general population, as the sample was not chosen randomly and the case group does not reflect the general (German) population of university students at all.

To test upon the internal validity of the sample, a comparison between testgroup and control group shall be performed with respect to the distribution of age and sex: The average age among the control group is 22.53 years, the test group is on average about one year older, that 23.21 years. This small difference between the samples could be the result of the questionnaire being sent to the previous two Erasmus yeargroups, some of whom may have already finished their degrees. Furthermore, the control group is mostly put together of people I know (in-) directly, as most people without international experiences will have filled out the questionnaire because they knew me (it was spread through social media). This way, the composition of the group is a bit younger on the one hand, and also rather clustered. Considering the sample size of the control group which is 50 participants (the prevailing view to be the smallest possible sample size), some of the control group's results could be blurred.

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<sup>7</sup> Especially the high amount of social sciences could be due to the fact that I am a student of political science and also spread the questionnaire via facebook. As many of my friends also study social sciences, the number may be greater. Furthermore, social science students also deal with social science research so they might be more interested in filling out a questionnaire sent around via Email.



The gender distribution among control and test group is also only roughly similar: 34.9% of the control group is male as opposed to 27.7% of the test group (accordingly are 65.1% of the control female, and 72.1% of the test group<sup>8</sup>).

It can be concluded that the two groups are roughly similar but not completely constructed the same way which limits the internal validity of the study.

Based on the questionnaire, six variables were developed which will be used to check upon the hypotheses that students who have (1) been on Erasmus, (2) lived abroad in any other context, (3) have (had) a relationship with a foreign person or have many international friends, or (4) travel a lot, are more likely to feel European than those students who did (or do or have been doing) none of these things.

## 5.2. Descriptive statistics on the variables

An extensive analysis of the four hypotheses (as depicted in figure 1) will be carried out in the next sections but some first descriptive observations shall be made at this stage already to give an overview on the collected data

As table 1 shows, three of these six items are dichotomously (yes/no) coded to find out if the participant, for instance, had been on Erasmus or not. However, students were asked to rank their feeling of European identity on a 1-4 scale, indicate their number of travels and amount of foreign. Table 1 also gives an overview about modes, (and if possible) medians and means of the six main items. The results are furthermore depicted by the following bar charts.

	<b>EU identity<sup>9</sup></b>	<b>Erasmus<sup>10</sup></b>	<b>General time abroad<sup>11</sup></b>	<b>Foreign Relationship p<sup>12</sup></b>	<b>Foreign Friends<sup>13</sup></b>	<b>Int. travelling<sup>14</sup></b>
<b>minimum</b>	1	0	0	0	1	1
<b>maximum</b>	4	1	1	1	5	6
<b>mean</b>	-	-	-	-	-	3.55
<b>median</b>	3	-	-	-	2	3
<b>mode</b>	3	1	1	0	2	3

Table 1: overview on used variables, source: own survey among Münster students.

<sup>8</sup> One person in the test group said to feel neither male nor female (0.20 %).

<sup>9</sup> EU identity: Eurobarometer-question. Scaled from 1= always to 4= never (5 [= I don't know] excluded), nominal scale

<sup>10</sup> Erasmus: 0 = Has not been on Erasmus; 1= has been on Erasmus, dichotomously coded.

<sup>11</sup> Time abroad: 0= has not spent time abroad; 1= has spent time abroad, dichotomously coded.

<sup>12</sup> Foreign Relationship: 0= has not had a relationship with a foreign person; 1= has had a relationship with a foreign person, dichotomously coded.

<sup>13</sup> Foreign Friends, friends with a migratory background: Scaled from 1= None to 5= all, ordinal scale.

<sup>14</sup> Travelling: Stays abroad during previous 5 years: Scaled from 1= never to 6 = more than 20 times, although this item is not coded in a strictly metrical manner, it is widely accepted in the social sciences to use it as such.

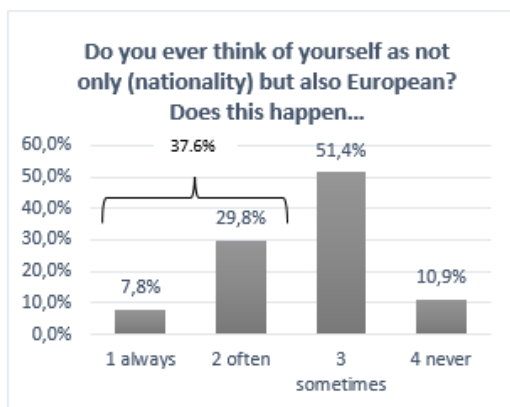


Figure 2: European identity, valid percentages. Source: own survey among Münster students

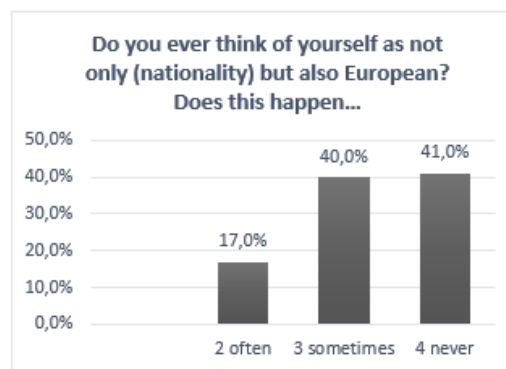


Figure 3: European identity, valid percentages. Source: own illustration, based on: Eurobarometer results for Germany (09/2006).

Figures 2-4 shows the allocation of answers to the question on European identity, taking into consideration my study, and the 2006 and 2014 Eurobarometer results for Germany. As figure 2 shows, most participants of the present study (51.4%) “sometimes” think of themselves as European besides their own nationality, while 7.8% “always” agree to feel European. The question is now if this outcome stands in contrast to or is in line with the overall view within the population. As I used the same question as in the Eurobarometer until 2006, it is easy to compare the two findings with each other. For this purpose, the German Eurobarometer-results will be used, as 95.66% of this study’s participants indicated to attend a university in Germany.<sup>15</sup>

When comparing the data, it is striking that more than twice as many participants of my study categorized themselves as “often” or “always” feeling European (37.6%) opposed to only 17% in the Eurobarometer-survey of 2006. This result shows that my sample (students with an average age of 22.7 years) feel more European than the the average population.

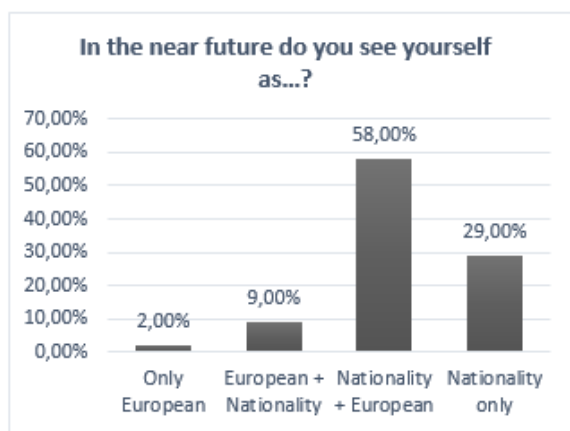


Figure 4: European identity, valid percentages. Source: own illustration, based on Eurobarometer results for Germany (12/2014).

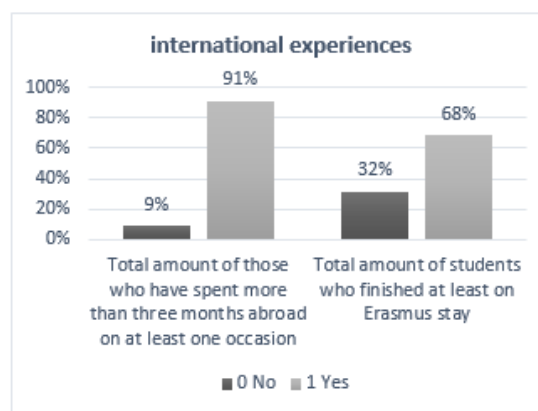


Figure 5: international experiences of the sample. Source: own survey among Münster students.

As mentioned in section 3.2.1, the item of European identity as I used it was changed in the Eurobarometer in 2006 into the “Moreno question”, which asks about the feeling of being European in the near future. Although the question was changed significantly, it shows a tendency which can roughly be compared to my outcomes: Again the national results are significantly lower than the present survey’s outcome. According to the latest Eurobarometer results, a total of 11% felt either “only European” or “European and German” which is even lower than the 17% who indicated to “often” feel European in 2006 (it is questionable here if the difference is only due to the time passed or also due to the way the question is composed). As the present survey results to 37.6% of

<sup>15</sup> 441 people said that they studied in a German city (including double-degrees), 20 named a University outside of Germany. 15 did not fill out the assigned box so they were excluded from this particular statistic.

participants feeling European (always or often), it can be reaffirmed that students seem to feel less exclusive nationalistic than the overall population (as it was for instance suggested by Gabel, 1998, King/ Ruiz-Gelicies 2003, p.242 and Kuhn 2012, p. 998, Citrin/ Sides, 2004).

But it is important to take into consideration that my questionnaire addressed students who spent longer periods of time abroad (both as part of the Erasmus program or on other occasions) which resulted in the fact that the control group (students without international experience) consists of only 50 people. This way, 89.4% of participants spent time abroad at least once, 68% of this group went on Erasmus (as can be seen in Figure 4). From these figures the question arises if the feeling of European identity within my sample was so high because most of the sample lived abroad or because students generally tend to feel less exclusive nationalistic. The next section will try to answer this question by testing the four hypotheses which were already presented in section 3.1, assuming that it is indeed the (Erasmus) stay abroad which causes a feeling of European identity.

### 5.3. Hypothesis 1: Erasmus and European identity

The first hypothesis assumes that students who spent an Erasmus semester abroad are more likely to feel European than those students who did not study abroad as part of the Erasmus program. The following table shows a crosstabulation in which the different answering patterns from Erasmus and non-Erasmus students with regards to the level of European identity ("Do you not only feel [nationality] but also European?") are stated. Regarded as Erasmus participants are students who finished one (or several) Erasmus stays. A first glance at the table shows that the given answers did not vary much among the two groups. What is striking is that 8.4% of participants who did *not* go on Erasmus stated to feel "very" European as opposed to only 7.3% of those who did go on Erasmus. Although the difference only amounts about 1 per cent, the result is a contradiction to Hypothesis 1. A Chi-square test affirms this first impression: The result is not statistically significant (with a Chi-square of 0.520, see annex for the complete table), showing that the Hypothesis cannot be accepted: No correlation exists between the items, as Cramer's V indicates a result of close to 0 (0.071).

Erasmus*Eurobarometer							
			Eurobarometer				Total
			1=always	2=often	3=sometimes	4=never	
Erasmus	0=no	Count	12	41	70	20	143
		% within ERASMUS	8.4%	28.7%	49.0%	14.0%	100.0%
	1=yes	Count	22	92	160	29	303
		% within ERASMUS	7.3%	30.4%	52.8%	9.6%	100.0%
Total	Count		34	133	230	49	446
	% within ERASMUS		7.6%	29.8%	51.6%	11.0%	100.0%

Table 2: Crosstabulation European identity ("How often do you not only feel [nationality] but also European?") and Erasmus. source: own survey among Münster students.

### 5.4. Hypothesis 2: Having lived abroad and European identity

As an Erasmus stay does not seem to cause a feeling of European identity, it could be possible that the feeling is rather rooted in any of long-term stay in a foreign country. One may argue that Erasmus is only one mean of spending time abroad and that young people may as well develop a feeling of

cosmopolitanism through any other scheme. Just like in section 5.3, a crosstabulation can be constructed between having lived abroad (dichotomously coded yes/no) and the feeling of European identity (1-4 scale). However, like in section 5.3, a first look at the results does not reveal any large differences between the test group (those who spent time abroad) and the control group (those who did not spend time abroad; see annex for the table). Again, this first observation is reflected in a Chi-Square. The value amounts 0.517 which is bigger than 0.05 showing that the result is not significant at the 5% level. Cramer's V amounts 0.071 which indicates a non-existing correlation between the two items. Thus, the hypothesis that students who have been abroad feel more European than those who have not been abroad must be neglected.

### 5.5. Hypothesis 3: Having foreign friends/ partners and European identity

Another assumption could be that it is not the experience of having lived in a foreign country which makes one feel more European but international contacts and relationships one builds in the home country as well as during travels and long-term stays. Especially marriages are classified as "strong ties" between different cultures (see Delhey, 2004; Fligstein, 2008). As the average age to marry is 30.9 years in Germany (Statista, 2015), it is not very likely for students to be married at all. Thus, in the questionnaire it was asked if the participant ever was in a relationship with a person from a foreign country or with a migratory background (binary coded: yes/no). Again, a crosstabulation can be constructed between the two items to give an overview on the matter (see table 3). This time, the differences between the two categories (having had a foreign partner or not having had a foreign partner) are a lot bigger than in the previous sections. For instance, 13.5% of those with a foreign (ex-) partner stated to "always" feel European, the control group only amounted 4.7%. Likewise, 39.2% of students who have or had a foreign relationship said to "often" feel European, again the control group added up to less (25.3%). When constructing a Chi-square test, these first observations can be underlined, since the test revealed a highly significant result (Chi-square of 0.000; see annex for the complete table). In order to look upon the effect X (having a foreign partner) has on Y (the feeling of European identity), Cramer's V can be interpreted. Cramer's V amounts 0.245 which is a small to moderate effect. So it can be concluded that having a foreign partner has a small to moderate effect on the feeling of European identity. However, it is important to note that the direction of the effect can only be guessed, it may likewise work into both directions, as it is not possible to make statements on the causality when dealing with cross-sectional studies.

International Relationship * Eurobarometer						
			Eurobarometer			
			1=always	2=often	3=sometimes	4= never
International Relationship	0=no	Count	14	75	167	41
		% within Relationship	4.7%	25.3%	56.2%	13.8%
	1=yes	Count	20	58	62	8
		% within Relationship	13.5%	39.2%	41.9%	5.4%
Total			34	133	229	49
			7.6%	29.9%	51.5%	11.0%

Table 3: Crosstabulation, European identity and international relationships, source: own survey among Münster students.

One last remark about relationships and foreign stays shall be given at this point: In the questionnaire, one item asked about the importance of certain events during the time abroad (the question was only given to the test group). One of these events was "to find my big love" (scaled

1=very important to 5= not important at all) Of course, most participants denied this statement, but 15 people (3.6%) said that finding their big love actually was a very important part of their foreign experience. Even though a correlation (using Spearman's Rho) between European identity and the love item is not statistically significant, in this regard the number may speak for itself.

Regarding foreign friends it was asked how high the amount of close foreign friends (or friends with a migratory background) was (scaled from 1=none to 5=all). As both items (European identity and "foreign friends") are ordinal scales (and not just binary as before), Spearman's rho can be used to see if having foreign friends (X) has an effect on the feeling of European identity (Y). The results (as shown in Table 4) indicate a weak correlation of -0.111 which is significant at the 0.05 level. This means that the more foreign friends one has, the more European he or she tends to feel or the other way around, as the question is scored 1=always, to 4=never. Again it must be noted that a correlation does not indicate the direction of a causality. It could also be that the more European one feels the more foreign friends one has. Although the result is significant, an outcome of -0.111 shows that only very little correlation between the two factors exists. The assumption that having foreign friends has an effect on the feeling of European identity can thus be considered, but the correlation is a small one. However, it could be that this weak result is based on the way the question was posed: It asked to rank the amount of foreign friends between (1) none, (2) in the minority, (3) more or less equal, (4) the majority, and (5) all. It can be assumed that even students who spent a lot of time living abroad still have many home country friends as the mean was 2 and only 4.4% and 0.2% of participants chose options (4) or (5). I am convinced that students build great friendships abroad but it is due to the question's weak formulation that results were rather low. But these speculations cannot change the results: There is a small correlation between having foreign friends and the feeling of European identity.

Correlations				
			Eurobarometer	Foreign Friends
Spearman's rho	Eurobarometer	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.111*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.019
		N	446	446
	Foreign Friends	Correlation Coefficient	-.111*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	.
		N	446	473

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Spearman's rho correlation between European identity and foreign friends. Source: own survey among Münster students.

## 5.6. Hypothesis 4: International travelling and European identity

As already stated above, it is a very common assumption that traveling leads to a smaller degree of national identity. One experiences and sees different things, interacts with people and thus learns and broadens one's horizon which helps to shift the focus to a wider level (in this case European identity). In my questionnaire the main item to test international travels was the classification into number of stays abroad within the last five years (ranking from never to more than 20 times). Of course, spending a semester abroad also counts as one "travel", but participants who had not spent more than three months abroad were also included into this type of question.

First of all, it is striking that the group of exchange students seems to be more mobile than the non-exchange group: The mode of those who had never been abroad lies at “approx. 1-5 times”, for exchange students the mode was “approx. 11-15 times” (see annex for the crosstabulation). This shows that (former) exchange students are more mobile. If this is due to their stay abroad or whether the stay abroad was chosen because of wanderlust has to be left to other research.

When testing the correlation between international travelling (X) and the level of European identity (Y) by using Spearman’s Rho, a significant (at the 0.05 level) result can be found which amounts to a level of -0.172. Again, the negative number can be explained by the fact that the identity item is scaled from 1-4, with one being the highest possible answer. The result shows that a weak correlation between the amount of travels (more than three days) and the level of European identity exists. Therefore, it seems that those who travel frequently feel slightly more European than those who do not.

### **5.7. Concluding remarks on the analysis**

In the analysis, the effect of four independent variables on the dependent variable, level of European identity, was tested. The main hypothesis of the study was constructed around the assumption that an Erasmus stay abroad helps to foster a feeling of European identity. However, this presumption had to be rejected, as no correlation was found. A similar result could be found with regards to the second hypothesis. It dealt with the idea that, if an Erasmus stay had no effect on the level of European identity, general stays abroad could do the trick. This thought is based on the fact that Erasmus is only one mobility tool out of many. But the second hypothesis’ test results could likewise not support the assumption of mobility being correlated with the feeling of European identity.

However, when testing the other two hypotheses (having foreign friends and partners on the one hand and international travels on the other hand), some more promising results could be found. Having (had) a foreign partner showed the most significant (highly significant) result with the highest correlation among the tested items. It turned out that a small to moderate effect between having a foreign partner and the feeling of belonging to Europe can be found. This supports the views of Jan Delhey (2004), as a marriage means the probably highest level of quantitative and qualitative communication between two cultures, which he calls strong ties (Delhey, 2004, p. 15). Having foreign friends also has an explanatory effect on the feeling of European identity, however a rather small one (Spearman’s Rho indicated a level of -0.111).

Those participants who travel frequently also showed a higher level of European identity than those students who do not go abroad very often (Spearman’s Rho correlation of -0.172, significant at the 0.05 level). The analysis also revealed that students who have been abroad travel more often, but it has to be left to other research what is cause and what is factor in this regard.

These results show that it is not necessarily the fact that a person has lived abroad for a certain amount of time which makes him or her feel less prone to the country of origin. Rather, international communication seems to be the key. Having a foreign partner or foreign friends has more of an effect than the simply living abroad (although it is easier – but not exclusively limited – to get to know international people when not living in the home country). Furthermore, frequent travels were found to build a weak correlation with the level of European identity.

## 6. Limitations of the study

As mentioned above, the results of the study cannot be demised onto the general population of (German) university students, as the sample was constructed of mostly Münster-based students. But external validity is further limited since a rough comparison between the WWU's statistic and the study at hand showed some different results with regards to proportion of sex and faculties. The same applies for a comparison between control group and test group. However, the present paper shows some directions and trends and adds another piece of research to the different results which have been found in European identity research.

A problem respecting the construct validity arose with regards to answering the questions. Some participants who had not been on Erasmus but participated in a range of other long-term stays abroad reflected that they found it hard to answer the questionnaire. This was already an issue which came up in the construction of the survey. As I did not want to exclude other forms of foreign stays (which would not have been possible anyway since many people spent time abroad before going on Erasmus) I already faced some difficulties in formulating the questions precisely but still open enough for all groups to answer them. Apparently this was reflected in the results. But, most questions people had difficulties with were not evaluated in this paper. It can be assumed that the core variables' construct validity is high as these questions rather dealt with the "hard facts" or were items which were used by official statistics (such as the Eurobarometer) before.

Furthermore, it must be highlighted that the present study follows a cross-sectional approach in which the data was only collected once. Finding correlations does not necessarily mean to also prove which factor influences which (causality). It could well be that people who feel more European go abroad, have foreign friends or travel frequently. Thus, independent and dependent variable may influence each other ( $X \leftrightarrow Y$ ). In order to make valid statements about causality, a longitudinal study (measuring data at least twice) would have to be done.

It also has to be mentioned that the control group was rather small, just hitting the minimum of fifty people. The test group's sample was larger ( $n=423$ ) and relatively mixed as the questionnaire was spread via two mailing lists. However, the test group's sample size is not random and it can be assumed that the control group mainly consists of (facebook-) friends of mine. Students who have been on Erasmus most likely filled out the survey themselves but people without international experience probably only answered the questions because they knew me or were explicitly asked to do so. Thus, the possibility that third variable also play a role cannot be ruled out. It could be, for instance, that party membership, political activism or the presence of Europe/ the EU in everyday life also play a role regarding the feeling of European identity.

## 7. Conclusions

Cross-border interactions and student exchange mobility have long been a topic of research among scholars of European studies and various other fields (such as sociology, history or social anthropology). As it is one of the aims of the exchange program Erasmus to foster the feeling of European identity among the participants, it is a highly disputed question among academics if this effect is really reached by letting students attend a foreign university. The hypotheses the present study was based upon were oriented towards those scientists who affirmed the effect an Erasmus stay abroad has on the feeling of European identity. Especially the results of van Mol (2010, 2011, 2014), van Mol/Timmermann (2014), Mitchell (2012, 2014), and King/ Ruiz-Gelicies (2003) were

considered in this paper. These authors observed different aspects of student mobility and European identity and all came to the conclusion that those students who spent time abroad feel more European than those participants who did not study in a foreign country. Some, such as Mitchell (2014) constructed longitudinal studies in which the association *with* Europe and the feeling *as* a European was measured before and after the year abroad. Her outcomes affirm a positive development between the two.

In the present study, four hypotheses were tested, two of which directly dealt with the impact of spending time abroad and European identity. These two hypotheses expected students who (1) spent an Erasmus semester (or several semesters) or (2) more than three months (not necessarily bound to Erasmus) abroad to feel more European than those students who did not do so. However, based on the results of my analysis, these assumptions cannot be confirmed. No correlation between the items is present. What was striking, however, is the fact that the respondents of my sample (who were predominantly Münster students with an average age of 22.7 years) felt significantly more European than the average German population. When comparing my outcomes with the Eurobarometer results (one of the Eurobarometer questions was used for the questionnaire) it is interesting to see that more people in the present sample feel European than in the overall population (as described in section 5.2). This outcome (students feeling more attached to Europe) is supported by some scholars, one of whom is Theresa Kuhn (2012). However, Kuhn is an author who rejects the hypothesis that studying abroad and European identity are correlated. Her line of argumentation may help to make sense of the non-existing relationship between long term stays abroad and level of European identity, as revealed by this study. Kuhn does not doubt the fact that international interaction and communication help to establish a feeling of less exclusive nationalism (thus she is in line with Karl Deutsch's community-based approach here). But according to her, the Erasmus program approaches the exact wrong group of inhabitants: Kuhn argues that the program is "preaching to the converted" (Kuhn, 2012, p. 995). This is due to the fact that the level of European identity is especially high among university students who are young and well educated, as this group is very likely to positively benefit from European integration. It is as if a "ceiling effect" of (a very high) European identity is reached among students which cannot be extended further. Instead, the author argues that mobility tools should be provided for those parts of the population who are less prone to Europe in the first place (Kuhn, 2012, pp. 995, 998). As my results also revealed a strong tendency of the participants to feel European and no correlation between European identity and stays abroad could be found, Kuhn's argumentation gives a possible explanation for the lack of correlation between the two items.

However, although the study could not affirm the effect an Erasmus stay has on the feeling of European identity, it did derive some results with regards to international travels. As it turns out, a significant but weak correlation exists between the numbers of stays in a foreign country (three nights or more) and the attachment to Europe. This outcome is in line with Arend Lijpharts assumptions articulated in his article "Tourist traffic and integration potential" published in 1964. He indicated tourist traffic to be "only a small, but not necessarily insignificant factor in the very intricate and complex process of integration" (Lijphart, 1964, p. 252). Travelling (one form of which is a long term stay abroad) causes international interaction, getting to know foreign landscapes, cities and cultures. It can be assumed that an interplay of these reasons helps to develop a feeling of less exclusive nationalism and that they together add up to the "small factor of integration" Lijphart wrote about. If the European Commission really wants to stimulate a feeling of European identity she would thus be advised to continue the policy of easy cross-border travelling.



Furthermore, the study's outcome suggest international communication and the build-up of high quality relationships (i.e. friendships or amorous relationships) to be a determiner of the feeling of European identity. A small correlation (significant at the 0.05 level) could be found between the number of foreign friends and attachment to Europe. A highly significant result, which showed a small to medium correlation, was detected with respect to international relationships and the feeling of European identity. These two communicative aspects are in line with the theory developed by Delhey (2004), who indicated marriages to be the strongest tie between cultures, and researched published by Fligstein (2008) who assumed international interaction to make people feel more European (although he based his argumentation on interaction as part of the Erasmus program). Both authors follow the school of Karl Deutsch whose theory states that mobility and social interaction help to form a new national identity. Later, the idea of *mutual identities* took hold in academic research (see for example Smith, 1992; Delhey, 2004; Díez Medrano/Guitérrez, 2001), a concept which was also considered in this paper: Every person holds a variety of identities which are formed differently for every human being and are able to shift. So it is not the question if a person feels *exclusively* European but rather if a European identity exists and, if so, how strong it is next to other attachments (such as one's nation, city, sport's club or family).

Nevertheless, two major issues remain: Firstly, the study was only constructed in a cross-sectional manner and did not take into consideration longitudinal or before-and-after changes in the feeling of European identity. Whether or not the level of European identity changes over time, especially when having completed a semester abroad, could not be considered in this research. Secondly, the results can hardly be generalized as the participants were clustered around the University of Münster and because the control group was very small (50 people).

Although no correlation between Erasmus and the level of European identity could be found, the program is not necessarily meaningless. If it is true what Kuhn (2012) found out – namely that the level of awareness of and attachment to Europe grows more when people have a lower level of education – Erasmus should be loosened from its elitist approach. Instead, the European Commission should extend the program to students in practical trainings; a first step into this direction was already done through the introduction of Erasmus+ in 2014 (which will be revised by 2020). Now, not only academics but also trainees, staff, and volunteers can spend a period of time in another country (European Commission, 2015). This approach should be expanded and extended to widen the access for young people who do not attend university. But nevertheless it is not the only aim of the Bologna Process and Erasmus to build a large European social sphere. Although the framing of European minds might not be so fruitful, other aspects are approached by the program, such as cultural learning, organizational skills, learning of foreign languages, spreading of best practices and mutual learning in the academic field. Although the student exchange does not directly create support of the European Union this does not mean that other soft skills which are derived from the stay abroad are meaningless.

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# Annex

## 1. Questions

### 1.1. Section ER: Erasmus

[ER10] Classification (Multiple Choice)

**"My situation at the moment (stay abroad)"**

**ER10\_01** I have never been abroad (for at least three months).

**ER10\_02** I have never been abroad, but I am in concrete preparation to study abroad/ go on Erasmus. Where?

**ER10\_03** My family and I lived abroad. Where?

**ER10\_04** I was abroad before my studies/ during my time at high school (for at least three months)

**ER10\_07** I am graduating abroad/ am doing a cooperational degree in two countries. Or have done so in

**ER10\_05** I am abroad on an Erasmus exchange (or comparable) program at the moment

**ER10\_06** I have already done an Erasmus exchange/ studied abroad.

1 = Not checked

2 = Checked

**ER10\_02a** I have never been abroad, but I am in concrete preparation to study abroad/ go on Erasmus. Where?  
(free text)

**ER10\_03a** My family and I lived abroad. Where? (free text)

**ER10\_04a** I was abroad before my studies/ during my time at high school (for at least three months) (free text)

**ER10\_07a** I am graduating abroad/ am doing a cooperational degree in two countries. Or have done so in (free text)

**ER10\_05a** I am abroad on an Erasmus exchange (or comparable) program at the moment (free text)

**ER10\_06a** I have already done an Erasmus exchange/ studied abroad. (free text)

Free text

**[ER03] Reasons to study abroad (Scale [extremes labelled])**

**"For you personally, how important are/ were the following reasons to go abroad:"**

**ER03\_01** Opportunity of personal development

**ER03\_02** Learning a foreign language

**ER03\_03** Wish to better understand the host country

**ER03\_04** Wish to improve career opportunities

**ER03\_05** Getting to know something new

**ER03\_06** Friends/ relatives go/ went abroad during their studies as well

1 = extremely important

5 = not important at all

-9 = Not answered

**[ER04] Fun in Erasmus**

**"What is your opinion regarding the following statement? For most Erasmus-Students the focus of their semester abroad is rather at having a good time than academic forthcoming"**

1 = fully agree

2 = partly agree

3 = don't agree

-9 = Not answered

**[ER05] Experiences (Scale [extremes labelled])**

**"The following experiences were a very important part of my time abroad (e.g. Erasmus):"**

**ER05\_01** Stunning nature

**ER05\_02** Meeting interesting people

**ER05\_03** Getting to know my own limits

**ER05\_04** To find my big love

**ER05\_05** Broadening my academic horizon

**ER05\_06** Trips to new cities and places

**ER05\_07** Social or political engagement

1 = very important

5 = not important at all

-9 = Not answered

**[ER06] Other (Selection)**

1 = other

-9 = Not answered

**ER06\_01 other (free text)**

**[ER07] Free-time activities (Scale [extremes labelled])**

**ER07\_01 During my time on Erasmus/ abroad I spent more time on leisure activities than at home.**

**ER07\_02 For my taste, I got to know too few people from my host country during my stay abroad (e.g. Erasmus).**

1 = no

2 = yes

-9 = Not answered

**[ER08] Groups on Erasmus (Selection)**

**"During my stay abroad (e.g. Erasmus) I mainly moved in groups of..."**

**ER08 Groups on Erasmus**

1 = Mostly people from my home country

2 = Mostly Europeans (not from the host country)

3 = Most people from out of Europe

4 = Mostly people from the host country

5 = Mixed

-9 = Not answered

**[ER09] Recommending Erasmus (Scale [extremes labelled])**

**ER09\_01 I would always recommend to go on Erasmus.**

1 = no

2 = yes

-1 = I did not go on Erasmus

-9 = Not answered

**[ER11] Not abroad (Scale [extremes labelled])**

**"Why did you never spend a longer period of time abroad?"**

**ER11\_01 Lack of support from my personal environment**

**ER11\_02 The private situation did/ does not allow to go**

**ER11\_03 I never saw the necessity to go abroad**

**ER11\_04** The costs attached to an Erasmus semester/ stay abroad are too high for me

**ER11\_05** I want to avoid delays in my curriculum vitae.

**ER11\_06** I prefer to move within a context I know.

1 = fully agree

5 = Completely disagree

-9 = Not answered

**[ER12] Selection**

**ER12 Other-2**

1 = other

-9 = Not answered

**ER12\_01 other**

Free text

## **1.2. Section EU: Europa**

**[EU01] European Subjects (Horizontal Selection)**

**"European subjects interest me..."**

1 = a lot

2 =

3 =

4 =

5 = not at all

-9 = Not answered

**[EU02] Eurobarometer (Selection)**

**"Do you ever feel yourself as not only your own nationality but also European? Does this happen..."**

1 = always

2 = often

3 = sometimes

4 = never

5 = I don't know

-9 = Not answered

**[EU03] Aware of the EU (Scale [extremes labeled])**

**"Due to my stay abroad (e.g. Erasmus) I became aware of the following aspects of the European Union:"**



**EU03\_01** Different University Systems in different countries

**EU03\_02** Impact of the Euro-crisis

**EU03\_03** Function and working of European institutions

**EU03\_04** Social structures in different countries

**EU03\_05** My home country's foreign policy

**EU03\_06** Cultural similarities within Europe

**EU03\_07** Cultural differences within Europe

1 = very important

5 = not important at all

-9 = Not answered

**[EU04] Other (Selection)**

1 = other

-9 = Not answered

**EU04\_01** other

Free text

**[EU05] European Subjects (Scale [extremes labelled])**

**EU05\_01** How well informed do you feel you are about questions relating the EU?

1 = very well informed

5 = very badly informed

-9 = Not answered

### **1.3. Section FA: Family and Friends**

**[FA01] Parents (Scale [extremes labelled])**

**FA01\_01** Have/ has your parent(s) lived abroad (for at least three months)?

1 = Yes

2 = No

-1 = I don't know

-9 = Not answered

**[FA02] Siblings (Scale [extremes labelled])**

**FA02\_01** Have/ has your sibling(s) lived abroad (for at least three months)?

- 1 = Yes
- 2 = No
- 1 = I don't have siblings
- 9 = Not answered

**[FA03] stays abroad (Selection)**

"How often have you been abroad during the last five years (for at least three nights)?"

**FA03** stays abroad

- 1 = never
- 2 = 1 - 5 times
- 3 = Ca. 6 - 10 times
- 4 = Ca. 11 - 15 times
- 5 = Ca. 16 - 20 times
- 6 = More than 20 times
- 9 = Not answered

**[FA04] relationship (Horizontal Selection)**

"Are you or were you ever in a relationship with a person who is not (only) your own nationality?"

**FA04** relationship

- 1 = Yes
- 2 = No
- 9 = Not answered

**[FA05] Relationship 2 Horizontal Selection**

"If yes: Is/ was the person"

**FA05** relationship2

- 1 = European
- 2 = From outside Europe
- 9 = Not answered

**[FA06] Friends/ migration background (Selection)**

"How many of your close friends are foreigners or have a migration background?"

**FA06** Friends/ background of migration

- 1 = None
- 2 = The minority
- 3 = More or less equal
- 4 = The majority
- 5 = all
- 9 = Not answered

**1.4. Section PA: Personal Information**

**[PA01] Gender (Scale [extremes labeled])**

"Lastly, we would like to ask you for some personal information:"

**PA01\_01** Gender

- 1 = male
- 2 = female
- 1 = neither
- 9 = Not answered

**[PA02] Personal Information (Selection)**

**PA02** personal Information

- 1 = Age
- 2 = Country of birth
- 3 = Subject of study
- 4 = Semester of study
- 5 = City of study (home country)
- 9 = Not answered

**PA02\_01** Age

**PA02\_02** Country of birth

**PA02\_03** Subject of study

**PA02\_04** Semester of study

**PA02\_05** City of study (home country)

Free text

[PA03] Text Input

**[PA04] Financial Situation (Selection)**

"How much money do you have at hand per month?"

**PA04** Finanzielle Situation

1 =

-9 = Not answered

**[PA05] Financing Studies (Multiple Choice)**

"How do you finance your studies?"

**PA05\_04** I receive BAföG

**PA05\_02** I work

**PA05\_01** I am supported by my parents/ family financially

**PA05\_03** I receive money from an inheritance

**PA05\_06** I receive a scholarship

**PA05\_07** I rose a credit

**PA05\_08** I am using my own savings

**PA05\_05** other

1 = Not checked

2 = Checked

**PA05\_05a** other (free text)

Free text

**Questions and remarks**

"If you have questions or remarks regarding this questionnaire you may leave a comment here."

**PA03\_01** [01]

Free text



## 2. Testing the Hypotheses, other outputs

In the following, several SPSS outputs dealing with the hypotheses will be presented. They can serve as additional explanatory information.

### 2.1. Allocation of test group and control group

Abroad					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00=no	50	10.6	10.6	10.6
	1=yes	423	89.4	89.4	100.0
	Total	473	100.0	100.0	

### 2.2. Hypothesis 1: Erasmus → European identity

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.260 <sup>a</sup>	3	.520
Likelihood Ratio	2.192	3	.534
Linear-by-Linear Association	.240	1	.624
N of Valid Cases	446		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.90.

Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.071	.520
	Cramer's V	.071	.520
N of Valid Cases		446	

### 2.3. Hypothesis 2: Foreign stays → European identity

**Abroad \* Eurobarometer**

		Eurobarometer				Total
		1=always	2=often	3=sometimes	4=never	
Abroad	.00=No Count	1	14	25	6	46
	% within Abroad	2.2%	30.4%	54.3%	13.0%	100.0%
	1=Yes Count	33	119	205	43	400
	% within Abroad	8.3%	29.8%	51.2%	10.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	34	133	230	49	446
	% within Abroad	7.6%	29.8%	51.6%	11.0%	100.0%

**Symmetric Measures**

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.071	.517
	Cramer's V	.071	.517
N of Valid Cases		446	

### 2.4. Hypothesis 3: Foreign friends and partners → European identity

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.704 <sup>a</sup>	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	26.682	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	26.287	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	445		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.31.

**Symmetric Measures**

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.175	.321
	Cramer's V	.101	.321
N of Valid Cases		446	

## 2.5. Hypothesis 4: Travel → European identity

Travel \* Eurobarometer Crosstabulation

			Eurobarometer				Total
			1=always	2=often	3=sometimes	4=never	
Travel	2	Count	5	25	68	16	114
		% within Travel	4.4%	21.9%	59.6%	14.0%	100.0%
	3	Count	7	42	69	16	134
		% within Travel	5.2%	31.3%	51.5%	11.9%	100.0%
	4	Count	9	29	39	10	87
		% within Travel	10.3%	33.3%	44.8%	11.5%	100.0%
	5	Count	2	14	26	4	46
		% within Travel	4.3%	30.4%	56.5%	8.7%	100.0%
	6	Count	11	23	28	3	65
		% within Travel	16.9%	35.4%	43.1%	4.6%	100.0%
	Total	Count	34	133	230	49	446
		% within Travel	7.6%	29.8%	51.6%	11.0%	100.0%

Correlations

			Eurobarometer	Travel
Spearman's rho	Eurobarometer	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.172**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	446	446
	Travel	Correlation Coefficient	-.172**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	446	473

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).