

Palacky University in Olomouc
Faculty of Physical Culture

CZECH ERASMUS EXPERIENCE – Language, Travel and Self-development
(Bachelor thesis)

Author: Štěpán Přindiš, rekreologie
Supervisor: Mgr. Donald N. Roberson, Jr., Ph.D.
Olomouc 2011

Bibliographical identification

Author's first name and surname: Štěpán Přindiš

Title of the bachelor thesis: Czech Erasmus Experience – Language, Travel and Self-development

Department: Department of Kinantropology

Supervisor: Mgr. Donald N. Roberson, Jr., Ph.D.

The year of presentation: 2011

Abstract:

This study focuses on the topic of the Erasmus exchange program at the Faculty of Physical Culture of Palacky University, Olomouc, CZ. This mobility program plays a significant role in the improvement of education across Europe. The purpose of this study was to understand the various experiences of Czech Erasmus students. I created a questionnaire based on other Erasmus research, this was sent to 118 students with 71 participating. I found that Czech students went on Erasmus mainly to improve their language proficiency. The most favourite leisure time activity was traveling around host country and into the other countries. Erasmus experience also allowed Czech students to be more open to dialogue, flexible and self-confident. In conclusion, the Erasmus experience had a significant influence upon the students' development and personal growth. Adding to this, the researcher spent two semesters on an Erasmus program in Norway.

Key words: culture, language, learning, travel, development, Erasmus

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Bibliografická identifikace

Jméno a příjmení autora: Štěpán Přindiš

Název diplomové práce: Czech Erasmus Experience – Language, Travel and Self-development

Pracoviště: Katedra společenských věd v kinantropologii

Vedoucí diplomové práce: Mgr. Donald N. Roberson, Ph.D.

Rok obhajoby: 2011

Abstrakt:

Tato práce se zabývá výměnnými pobyty Erasmus na Fakultě Tělesné Kultury Univerzity Palackého v Olomouci. Studijní program Erasmus významně přispívá k inovaci vzdělávání v Evropě. Účelem této práce bylo porozumět rozmanitým zkušenostem českých studentů s tímto programem. Struktura dotazníku byla založena na předešlých šetřeních Erasmus Student Network. Dotazník byl poslán 118 studentům, z čehož 71 se zúčastnilo výzkumu. Z výsledků mé práce vyplývá, že studenti odjeli na Erasmus, aby si zlepšili úroveň cizího jazyka. Jejich nejoblíbenější volnočasovou aktivitou bylo cestování po hostitelské zemi a do ostatních zemí. Zkušenosti z Erasmus programu také pomohly českým studentům stát se více otevření druhým, flexibilní a sebejistí. Podle získaných dat jsem dospěl k přesvědčení, že Erasmus program má významný vliv na celkový rozvoj a osobnostní růst českých studentů. V závěru poznamenávám, že autor práce strávil dva semestry na Erasmus programu v Norsku.

Klíčové slova: kultura, jazyk, vzdělávání, cestování, rozvoj, Erasmus

Souhlasím s půjčováním diplomové práce v rámci knihovních služeb.

I hereby declare that I have completed this Bachelor thesis individually under guidance Mgr. Donald N. Roberson, Jr., Ph.D. I have provided all literal sources and met principles of scientific ethics.

In Olomouc 28.th April 2011

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I would like to express my deep gratitude to people who helped me with the completion of this thesis, firstly to Mgr. Zuzana Hanelová, next to Emma Marie Montgomery for objective comments and also to my supervisor for his continuous encouragement.

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	7
1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS IN LITERATURE.....	8
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	9
2.1 Language	9
2.2 Travel.....	13
2.3 Self-development.....	17
3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	20
4 METHODOLOGY.....	20
5 FINDINGS	21
5.1.1 General information – Country where you studied.....	22
5.1.2 General information – Duration of the exchange period.....	22
5.2 Motives	23
5.3 Information prior the departure.....	24
5.4 Leisure time activities	24
5.5 Social network.....	25
5.6 Self-development	26
5.7 Skills	26
5.8 Overall satisfaction	27
6 DISCUSSION	29
6.1 Communication	29
6.2 Traveling & experience.....	30
6.3 Self-development & skills.....	32
7 CONCLUSIONS.....	33
8 IMPLICATIONS	34
9 SUMMARY	35
10 SOUHRN	36
11 REFERENCES.....	37
12 APPENDIX.....	41
12.1 The Erasmus Experience Questionnaire.....	41

INTRODUCTION

Students from all over the world now have a unique opportunity to study in different settings. International higher education is becoming a significant contributor to the socialization of young people. Globalization pushes nations together which are widely interconnected through the business, media and technological growth. People willing to adapt are faced with progressive changes in the global society. Almost every aspect of living has made technological progress in some way. That is why the traditional school system can not simply continue in the same manner as previous generations and must realize the value of inventions, new ideas and open-minded people. If studying has lost its intrinsic value and the student is not motivated we should consider implementing an alternative teaching approaches.

Any form of education can be considered as a goal in itself. Curiosity leads to new knowledge and skills. Hadis (2005) describes in his study that 53.2% of US college students found themselves, after some time studying abroad, with a greater curiosity for pleasure of knowing and experience than passing tests. Much of the research material on the impacts of study abroad on US college students evaluates affirmative effects in acquiring a deeper global interest, personal and intellectual development as well as self-awareness and independence (Bates, 1997; Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Cash, 1993; Drews & Meyer, 1996; Hutchins, 1996; King & Young, 1994; McCabe, 1994; Thomlison, 1991; Waldbaum, 1996; Ybarra, 1997).

Studying abroad, out of the familiar environment, can bring considerable advantages in the student's maturation process. Many different stimuli come from various directions and shape students attention and thoughts. The full immersion into an event, action or education is the key element for the learning. The purpose of this study is to discover and understand the range of differing experiences that students can have on Erasmus. Extra attention will be paid to language improvement, traveling and self-development of students from the Faculty of Physical Culture University of Palacky.

1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS IN LITERATURE

In the Czech literature we found little about Erasmus. The National Agency for European Education Programs (NAEP) working under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) is responsible for the realization of the Lifelong Learning Programs in Czech Republic. This agency plays an important role in providing grants and also creates an informative and consultative network for all applicants. The NAEP provides all information about processes and necessary steps for participation on Erasmus.

Very interesting studies regarding my topic were found on the web page of *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* and World Wide Web database ERIC. Montrose's (2002) research is very close to this topic and describes the importance of encouraging students to participate in study abroad, but also points out that in many cases there is a lack of integration between the experience and the learning. On the other hand, Whalen (1996) wrote about memory and its role in experience. He also argues that we should pay greater attention to what is really happening with students while they are enrolled in such programs.

Other information about study abroad programs was found on the web pages of the European Commission. In the section of Education and Culture there is information about Lifelong Learning programs and statistics of outgoing and incoming students with the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) producing yearly surveys for participants. This information has proved the significance for my research. I will discuss language, travel and self-development in my literature review.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Language

Students are aware of a global growing importance of learning languages, although their level of foreign language proficiency is low and does not often suffice for successful participation on Erasmus. Because students rarely have the opportunity to experience the learning of a foreign language in a direct context in which the design of meaning and action can be fully understood. Roberts (1994) describes the passive process in which many foreign languages are learnt as simply an act of technical decoding. „The language learning experience becomes more real, more purposeful and more authentic for learners when they are taught the cultural contexts of the language itself” according to Peterson & Coltrane (In Fleet, 2006, p.9).

The atmosphere of the classroom is essential in language education. An intrinsic motivation and self-determination are an important parts of any learning. Kohonen (1992) talks about the fulfillment of an intrinsic motivation. Students need to feel certain amount of a belonging, acceptance and satisfaction from their studies and work. They should manifest a self-actualization and self-control in the experiential structured classrooms. As students progress and their achievements continue to grow, they will as a result develop on a personal and emotional level and naturally gain the feelings of success and higher competence. Students attaining the progress and consequential achievements grow as a persons and naturally get the feelings of success and competence. Kohonen (1992) describes that “the process of learning is seen as the recycling of experience at deeper levels of understanding and interpretation” (p.17). Petty (2006) speaks about the set of various principles according to which we can motivate the students in learning foreign languages. Learning of a foreign language must become practical. Students should be involved in situations where they can test and interact with natives of their chosen language. He similarly to Kohonen (1992) emphasizes the critical role played by long term motivation. If students understand what is the real aim of their learning, the long term motivation will find a place in the student’s mindset. In contrast, short term motivation can be initiated when, one is working on the particular sections of for example, an assignment. This form of motivation, along with self determination assists students in achieving more immediate goals. It is useful to support students with assistance and encourage them in situations where they are self-determined. Adding to this Fleet (2006) claims that, “establishing a tolerant classroom atmosphere in which all cultures are celebrated and explicitly teaching about the target culture enables language teachers to affect student attitudes towards the target language and culture in a positive way” (p.25). Petty (2006) discusses how learning to learn is a process when students want to be immersed in the learning personally. By engaging with languages during daily activities should cause a change in students approach to the studies of a foreign language. The

connection made between students and the foreign language can produce a greater interest level. It would lead to a higher probability of repetition and the acquiring of better skills with foreign language. This key aspect plays one of the most important roles in the development of the inner motivation. There is a mystery affect. Classes that are traditionally structured can be transformed into some real life story, creating not only the mystery affect but also providing the students with a purpose and relevance to their learning (Wray, 2006) . Where students will become more involved.

Students' learning belief and strategy are at medium level (Xue-mei, 2007) "...many students have been accustomed to thinking in Chinese and read, write and answer questions by translation since in middle school" (p.61). Yet students, are missing the main point of learning foreign languages which is the communication with other people of other cultures. Nowadays, the examination system would rather test language knowledge than the communicative competence of students. For example: "Grammar-Translation Method appears relatively easy to apply and it makes few demands on teachers, which is perhaps the exact reason of its popularity" (Qing-xue & Jing-fang, 2007, p.70). Huang (2010) is also convinced that The Grammar-Translation Method generates students with far-reaching knowledge of grammatical rules but insufficient communicative ability.

Modern teaching approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Project-based Learning offer considerable shifts in the classroom learning of languages. Brown (1994) lists the core features of CLT which are "pair and group work", "fluency", "error correction" and "the role of the teacher". Brown (1994) emphasizes activities that brings students together to give each participant a safe opportunity to test ideas. This helps the individuals to speak out in public or in front of a class and lead to the performance of more highly developed ideas and thoughts (Coskun, 2011). Fluency is described by Coskun (2011) as an aspect that occurs when speakers are involved in meaningful interaction. Its often developed by creative and re-creative activities in which students discuss contents, strategies and misconceptions. Focusing on mistakes discourages students from actual open speaking and causes lower level of interaction in the classes (Coskun, 2011). The role of the teacher is the fourth principle that Brown (1994) mentioned as a core feature in Communicative Language Teaching. The teacher takes many roles in the actual process of teaching. The Teacher is a facilitator of the communication, an independent participant, organizer of resources, guide, researcher and learner. The purpose of Coskun's study was to observe two English teachers and compare their attitudes to CLT and the implementation of this approach in the classroom in Turkey. He found out the disparity between attitudes and practice in the classroom. For instance, both teachers were familiar with the curriculum of CLT but even although they did not apply correct ways and ignore instructions and target questions to the whole class. The findings and observation of this case study show the disagreement between a teachers' attitude and approach towards different teaching methods. Coskun (2011) observed that teachers dominated the lesson by

giving their own knowledge, by starting classroom interaction and discussions, and by following a one-way teacher-student cooperation. Coskun (2011) describes that “due to some constraints, such as their large class size, traditional grammar-based examination and their lack of time to prepare communicative activities, they cannot reflect the way they apply CLT to their actual teaching situation” (p.31).

Qing-xue & Jing-fang (2007) speak about the speed of development of the communicative method, it is present and dominates the teaching methods in many countries. Its not only more interesting for students, but also “...helps learners develop linguistic competence as well as communicative competence” (p.71). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a language teaching approach appeared in the 1970s as a reaction against old views of language. Advocates of CLT claim that the intrinsic and main goal of second language acquisition should be communication with others rather than memorization of a grammatical system of rules. In CLT classrooms, students are encouraged to practice and use the language in spontaneous contexts where learners discuss meanings through communication and interplay with others (Omaggio, 2001). Contemporary activities such as information gap, role plays, and games aim to engage students and other learners and maintain the inner motivation. The structure of learner-centered and communication-centered made CLT approach popular among language teachers. Haung (2010) points out “social interactions occur when input and output take place. Group work where learners have opportunity to use language and negotiate meaning with one another is essential” (p.32). Learning languages is a complex formation which is based and characterized by a communicative stream between students. Haung (2010) also refers about task-based learning, for example, Willi’s model for task-based learning, effectively addresses many important principles and assists with progress of adult learners in their language learning. In task-based language teaching, the extra focus is put on the completion of the task. Tasks are usually performed in pairs or small groups so they provide opportunities for interaction and negotiating of hidden meanings in the words. Student’s understanding and communication meanings are central for evolving his/her personal language skill. Learners’ intrinsic motivation comes from an individual experience that forms one’s attitude.

Haung (2010) claims that if learners’ attitudes toward a learning are not developed and prepared, they cannot successfully learn what is taught. They can only learn certain language features which answers to their own internal schedule. The educational maturation is a highly individual procedure and according to DeKeyser (2010) “teachers need to be sensitive to how they can adapt practice activities to their learners” (p.160). The repetitions and large amounts of practice are necessary for the acquisition of second language skills. Systematic activities that lead to a certain aim are needed. It does not mean repetitive handling of forms, but as DeKeyser (2010)

points out “a variety of shapes, from initial communicative drills to role-playing activities, task-based learning, and content-based teaching” (p.62). Distinct knowledge is best kept when it is created as an answer to questions appearing from communication directly (DeKeyser, 2010).

Language can be seen as a barrier or a gate into the world. English language has become spoken commonly and the importance of learning other languages is increasing every day. When we learn a foreign language the main focus is on how to obtain sufficient skills for the meaningful communication with others. Fleet (2006) states an important fact that, “the teaching of culture can and does raise a cultural awareness, appreciation, and acceptance of other cultures, and has also been shown to increase an awareness of one’s own culture as well” (p.25). The process of learning usually requires a high level of immersion into the culture of the language’s origin and the interconnection of a word with some practical usage. Culture is (Pearchall & Hanks, 1998) “the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively” (p.447). Shu-ji & Li-hua (2010) speak about the inter-cultural competence that comes from learning about foreign culture. The inter-cultural competence helped many foreign language teachers in China to realize it’s integral part of communicative competence. They admit that there is little evidence that teachers use inter-cultural instruction effectively into intensive reading through Project-based Learning (PBL). The inter-culture education as Shu-ji & Li-hua (2010) point out “... helps to improve students’ sensitivity and resolution capability of the culture between East and West. It is useful to improve students’ inter-cultural communicative competence” (p.26). Also Shu-ji & Li-hua (2010) state “The relevance of teaching culture with language is based on the belief that language and culture are inter-connected“ (p.27) and this is in agreement with ideas of Cruz, Bonissone & Baff, 1995; Heileman & Kaplan, 1985; Lessard-Clouston, 1997; Kramsch, 1998; Peck, 1998; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002; Sellami, 2000; Singhal, 1997; Stern, 1983; Thanasoulas, 2001. According to Peck’s words (in Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010) “without the study of culture, foreign language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete” (p.27).

The Project-based Learning (PBL) consists of several steps that need to be followed. In the process of selecting topics Shu-ji & Li-hua (2010) describes that the teacher and learners talk together about projects and assignments and also get to know each other, new topics and issues that are appropriate for project learning may come to light. When topics are set and students feel ok about working on the projects another step can follow. Once learners start working together they plan the project, manage research and create their own product. The less experienced participants with lower language proficiency or little experiences may require necessary support throughout the project (Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010). Afterwards, students are supposed to share results of their work with others and also if appropriate give a presentation about their entire project. The teacher’s role in Project-based Learning is according to Shu-ji & Li-hua (2010) transformed from the traditional

view of “teacher telling” to “student doing”. This approach emphasis of the creating and doing on the students.

In this research, Project-based Learning was realized in the form of lectures in the classroom and out of class (Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010). Students not only learned a particular information about culture and improved their language skills. They also developed a personal competence that they can apply to other cultural situations. With necessary practice and self-awareness, they learned to distinguish observation from interpretation. They are after all in a better position to accept, even empathize with people from different backgrounds and to get a sense of the humanity (Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010). Students may have different beliefs about the motives of learning English as a Second Language (ESL). So it’s very important to give students necessary assistance before the program and composed guidance through the entire course (Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010). Students with developed inter-cultural communication competence have shown also a high level of language proficiency. Some connection between inter-cultural competence and a foreign language acquisition has been drawn. “Therefore, integration of inter-culture into intensive teaching through Project-based Learning is very necessary and important, and in fact, productive for English majors practically and theoretically” (Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010, p.34). The students described that the program helps them enclose some inter-cultural knowledge to be more sensitive to the other cultures, but also extends their horizons of a global view, incrise their language motivation and improve their language proficiency. Students also mentioned that this approach is more autonomous and allows them to improve their abilities to think and to cooperate in the groups (Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010).

Project-based Learning is an effective method that has positive influence on student’s attitudes towards inter-cultural learning. It also enriches students and arouses their motivation in language learning “hence improve their proficiency in language learning” (Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010, pp. 35-36). Project-based or task-based teaching approaches helps students to gain a broader inter-cultural competence, intercultural awareness and also play a significant role in the development of their motivation to learn languages (Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010). Fleet (2006) emphasizes a core aspect of a teaching language as a willingness to teach the culture inherent in the language, included the verbal as well as the non-verbal feature of language. It practically means that students can learn more if they will be involved in international classes where they easily come into contact with foriegners. “Authentic Language Learning” allows students according to Peck (in Fleet, 2006) to “feel, touch, smell, and see the foreign peoples and not just hear their language” (p.9).

2.2 Travel

Traveling is inter-connected with learning languages and exploring new parts of the world. Moving from the well-known place of origin to other cultural background represents one of the

most influencing experience. According to Kolb (In Kohonen, 1992) an actual point of experiential learning is the individual experience, giving "...life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts and at the same time providing a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process" (p.14). Learning is thus perceived as a cyclic procedure integrating one's actual experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization and upcoming action (Kohonen, 1992). Experiential learning provides the fundamental philosophical view of learning as part of personal maturation and growth. The main aim is to allow the students to evolve increasingly self-directed and responsible for his or her learning attitude. The experiential learning facilitates personal growth, it helps students adapt to new social situations and changes, it also takes into account one's personal learning ability and finally it responds to the student's needs and practical contemplations (Kohonen, 1992). In an environment where one feels positive and open, the individual can progress towards becoming a fully functioning person. This process of personal development is often characterized by a widening range of human experience. Kohonen (1992) speaks about the experience as an awareness of one's own feelings, strength and weaknesses, an openness to next experiences, a mental immersion in the activity, tolerance, a basic trust in others, an ability to listen to them emphatically and perceive their feelings. All above mentioned is always influenced by personal involvement and one's willingness to explore the difference.

When students travel from their country to one with diverse culture, they experience not only new landscape but also the daily routines of local people. Pearce & Hanks (1998) defines "travel" as "the action of travelling, typically abroad" (p.1972). Students traveling abroad have to interact in terms of social adaptation and that is why "...more authentic environments should be created to improve student's inter-cultural communication competence" (Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010, p.36). People live by various values which can be seen as the cultural development of the society. The students will explore similarities and variations in the host culture and at the same time they may find according to Savick, Adams, Wilde & Binder (2007-2008) that much of their knowledge and skills based on learning in their home culture, will not completely suffice in different culture. The successful adaptation and recognition of the developmental processes during a travel period can have beneficial and lifelong effects for students. The learning about culture is best approached by creating an open-minded and tolerant environment within the group itself (Fleet, 2006). In this conditions students share their knowledge with others because they want to present their culture and simultaneously learn about other cultures.

This experience of travel is now impacting millions of Europeans a year who study as well as work out of their home culture. Learning outside one's safe and familiar background is a highly individual. Whalen (1996) argues that "the process by which students learn while studying abroad is

uniquely shaped by the role that memory plays in the experience” (p.1). For better understanding and effectiveness of Erasmus program, we should map how students go about learning and what exactly they do while involved in such program. Many of the existing research focused on educational outcomes and only few analysed the processes that lead to appearance new quality in student’s character.

We can often hear about “cultural adjustment”, “academic maturation”, “cultural shock” and many other life changing experiences that had great influence on people traveling abroad but we know little about what starts this changes and how they become parts of one’s mindset. According to studies that have found important connection between transitional life moments and education processes, Whalen (1996) claims that study abroad is an experience of being at a transition between cultures. And thus education episodes connected with such a emotional moments are those that are best remembered. Kerouac (1957) describes that, “the memory of one’s home is an essential aspect of moving across cultures and when such a memory is not present, the journey suffers from lack of meaning” (p.196). In other words traveling abroad is always comparison of what we know and are used to from our home. Memory is according to Whalen (1996), “an active arbiter of the present, and how students remember the past, tells us much about how they understand their present situation” (p.5). Memories from traveling abroad experience contribute to our feelings to be more independent. If we engaged in a new culture through active approach which requires being and living in a place, the previously foreign place will become our new home and learning will have a long lasting effects. “To remember a new place nostalgically means that a student has learned to live in such a place and is drawn toward the remembrance of his or her life within the culture” (Whalen, 1996, p.10).

Traveling abroad engages some specific types of learning. Everybody has some image about traditional way of learning in the class that is supposed to suit everyone. But living and learning abroad is an experiential type of learning. The experience is strongly connected with one’s emotion about the place. Experiential learning requires an active involvement. That is why Ogden (2007/2008) gives a great importance to a student services that focus on cultural engagement and active approach within education abroad and take many forms. This services are often enjoyable and beneficial for students.

The majority of students in previous studies refer to the period abroad as an amazing learning experience. But most of them did not achieve any particular academic achievements and rather talk about other social situations and events. We have standards of traditional learning with predictable and valid outcomes on one side, and on the other side we have unique and individualized knowledge that stretches in creative directions. “When students are challenged slightly beyond their comfort zones and are not panicked, the results can be transformative”

(Ogden, 2007-2008, p.46). He (2007-2008) introduces a very interesting image of the colonial student who casts a striking likeness with the early colonial travelers that were discovering worlds different from their own. According to which image, they were finding excitement, seeking new wonders and living the experience of lifetime affection. Because of learning that takes place outside the familiar and quite secure classroom, students can find according to Montrose (2002, 5.parag.):

A world that is complex and interconnected, challenging their prevailing world view and their ability to take responsibility for their own learning. In experiential learning it is the student who determines intentional, measurable learning objectives. Learning is the evaluated based on reading, writing, presenting, or producing projects that measure achievement based on direct experience.

Economic consequences put many public and private budgets under strong pressure which leads to the point that some jobs are disappearing. On the other hand, new ones require different and more specialized skills. Students can be prepared for real life situations and employability only through an education system that secures and teaches necessary and relevant skills that respond to globally changing market demands. Education and training system should therefore become much more flexible and answer these special needs of the labour market and society at large. Ogden (2007/2008) describes today's students like "a children of the empire", they have a sense of privilege to discover the world.

The Erasmus program plays an important role among the Lifelong Learning Programs (LLP) and is one of the biggest steps for education across Europe. Students can experience life and study in some foreign country. Ogden (2007/2008) point out a very interesting fact that the extent to which a student experiences the host country culture mostly depends upon the individual's openness and willingness to engage with difference. The European Commission has launched and sponsors this type of program because the European Union visualizes this as a way to have an influence in the global economy (Official Journal of the European Union, 2010).

A Memorandum on lifelong learning/Commission of the European Communities, Directorate-General for Education and Culture (2000, p.12) describes Erasmus program:

Erasmus, the European Union's flagship mobility programme in the field of education and training was established in 1987. Since 2007, Erasmus was a subprogramme of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme. It is named after the philosopher, theologian and humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465-1536). Erasmus lived and worked in several parts of Europe in the quest of the knowledge, experience and insights which only such contacts with

other countries could bring. By leaving his fortune to the University of Basel, he became a precursor of mobility grants.

Erasmus programme aims to foster the following four topics:

- Enhancing the quality and reinforcing the European dimension of higher education.
- Increasing student and staff mobility.
- Enriching not only the student's lives in the academic field but also in the acquisition of intercultural skills and self-reliance.
- Staff exchange also have beneficial effects both on the persons concerned and on the institutions involved.

Erasmus therefore plays the prime example of how Europe creates opportunities for its citizens. Some significant skills and important experiences lead afterwards to the appearance of highly productive citizens. Better organisational skills, intercultural understanding, improvement of foreign language, deeper insights into host countries, improvement human's knowledge and skills that enlarge the horizons and lead to making new friends and colleagues throughout Europe (European Commission, 2008).

A careful investment in education and training at national and European level is crucial for the development of a knowledge based society as well as a way out from the economic downturn. Europe is in a global competition depending on its population skills and innovative capacities. Talent and creativity has to be stimulated and updated throughout life. Lifelong learning is capable to deliver the essential skills that are relevant not only to the labour market but also for social inclusion and active citizenship. Wößmann & Schütz (2006) emphasize that, "the added value of a European approach is that diverse education and training systems can benefit from mutual learning and exchange of best practice" (p.11).

2.3 Self-development

In the first half of the sixteen century, Erasmus of Rotterdam set a base for new ideas about cultural exchange. He was actually one of the first philosophers who pointed to the importance of learning from traveling, cultures and people. Simile to this Ogden (2007/2008) claims that, "the sustainability of most education abroad programming lies in the ability to provide opportunities for our students and those in the host culture to live and learn alongside people from different cultures"

(p.43). Erasmus represents one of the richest and most significant type of experiential learning for our students. Too much standardization of learning influences negatively the student's creativity. The individualized knowledge is supported in experiential learning. Students are not memorizing and feeding back information. They become generating their own ideas and working through possible solutions. The integration of concrete action in experiential learning allows us to make possible the evaluation. Measurable learning goals and objectives play a very powerful role in experiential learning (Montrose, 2002). The importance of an international experience for the purpose of language development, cultural immersion or enhancement of a student's world view can not be underestimated, "although there is little doubt about the benefits and importance of encouraging students to participate in study abroad, in many cases there is a lack of integration between the experience and the learning or educational value that can be derived from it" (Montrose, 2002, 37.parag.). Dewey (In Montrose, 2002, 9.parag.) argues that common activity does not create a challenging experience and he often advocates that "learning by doing" is more effective than classroom learning. We act intentionally and something happens to us in return (Montrose, 2002). That something is an involvement in the certain activity that leads us to a better understanding of our intentional acting.

Kolb's (1984) learning cycle model describes different stages by which students integrate an experience into a meaningful context. He speaks about an immersion in the actual activity in this case it's the study abroad program. Then one steps back and reflects the differences between learning at home and in the host country. Student should recognize and describe positive and negative sites of both approaches. Afterwards, students act in order to secure their personal development. In addition to this, The National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) developed a set of guidelines referred to as "Principles of Good Practice" which are following. The "intention" of – why is the student going abroad? The "authenticity" – are there situations a real? The "planning" – the importance of measurable and intentional goals. The "clarity" – what is the communication among stakeholders. The "monitoring and assessment" – what outcomes are expected and each person's role. The "reflection" – the continuous process of personal self-examination. And the "evaluation". Steinberg (2002) describes that, "... students usually enter a less structured university environment where students are given more freedom in developing their learning programs and self-directed learning. In addition, educators usually expect students to learn outside of the classroom in the real life. Over the years, Steinberg (2002) from the Institute for the International Education of Students, has come to the conclusion that the experiential dimension in the study abroad programs supports student's development and an involvement of inter-cultural competence. His core value of international education today is the examination of academic programs against a holistic framework. He also thinks that, the boundaries between traditional

learning approaches and experiential learning are less strict than they were in the past. A learning contract, ideally flexible and modifiable, is a key component in experiential learning, it defines strategies and objectives which student seeks to learn on study abroad period. Such a contract could select learning objectives for students and shape the experiential learning in appropriate ways.

Pearchall & Hanks (1998) defines self-development as “the process by which a person’s character or abilities are gradually developed” (p.1686). Learning is a long life process where there is no final step. Cognition gives us necessary feelings of orientation in this world. It shows us positive or negative, intrinsic or false attributes of our being with ourselves. To choose and make a decision remains up to us (Coreth, 1994). We are active arbiters and participate on the reality, we create and re-create through learning. Hogenová (2006) describes the present process of learning as a handling of an information that can be used on the market. Any information, however needs to be united and emerged in something already existing in ourselves. This type of information is often referred to our intrinsic experiences and have long life effects on the owner’s attitudes. Hogenová (2006) understands a motion as a complex process of both physical and spiritual at the same time. In this sense, students traveling abroad to participate on study abroad program are an example of a complex movement. We are living in the system with the rules according to which people often act in their lives. On the other hand people have a freedom to choose their own way of development. “Developmental tasks are links between the demands of society and one’s individual needs” according to Havighurst (In Roberson, 2003, p.4).

Braskamp, Braskamp & Merrill (2009) measured student changes over the study period abroad of one semester. Students took the same written survey before their education abroad and then shortly after they returned to the United States. The presented survey is based on research question: “Do students express changes and growth in their self reports of their global learning and development”? More specifically, do students change their self reports on cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal domains of global learning and development during the period of one semester. (Braskamp, Braskamp & Merrill, 2009). Development involves mental processes and behavior acquisition involves a collection of skills. These primarily developmental processes consist of three major domains: cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal (Braskamps and Merrill, 2009). They describe that the cognitive site of personal development is centered on one’s knowledge and understanding of what is correct and real and important to know. The next domain is intrapersonal development which marks out becoming more aware of own’s character, integrating one’s personal values and the appreciation of self-identity. Becoming more aware of one’s strengths, values and personal characteristics. Understanding one’s unique identity and showing the respect for different cultural perspectives are signs of interpersonal development. This development is according to Braskamp, Braskamp & Merrill (2009) “centered on one’s willingness to interact with persons with

different social norms and cultural backgrounds, acceptance of others, and being comfortable when relating to others” (pp.105-106). In this research, students were learning how to analyze and understand cultural differences, but did not show particular progress in knowing how to take these cultural differences into a consideration about knowledge. Students in this study gained in self-confidence and also showed progress in further identifying themselves as unique individuals. They showed they became more comfortable with other persons unlike them and developed a greater commitment to assist others. In general, Braskamp, Braskamp & Merrill (2009) describes that “students in most of the education abroad programs show the greatest gains in their self-assessment in the cognitive domain, especially their knowledge of international affairs and cultural understanding” (p.110). Based on the results of this study, education abroad programs are an effective educational experience. The desired goal of any education abroad experience is to help students to develop holistically and globally and understand the opportunities which this word offers to them. Student’s engagement in education abroad experiences enhances one’s global learning and development. Education abroad may be an important catalyst for students developing personal attributes, like a sense of self direction.

3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to understand the various experiences that Czech students can have on Erasmus. I have several research questions that will be answered:

1. What are motives for students to participate?
2. What was the level of preparation for Erasmus?
3. How do students learn on Erasmus?
4. What are significant personal changes and self-development?

4 METHODOLOGY

Erasmus Experience Survey (EES) is the basic type of sociological research with quantitative results. The questionnaire was made according to Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Surveys (2006, 2008). The mission of the ESN is to support mobility and benefit in terms of higher education standards of students who will be better prepared for life situations and the job market in Europe. The ESN activity focuses on the evaluation of the quality of the exchange programs. The ESN survey 2006 was aimed at exploring the issue of the “Exchange Student’s Rights“. More than 12, 000 students from Europe filled in an email questionnaire.

The ESN survey 2008 was also partly used for creating Erasmus Experience Survey questionnaire 2010. The ESN survey 2008 “Exchanging Cultures“ was discovering essential parts of any exchange that are processes of integrating and adapting in different culture settings. This type of project provides necessary information about real needs and concerns of the international students towards the stakeholders. Every student must cope with the cultural diversity of Europe on the exchange and therefore understanding what students expect and experience will lead to better preparation.

The Erasmus Experience Survey 2010 was the email questionnaire made on the web page www.surveymonkey.com. The basic account allowed me to create the ten question questionnaire which was efficient enough for EES needs. Some parts of the questionnaire were slightly modified due to necessary translation into the Czech language. My key person for gathering information was Mgr. Zuzana Hanelová who works as a coordinator for foreign relations at the Faculty of Physical Culture at University of Palacky. After creating the email questionnaire Mrs. Hanelová sent the link into the email addresses of students who participated on Erasmus in last two years. The collecting of responses has been going on for almost three weeks and total amount of all responses was 72. In both academic years 2008/2009 and 2009/2010, there were 118 students who were successfully enrolled on Erasmus program. Total number of started survey was 72. Total number of fully completed survey was 71 (97.2 %). The return of the email questionnaire was 82.6 %. The questionnaire consisted of the eight major questions. General information – country and duration of the exchange, motives, preparedness, leisure time activities, socialization, self-development, skills and overall level of satisfaction with the stay and study.

Similar to the participant observation I had my own experience that gives me more insight into the study. However, I must try to remain objective. I was Erasmus student between years 2009-2010. I participated in the program called Physical Education, Sport, Culture and Society which was taught at Telemark University College in Notodden, Norway. This adds to reliability of this research. The personal experience helps me to understand the experiences of my sample.

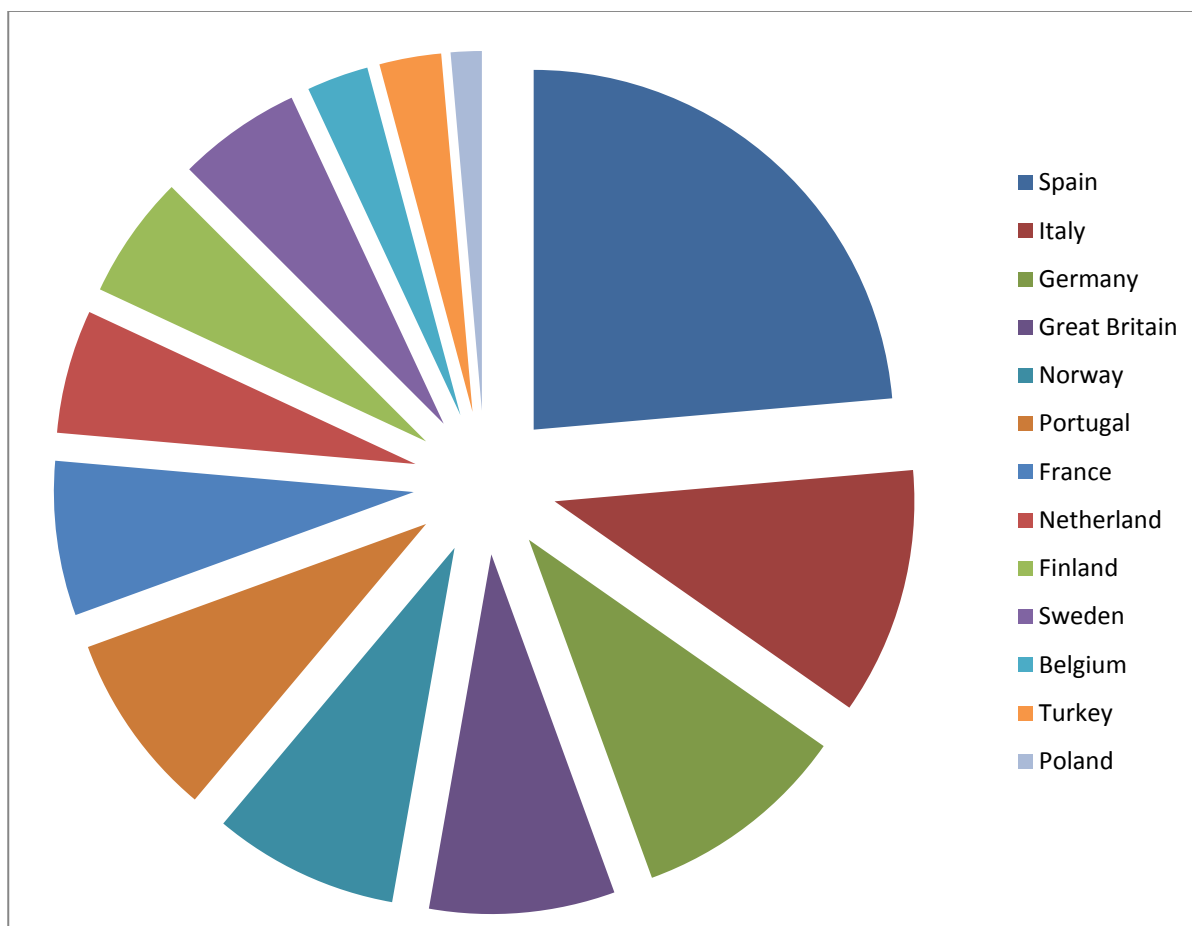
5 FINDINGS

The purpose of my study was to understand the various experiences that Czech students had on Erasmus. I will answer research questions regarding the important motives for students to participate, the level of preparation on Erasmus, the learning and self-development.

5.1.1 General information – Country where you studied.

Among the students from Faculty of Physical Culture at University of Palacky who answered EES 2010 questionnaire 17 students went on Erasmus to Spain, 8 to Italy and 7 to Germany. The equivalent number of students 6 went to Norway, Portugal and Great Britain. France was the destination of 5 students. Then 4 students participated on Erasmus in Netherlands, Sweden and Finland. Turkey and Belgium had 2 students were interested in studying in these countries. And only one student who took part in EES 2010 went on Erasmus to Poland.

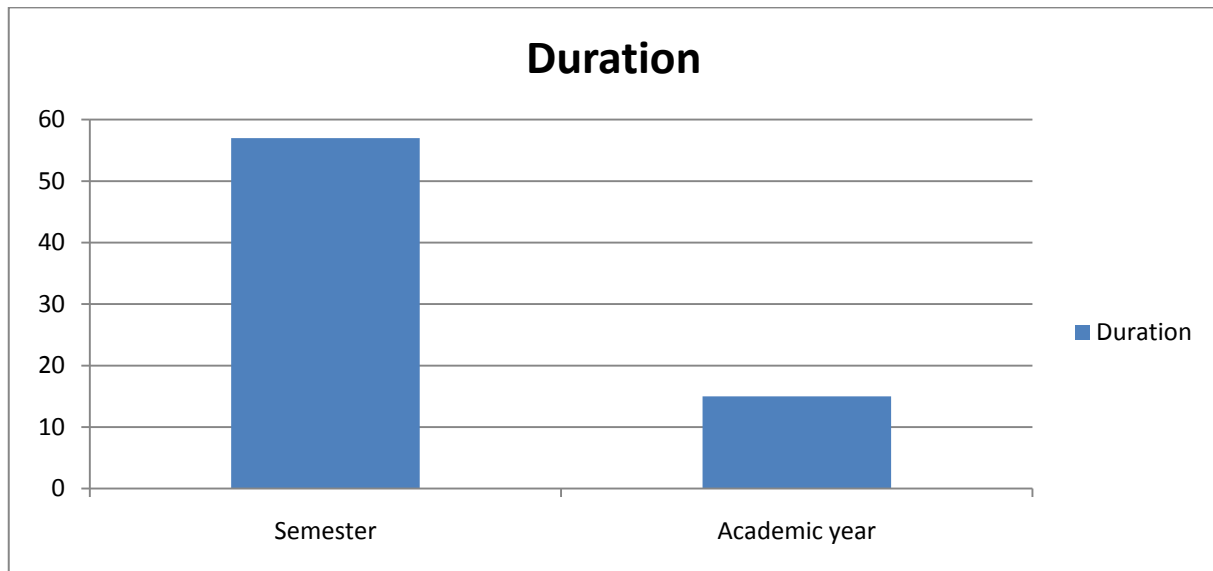
Figure 1 Country where you studied in as an exchange student? (n=72)



5.1.2 General information – Duration of the exchange period.

The majority of students 79.2 % chose to spend one semester in the host country (57). Twenty percent of students decided to spend the entire academic year in the host country (15).

Figure 2 How long was the period of your stay? (n=71)

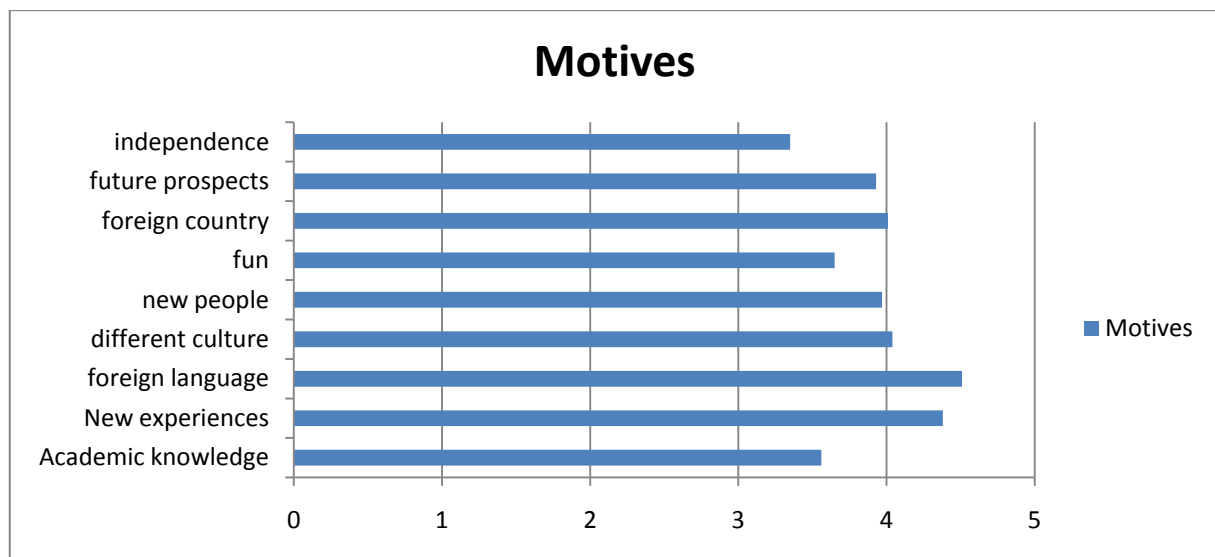


5.2 Motives

The research question: What are motives for students to participate?

Among the highest rated motives that students indicated were the practice of foreign language, having new experiences, and living in the different culture background. Least motive to go on Erasmus was independence and gaining academic knowledge.

Figure 3 Please indicate how important for you were following reasons to go on exchange period?
(n=71)

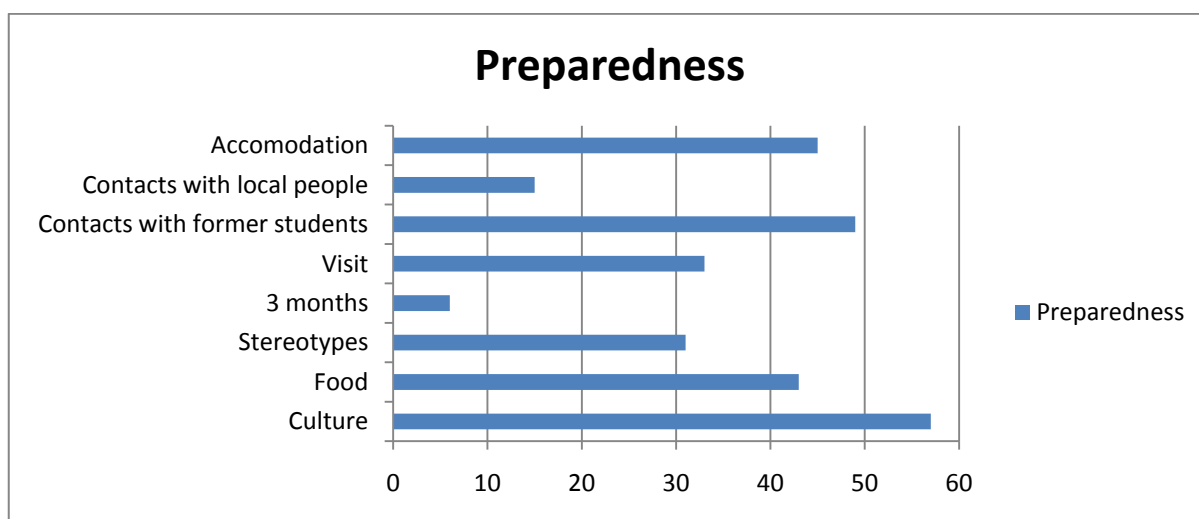


5.3 Information prior the departure

The research question: What was the level of preparation for Erasmus?

Most of the respondents, 80.3 % felt informed about host country's culture before they went on Erasmus. Sixty-nine percent of students also talked to people who studied at the same university in the past. Before going, 63,4 % also agreed that they had organized their accomodation prior the departure. And 60.6% students indicated that they knew the typical food of the host coutry. Among students, 72, almost the half 46,5 % have visited their exchange country previously in the past time.

Figure 4 Before you went to your host country to study? (n=71)

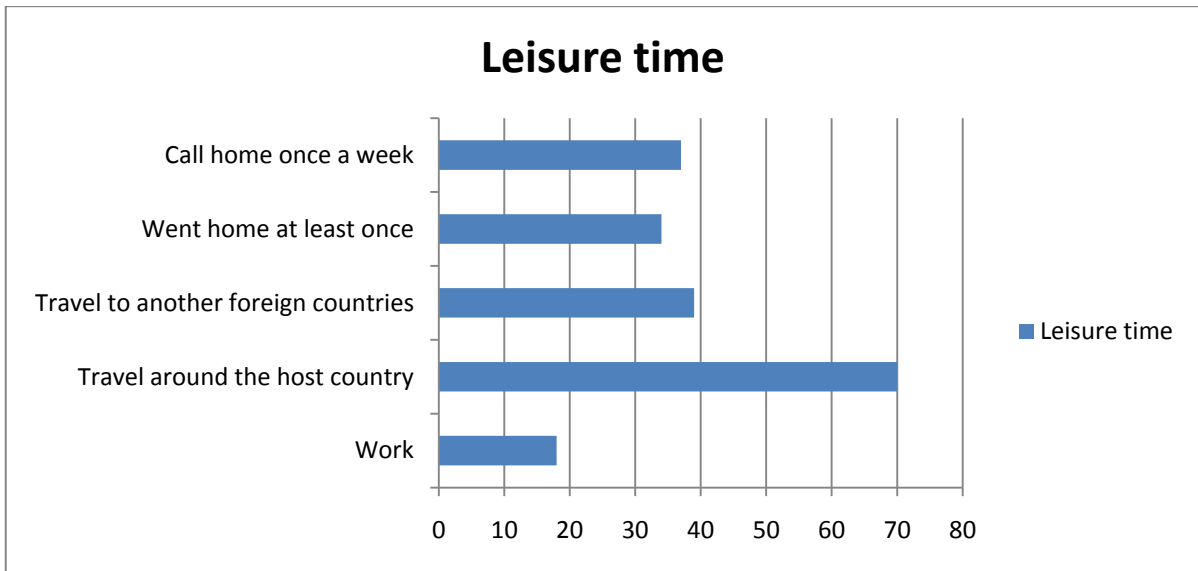


5.4 Leisure time activities

The research question: How do students learn on Erasmus?

The most common free time activity was traveling around the host country. Second was also traveling but to another countries. 18% of students were working while they were on Erasmus.

Figure 5 During your stay did you? (n=71)

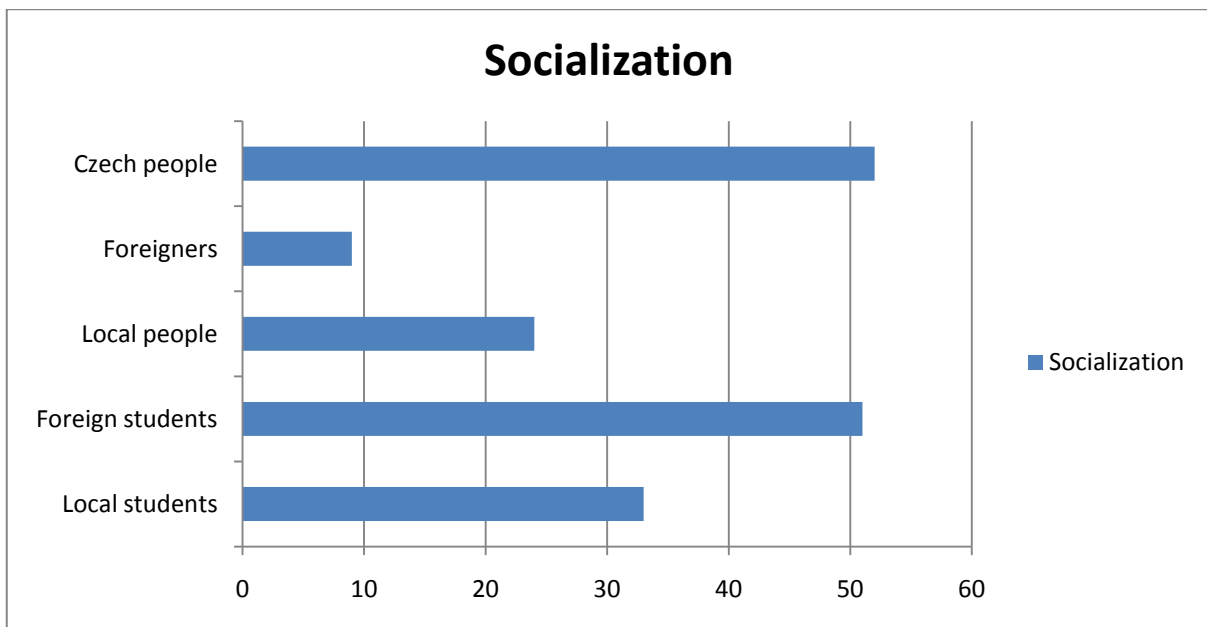


5.5 Social network

The research question: How do students learn on Erasmus?

This chart shows responses “most of the time” and “much time” that students spent with following groups of people. Students generally spent most of their time with Czech people and other foreign students. They also spent part of their time with local students but they spent least time with other foreign people then foreign students.

Figure 6 Please indicate how much time you spent with the following groups of people during your stay abroad? (n=71)

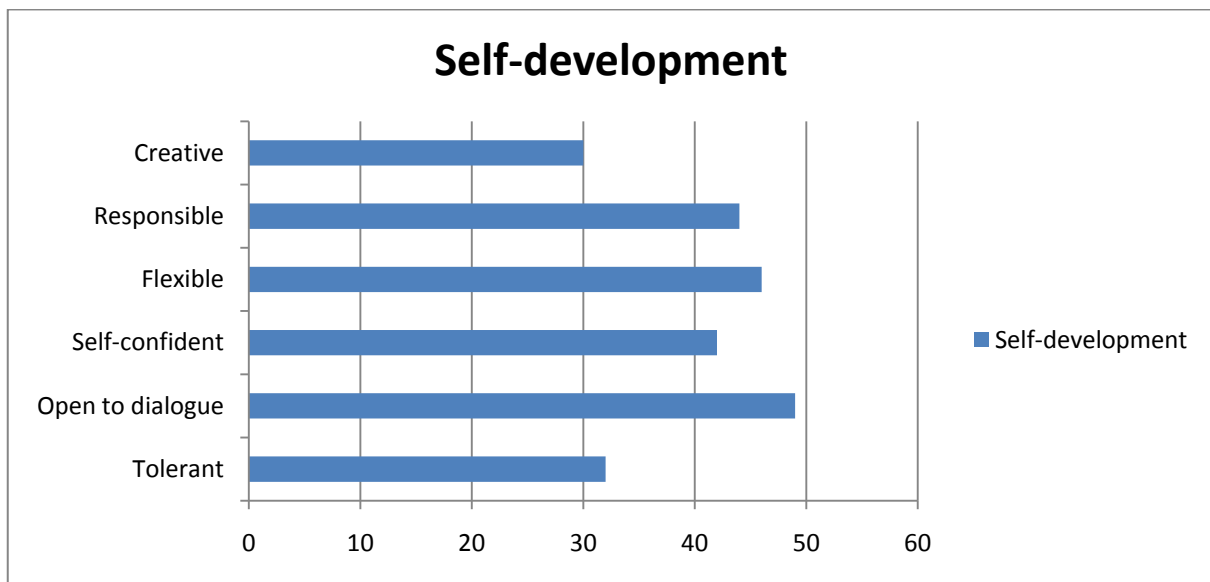


5.6 Self-development

The research question: What are significant personal changes and self-development?

This chart shows responses on “agree” and “strongly agree”. It is very important that participants were aware any change in their personal characters. Students indicated that Erasmus experience made them mostly more open to dialogue and flexible. They also felt more responsible and self confident after returning from the exchange.

Figure 7 My stay made me more? (n=71)



5.7 Skills

The research question: What are significant personal changes and self-development?

This chart shows responses “agree” and “strongly agree” with following statements. The most important skill students referred to was working with people from different cultural backgrounds. Secondly, students felt they improved in adapting on new situations and places and the third most frequently mentioned achievement was problem-solving skill.

Figure 8 Your stay abroad helped you improving following skills? (n=71)

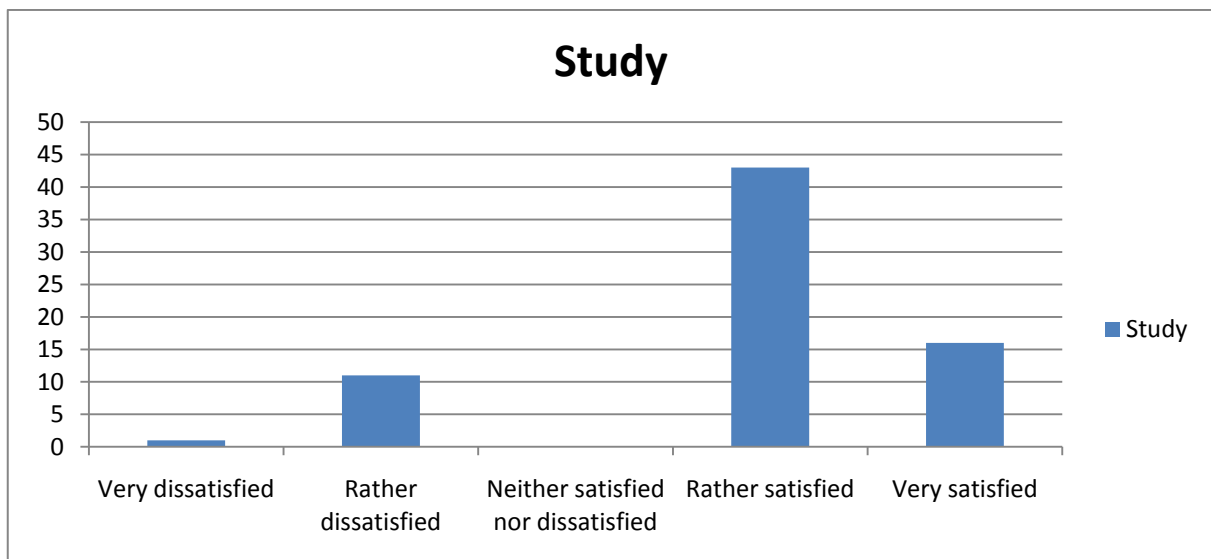


5.8 Overall satisfaction

In addition, I found the difference between the level of satisfaction with the study and stay on Erasmus.

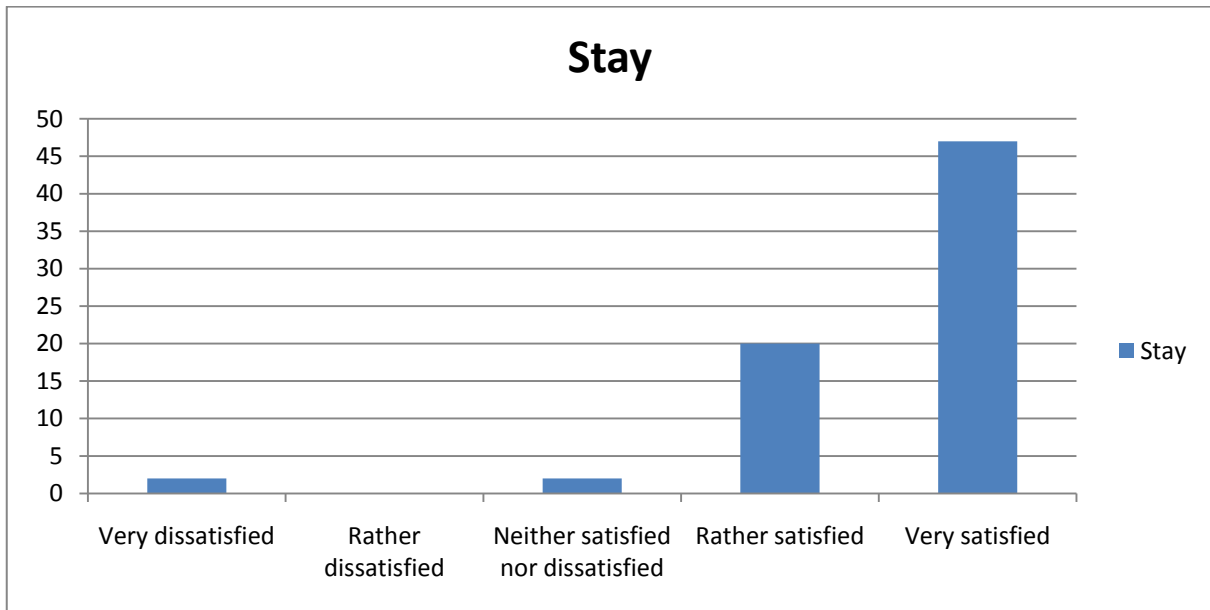
Students indicated that they were rather satisfied with their study in the foreign country.

Figure 9 What is your overall level of satisfaction with your study? (n=71)



Students indicated that they were very satisfied with their stay in the host country.

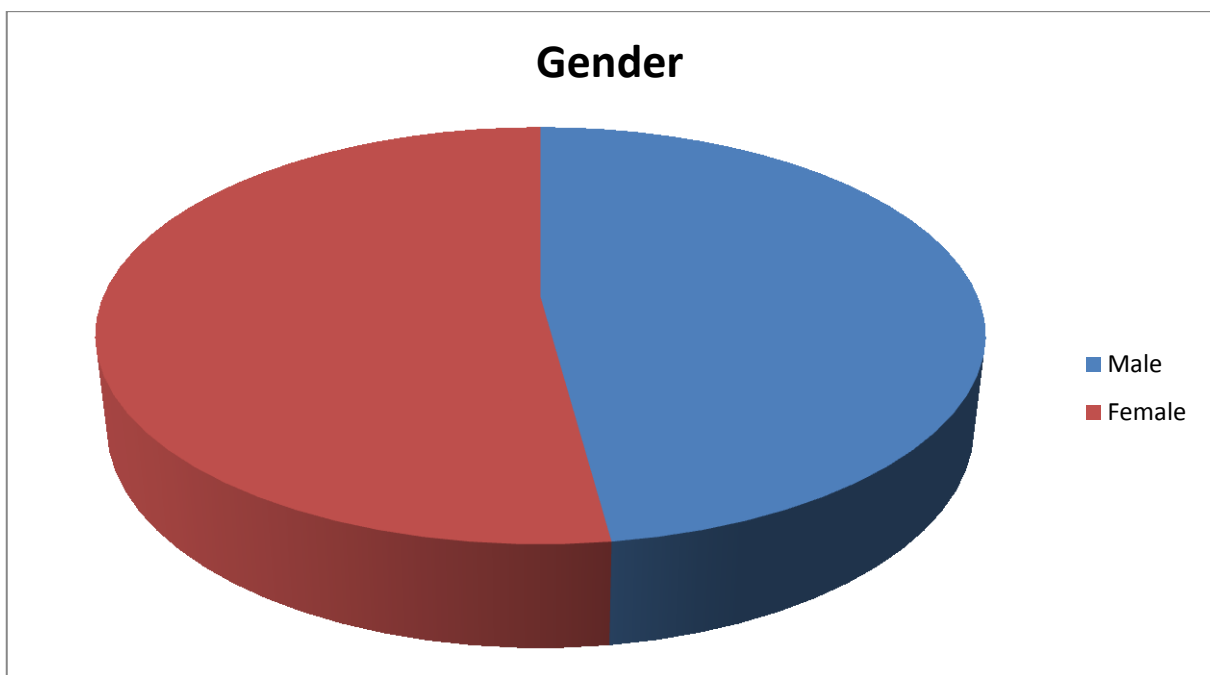
Figure 10 What is your overall level of satisfaction with your stay? (n=71)



5.9 Gender

Students were slightly more females than males who went on Erasmus. There were 37 women and 34 men in my sample.

Figure 11 Male/female? (n=71)



6 DISCUSSION

Now I will discuss the three main findings of my study. Firstly, I want to comment on the highest rated motive for students to participate on Erasmus, and I will suggest some links between the cultural competence and foreign language acquisition. Secondly, I will talk about the favourite leisure time activity of my sample which represents one of the richest sources of experiential learning. In the second part I will also mention the importance of integration between the experience and the learning. Finally, I will describe some developmental changes of Czech students who experienced Erasmus.

6.1 Communication

Czech students generally preferred hot, southern countries to the north of Europe. Seventeen students went on Erasmus to Spain, eight to Italy and seven to Germany. The main reason for Spain as an Erasmus destination may be the growing importance and attractiveness of the Spanish language. Spanish is the official language of 22 countries. It is the native tongue of more than 266 million people. Over 330 million people speak Spanish. Spanish language is the second most spoken language in the world (Spanish in the world, 2011). This interest is also built on the presumption that students mostly went on Erasmus to practice or significantly improve their foreign language, to have new experiences, and to live in a different culture background. Learning a new language was the most important motive for students in my study. Similar to the ESNSurvey (2006) "Exchange student's rights" the two most important motives were to have new experiences and to practice a foreign language. Less important reason was to be more independent.

Without any doubt, the extent of integration in the host culture significantly influences students' learning. They are active seekers of new knowledge and experiences or "the connection with the culture remains filtered through sunglasses and a camera viewfinder" (Ogden, 2007-2008, p.42). The main motives of my sample are that the foreign language acquisition is strongly connected with living and being in the culture. Many advocates of Communicative Language Teaching (Brown, 1994; Haung 2010; Omaggio, 2001) claim that the intrinsic goal of second language acquisition should be communication with others. The communicative competence is therefore practical and responds to real needs that are created in the process of socialization.

Erasmus exchange program plays an important role because it provides students with the opportunity to step out of their accustomed learning and living environment. The adaptation process influences students' attention to the intrinsic need for communication with others. Petty (2006) describes the long term motivation in learning languages as understanding of practical site of learning and also as a possibility to test the communicative competence and interact with foreign people. Students on Erasmus also develop the inter-cultural competence which raise a cultural

awareness and increase the awareness of ones's own culture (Fleet, 2006). According to Peck's words (In Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010) "without the study of culture, foreign language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete" (p.27). That's the reason why students often dispose with grammatical rules but low communicative competence which is not sufficient enough for the meaningful communication and socialization with foreign people. Language can be seen as a barrier or gate into their complex world. Students who develop the personal competence of self-awareness and can apply it into other cultural situations find it easier to accept and even empathize with people from different backgrounds (Shu-ji & Li-hua, 2010). Students of the Faculty of Physical Culture and particularly students from the department of Rekreology are dependent on the communicative competences no matter in which language or country the program is organized. The international cooperation and rich relationships with other people working in the same field are key aspects for the improvement and keeping up with international learning. It means that students can learn more practical and relevant skills if they will be involved in the international classes where they naturally come into contact with foreign people. The negotiations of meanings and interacting in the international classes will contribute to a widening of the student's world view and learning by experience. Their inter-cultural competence and language acquisition will increase and the authentic learning approach may also lead to a creation of future business cooperation among students. Therefore the greater attention should be paid to the communicative competence and alternative methods that promote inter-cultural learning and developing students creativity and talent in the international conditions at the Faculty of Physical Culture Palacky University in Olomouc.

6.2 Traveling & experience

The most common leisure time activity of my sample was traveling around the host country as well as traveling into other countries. This shows that students on Erasmus were influenced by other foreign students. They organized trips to visit other countries in order to experience new cultures and meet new people. Erasmus of Rotterdam also describes this fact about the cultural exchange. He would never be able to gain such an insight without traveling and meeting different cultures (European Commission, 2008). Moving across cultures represents one of the most influencing experiences. Kolb (In Kohonen, 1992) describes that experiential learning is highly a individual process where some subjective life experience poses the meaning into a abstract concept. It's cyclic procedure consisting of four main stages. This procedure of experiential learning begins with an immersion into the certain activity. Students should be motivated in sharing ideas through the Project-based learning. Students should be stimulated by various challenging activities where they can discover and better understand themselves and others. These crucial situations are often represented by physically and mentally demanding activities which put an extra level of pressure

on participants. The experiences from international cooperation can positively influence the student's self-actualization and can also greatly contribute to a future personal development. The experiential learning represents according to Kohonen (1992) the basic view of learning as part of personal development. The main aim is to help students to become self-directed in learning and responsible in making one's own decisions. Students can without any restricting conditions progress towards a fully capable and independent person. This process of involvement is characterized by gathering different human experiences and integrating them into one's mindset. Traveling also offers the opportunity for testing the intercultural communication competence. At the same time Savick, Adams, Wilde & Binder (2007/2008) claim that students while exploring similarities and variations in the host country and culture may recognize that most of the skills and knowledge they learned at home will not be adequate for a successful adaptation. Learning about culture is conditioned by creating an open and tolerant atmosphere where students can develop deeper understanding of daily routines and life patterns of local people (Fleet, 2006). Memories from traveling contribute to our feelings to be more independent. Such feelings of independency can be experienced by the personal engagement within the education program abroad. Ogden (2007/2008) states "when students are challenged slightly beyond their comfort zones and are not panicked, the results from the studying abroad can be transformative" (p.46). Traveling is a fundamental type of movement which enriches the personal character for new knowledge and skills. Traveling supports the self-actualization and creates positive conditions for experiential learning.

Czech students in my sample spent most of their time with fellow Czech students and other foreign students instead of time with local students. Thus Czech students could not make close relationships and learn properly about the culture of the host country. Interacting is the essential part of adapting on Erasmus. Similarly Ogden (2007-2008) describes that sometimes: "learning the local language, developing meaningful relationships within the community or exploring the uniqueness of the host culture all become relatively less important" (p.38), because students did not come into contact with locals. Another fact is that 18% of students in my study were working on Erasmus. From the point of socialization students who were working could come into contact with local people. They were in better position to accept, even sympathize with people from different backgrounds. Ogden (2007/2008) describes that the experience that students have depends upon the individual's openness and willingness to engage with the host culture. In the ESNSurvey (2008) "Exchanging cultures" students declared that the help of the Erasmus Student Network and other student organizations was most important in helping them to get in contact with other exchange students and providing them with useful information. Eighty percent of students in my sample felt informed about the host country's culture before they went on Erasmus. They often talked to people who have experienced studying at the same university. Sixty-three percent also agreed that they had

organized their accommodation prior the departure. Thus the general level of preparation of Czech students for Erasmus exchange period seems to be appropriate and should ensure adaptation and engagement into the program.

6.3 Self-development & skills

Since birth we have started developing into a more sophisticated and skillful human beings. Every stage of our lives is characterized by some major change that directs us to some change. Students need to be carefully stimulated according to their uniqueness and personal abilities. The socialization of young open-minded people and international cooperation can have a positive influence upon next generations. The international study experience facilitates deeper insights into the host countries, better organizational skills, intercultural understanding, improvement of foreign language, knowledge and skills. It also represents an great opportunity to make new friends and colleagues throughout Europe (European Commission, 2008).

Students indicated that the Erasmus experience made them more open to dialogue which means that they respected and listened to each other. Erasmus has allowed them to see the real people and cultures and gain insight into different opinions. But, they could also see how similar they are just living in different countries. Visiting each other and reunions are motivations for next traveling and learning more about. The importance of an international experience for the purpose of language improvement, cultural immersion and enhancement of student's world view can not be underestimated. The Erasmus experience also influenced students in other ways. According to my survey, students developed into more flexible, responsible and self-confident human beings. Similar to the ESNsurvey (2008) "Exchanging cultures" respondents claimed that their individuality has changed and that the period abroad made them more flexible, self-confident, open to dialogue and more tolerant toward the others. Students learned and developed a deeper awareness of self-identity on Erasmus.

The key aspect is according to Steinberg (2002) "an organizer who understands and effectively implements experiential education theory, who challenges students to reflect on their experience on a continuing basis, and who challenges the students to link their experience with context, thus achieving deeper learning" (44.parag.). Similar to this Montrose (2002) claims "... in many cases of study abroad there is a lack of integration between the experience and the learning or educational value that can be derived from it" (37.parag.).

The most important skill students referred to was working with people from different cultural backgrounds. It's obvious that students who experienced Erasmus have learned to cooperate and work in international conditions. Erasmus students often have very close relationships because they spend time together. They usually organize social evenings and physical activities. Everyone wants

to have fun and experience as much as possible. Secondly, students felt they improved in adapting to new situations and places. And the third most frequently mentioned achievement was problem-solving skill. This reflects ideas of Ogden (2007-2008) who said that, “Education abroad programs should make it impossible for students to avoid direct and meaningful contact with the host culture, to learn with and from them, to explore new values, assumptions and beliefs” (p.50).

7 CONCLUSIONS

As a result of this study I will make three main conclusions. First, language acquisition is the main reason for participation in the Erasmus program. Second, the most common free time activity was travel. Travel is also a natural way to learn. And, third, the Erasmus experience contributed to one’s personal change and self-development.

How one learns on Erasmus is an important subject of discussion. The improvements of Erasmus program may contribute to greater learning experiences, complex personal development and creation of friendships throughout Europe. Students should be aware of an important opportunity that is hidden inside the Erasmus experience.

Students in my study were very satisfied with their stay on Erasmus. This interesting fact shows that Czech students did adapt to a new cultural background and fairly integrated themselves into the programs and classes. Their level of preparation and the source of information they had before departure more likely secured an easier immersion into the host culture. On the other hand Ogden (2007-2008) claims that, “the education abroad field will need to discover what motivates students to want to step outside of their comfort zones in spite of perceptions of risk” (pp. 37-38). Erasmus program puts an importance on sharing knowledge and meeting different people with different ideas. Almost four centuries ago Erasmus of Rotterdam knew about the great impact of traveling and meeting new people on self-development and gaining new experiences. Students are able to share experiences and learn from each other. Students can promote intercultural understanding and benefit from this. The Lifelong Learning Programs shows that students help to unify Europe. The Erasmus aim could be described as an effort to bring young people together and stimulate their development.

The National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) developed a set of guidelines referred to as “Principles of Good Practice”. Students should strive according to these principles into their study program abroad. They should be aware of their personal desire for development and natural curiosity to travel the world. It states that universities should encourage students to participate on Erasmus. The uniqueness of this program lies in the authentic environment where students from all Europe share an everyday life. The preparation and planning of study exchange

can enhance student's independency and capability for self-directed learning. The clarity of program and clear set of rules between involved institutions could assist in a better recognition of subjects. This would help students to finish some parts of their studies at the host institution. The monitoring of students while they are on Erasmus can help in preparation and also to better understanding of international study experience. The next step according to the NSEE should be the reflection of this experience. Students may summarize and try to explain their significant situations and events in the evaluation. Their introspective evaluation of Erasmus experience could also lead to better self-actualization in their future life. Ideally there would be some learning contract between the home institution and a student going on Erasmus. A flexible contract that would help to define the strategies and objectives which students seek to learn on Erasmus. Students should come to the point in their experience that learning is a long life process, where there is no final step. Seeking for more information about the world principles throughout a traveling. Traveling is an inter-cultural movement during which people adapt and develop various relevant skills for a successful and happy life.

8 IMPLICATIONS

Students want to travel the world and experience new adventures. Many are searching new knowledge and skills that will enable them to reach a desirable profession. The Erasmus experience is challenging and demanding. Students should be prepared for cultural immersion and meaningful communication while they are on Erasmus. Therefore a better language and inter-cultural competence is needed. Students should be motivated and engaged into a experiences that lead to transformative personal growth. Another implication is a better learning agreement between the institutions. The recognition of subjects and practices would help students to organize their studies. Students could partly complete their courses at the host university. The Erasmus experience represents a rich source of experiential learning. Particularly, at the Department of Rekology students could share their experiences with others and also present presentations about their study abroad periods. In this sense, students could also begin to work on their future Graduation thesis. Usually less structured schedules at the host universities allow students to employ their free time by some meaningful activity. Finally, working in the field of study and integration into the host culture should be promoted. Students could gain relevant skills and broaden their working experiences into international dimension.

9 SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to understand various experiences that Czech students had on Erasmus. In addition, I had several research questions regarding the important motives for students to participate, the level of preparation for Erasmus, the learning and self-development. This study is divided into the three main parts – language, travel and self-development.

The first part of my study describes the importance of learning languages as well as learning the inter-cultural competence. The main reason and motivation for Czech students to participate on Erasmus was an improvement of a foreign language. Student also went on Erasmus to gain new experiences and to live in a different culture background. Erasmus of Rotterdam describes this fact about the cultural exchange. He would never be able to gain such an insight without traveling and meeting different cultures.

The second part refers about the favourite leisure time activity of my sample which represents one of the richest sources of experiential learning. The most common leisure time activity of Czech students was traveling around the host country as well as traveling into other countries. The importance of integration between the experience and the learning is also discussed. Traveling is a fundamental type of movement which enriches the personal character for new knowledge and skills. Traveling also supports the self-actualization and creates positive conditions for experiential learning.

The third part describes some developmental changes of Czech students who experienced Erasmus. According to my survey, students developed into more flexible, responsible and self-confident human beings. The international study experience facilitates deeper insights into the host countries, better organizational skills, intercultural understanding, improvement of foreign language, knowledge and skills. The most important skill students referred to was working with people from different cultural backgrounds. Secondly, students felt they improved in adapting to new situations and places. And the third most frequently mentioned achievement was problem-solving skill.

How one learns on Erasmus is an important subject of discussion. The improvements of Erasmus program may contribute to greater learning experiences, complex personal development and creation of friendships throughout Europe. Students should be aware of an important opportunity that is hidden inside the Erasmus experience.

10 SOUHRN

Účelem této práce bylo porozumět rozličným zkušenostem českých studentů z Erasmus programu. K tomu jsem připravil několik výzkumných otázek týkajících se důležitých důvodů pro účast na Erasmus programu, připravenosti, vzdělávání a seberozvoje. Tato práce je rozdělena do tří hlavních částí – jazyk, cestování a seberozvoj.

První část mé práce popisuje význam rozvoje komunikativních schopností v cizím jazyce a mezikulturní porozumění. Hlavním důvodem a motivací k účasti na Erasmus programu bylo pro české studenty zdokonalení se v cizím jazyce. Studenti odjeli na Erasmus také proto, aby získali nové zkušenosti a zkusili si žít v odlišném kulturním prostředí. Erasmus z Rotterdamu popisuje velký význam takové zkušenosti. On sám by nikdy nebyl schopný získat takové porozumění a nadhled bez cestování a seznamování se s odlišnými kulturami.

Druhá část poukazuje na oblíbenou volnočasovou aktivitu mého souboru, která představuje jeden z nejbohatších zdrojů zážitkového vzdělávání. Nejběžnější volnočasovou aktivitou českých studentů bylo cestování po hostitelské zemi a do zemí okolních. V této části se zmiňuji také a významu propojování zkušenosti se samotným učením. Cestování je totiž jedním ze základních druhů lidského pohybu, který obohacuje osobnost o nové znalosti a schopnosti. Cestování také podporuje seberealizaci a vytváří pozitivní prostředí pro zážitkové vzdělávání.

Třetí část popisuje některé vývojové změny českých studentů, kteří se zúčastnili Erasmus programu. Z výsledků mé práce vyplývá, že studenti se vyvinuli v přizpůsobivější, odpovědnější a sebejistější lidské bytosti. Mezinárodní studijní zkušenost bezesporu napomáhá k hlubšímu nahlédnutí do kultury hostitelské země, lepším organizačním schopnostem, mezikulturnímu porozumění, zdokonalení se v cizím jazyce, znalostech a schopnostech. Mezi nejdůležitější dovednosti studenti zařadili práci s lidmi z jiných kultur. Studenti také pocítili zlepšení ve schopnosti se přizpůsobit novým situacím a místům a naučili se řešit problémy.

To jakým způsobem se studenti učí na Erasmu by mělo být předmětem diskuze. Zkvalitnění Erasmus programu může vést k hodnotnějším zkušenostem a vzdělávání, celkovému osobnostnímu rozvoji a vytvoření úzkých vztahů v evropském měřítku. Studenti by si proto měli být vědomi této důležité příležitosti, kterou představuje zkušenost z výměnného studijního programu - Erasmus.

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12 APPENDIX

12.1 The Erasmus Experience Questionnaire

Erasmus Experience Survey 2010

The questionnaire is strictly dedicated for the purpose of the research regarding the Bachelor thesis on the topic - Erasmus experience. The questionnaire is anonymous and designed for all students who went on exchange study period abroad.

1. General information

1.1 Country where you studied in as an exchange student?

Austria Belgium Bulgaria Denmark Estonia Finland France Germany Great Britain Greece Hungarian Ireland Italy Latvia Malta Netherlands Norway Poland Portugal Rumania Slovakia Slovenia Spain Sweden Switzerland Turkey

1.2 How long was the period of your stay?

Semester Academic year

2. Motives

An effort to understand basic motives that made students to go on the exchange period.
Please indicate how important for you were the following reasons to go on exchange period.

	Not important at all	Not important	Neither important nor unimportant	Important	Very important
To have new experiences					
To improve my academic knowledge					
To enhance future employment prospects					
To have fun					
To learn about different cultures					
To practice a foreign language					
To meet new people					
To be independent					
To live in a foreign country					

3. Information prior the departure

Before you went to your host country to study:

	Yes	No
You had enough information about the host country's culture		
You knew the typical dish of your host country		
You knew stereotypes of the host country		
You had already spent more than 3 months in the country		
You had visited the hosting country		
You talked to people who had already studied/worked in the host country		
You made contacts with		

	Yes	No
local students/young people by internet		
You had arranged your accommodation		

4. Leisure time activities

During your stay did you:

	Yes	No
Do volunteer work		
Travel around the host country		
Travel to another foreign countries		
Go back home at least once		
Call home country at least once a week		

5. Social network

Please indicate how much time you spent with the following groups of people during your stay abroad.

	Most of my time	Much time	Not much time	I did not spent time with them
Local students				
Foreign students				
Local people other than students				
Foreigners other than students				
People of your nationality				

6. Self-development

My stay made me more:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Tolerant					
Open to dialogue					
Self-confident					
Flexible					

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Responsible					
Creative					

7. Skills

Your stay abroad helped you improving the following skills:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Working in a team					
Problem-solving in unexpected situations					
Planning your time and your projects					
Taking responsibility of your tasks and duties					
Adapting to new situations					
Working with people of different cultural backgrounds					

8. Overall satisfaction

8.1 What is your overall level of satisfaction with:

	Very dissatisfied	Rather dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Rather satisfied	Very satisfied
your studies as an exchange student					
your stay as an exchange student					

8.2 Gender

Female	
Male	

9. Conclusion

For any further experiences or observations you would like to share, please contact me on this email: Stepan_p@email.cz

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Štěpán Přindiš