



EXCHANGING CULTURES: Cultural Aspect of Erasmus Programme from The Perspective of Incoming International Students

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Gazi University



- Since 1982 (First academic unit 1926, founded by Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK)
- 44 academic units (faculties, graduate schools, vocational schools)
- 48 research centres
- Erasmus Programme, since 2004
- Every year approximately 40 incoming international students
- The number is low because of the language problem
- Main taught language is Turkish, at some faculties like Administrative Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 30% English



GAZİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ





Aim of The Study



- The social background essentially shapes the mentality of oneself. At the same time, personal experiences also heavily influence one's way of life. *

Culture;

- verbal messages and non-verbal signs that constitute the foundation of communication
- attributed meanings and interpretations of non-verbal signs**

* Neumann, M.L. , Knust, S.L. (2013). Perceptions of Cultural Differences between Turkish and German Societies: Personal Observations of Two German Erasmus Students at Karabük University Journal of History, Culture and Health Research, Karabuk University, Karabük

** Güvenç, B. (1991). Kültürün ABC'si, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul



The Culture and Education Committee of European Parliament is responsible for the cultural aspects of European Union, which are defined as:

- Improving the knowledge and dissemination of culture
- The protection and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity
- The conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage, cultural exchanges and artistic creation*

* Zhelyazkova, Z. (2013). Cultural and Linguistic Implications of The Erasmus Exchange Program, Trakia Journal of Sciences, vol:11. no:3. Stara Zagora



The Union's education policy includes the promotion of the system of European schools and lifelong learning.

Erasmus Programme is ideal both for the cultural and educational policies for The EU.*

* Zhelyazkova, Z. (2013). Cultural and Linguistic Implications of The Erasmus Exchange Program, *Trakia Journal of Sciences*, vol:11. no:3. Stara Zagora



A research about the reasons that have a strong influence on the decision of Erasmus students to study abroad shows that:

- learning a foreign language,
- opportunity for self-development (87 %)
- wish to gain academic learning experience in another country (82 %)
- wish to improve understanding of the host country (73%)
- wish to improve career prospects,
- wish to travel (71%)
- wish for a break from usual surroundings (66%) *

* Opper, S., Teichler, U., Carlson, J. (1990). *Impact of Study Abroad Programmes on Students and Graduates*. London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers



- As the practitioners of this programme, we also observe that coming to a different country for study or traineeship makes the students gain a new and valuable cultural perspective.
- Since their perspective changes, they attribute different meanings to the concepts they have already known, with the help of their Erasmus experiences.



Content of The Study



- workshop
- a discussion with international incoming students about various topics
- 19 students attended, their nationalities: Spanish, Italian, Romanian, Lithuanian, French, Estonian, German, Polish
- opinions before and after their arrival in Turkey
- their comments, arguments and experiences
- recorded and written down during the workshop
- compilation out of the received data



Topics

1. Is this your first time in Turkey? Have you experienced Turkish culture before? If yes, have you discovered anything new this time?



Only one of the students:

"Last year, I was in İstanbul, Amasra and Karabük for a week and liked that trip very much, that's why I wanted to come back as an Erasmus Student this time."



2. What did you think about Turkish culture before you arrive in Ankara? What were your expectations?



The answers are:

"I have Turkish friends in Germany, so I am familiar with the culture. But I expected people to be more open minded about foreigners and interested in politics."

"I thought, Turkish daily life would not be so modern, I was expecting a village life or something, I was surprised when I first came here."

" I was expecting more women in scarves."



"More people who can speak English in big cities, at universities."

"I was expecting the transportation in big cities to be better, it is very expensive and there is no way to use transportation at night. On the other hand, intercity transportation is better than the one in Poland, much cheaper."



3. In your first month here, were your expectations similar to what you saw, what you experienced?



"In Spain, the higher education is more theoretical, but here, it is more practical and the classes are not crowded, so there is more chance to participate in lessons in Gazi University (English Language Teaching) "

And one of the Engineering students agrees.



"Bureaucratic issues are very complicated such as applying for residence permit, going to foreigners' office at the police station. It takes a lot of time to solve your issues."

" The traffic is scary." (Lithuanian student)



"Some people are very helpful. Even if they do not understand what you say, they try to help. But when you are on the metro or on a bus and speak your native language, everyone stares at you" (Spanish students).

Another student replies to this statement like:

"That's because you Spanish people are shouting, not speaking :)".



4. Are there any similarities between your culture / daily life and Turkish culture / daily life?



"Spanish people are friendly like Turkish people."

"Mothers and grandmothers are similar" (Italian and Spanish students).

"Superstitions are similar such as knocking on things, we knock on shoulders, you knock on wooden things, pulling the ear..." (Lithuanian student).

"Gossiping" (Spanish student)



"Not being punctual is the same." (Spanish students)

"Every plan changes in the end, Turkish people are not organised like us" (Romanian student)

"International brands are the same like Coca-Cola, Mc Donald's, Burger King"

"Generous people who shares food with guests."



5. What do you like most about Turkish daily life & culture, cities, places, food etc.?

"Tea and hospitality"



"Pamukkale"



"Pamukkale"



"Capadoccia"



"Islamic call to prayer, Ezan"



"Traditional Turkish music and dances"



"İstanbul"



"Turkish desserts"



"A musical instrument, Kanun"





"The rules are flexible. For instance, you walk to a shop that has just been closed. Still, if you ask kindly, the shopkeeper reopens it just for you.

"Everything is different when I walk on the street."

"Respect to old people"

"Cheap daily life (food and beverages)"



6. What don't you like about Turkish daily life?



"Bureaucratic issues"

"Climbing hills / bumpy roads" (In Ankara)

"Nobody speaks English"

"Taxi drivers "

"Rubbish on the streets"

"Transportation"

"Spicy food"

"In touristic areas, shopkeepers try to cheat foreigners by selling overpriced souvenirs."



7. Can you think of any specific quality or a characteristic of Turkish culture and daily life as a habit of yours, from now on? Can you say that "..... has become my favourite thing, I will continue doing after I go back to my home country?"

"Tea time"





"Some Turkish words and expressions like:

"tamam" or "evet" (means okay and yes)

"otur otur" (means sit down, sit)

"I will be a more relaxed person when I go back to my country." (French student)



"Waking up late in the mornings"

"I will not use premade food sauce like mayonnaise and ketchup"

"Taking off shoes before entering in flats"

"Making Ayran out of Yoghurt"





8. How did you learn Turkish culture? Who or what did help you learn this culture? Did you get to know a Turkish family?



"I stayed with one of my Turkish friend's family, they embraced me like their own child, it was a kind and caring family."

"Classmates"

"Erasmus Student Network (Gazi University ESN)"

"Another foreigner from a different university"

"Turkish mentor / buddy students"



9. Did you want to learn Turkish language before coming to Turkey? Have you learned any Turkish words or idioms so far?

"Merhaba" (hello)

"Evet" (yes)

"Tamam" (okay)

"Günaydın" (good morning)

"İyi akşamlar" (good evening)

"Et" (meat)

"Su" (water)

"Çorba" (soup)

"Tavuk" "Piliç" (chicken)

"Çok yaşa" (God bless you)

"Ellerine sağlık" (thank you for the meal, be healthy)

"Numbers"

"Yok" (none)

"I took some Turkish language courses at school"
(German student)

"Turkish people love to teach Turkish to foreign people, they really try to do it a lot"



10. Do you think Erasmus programme contributes to cultural experiences? Does it help students know new people, make friends and change visions?



"Gives you another point of view" (Italian student)

"Having a new family, mixing cultures, habits and languages" (Estonian student)

"I would not truly know about this country without living here for a while, I am glad I did" (Spanish student)



"Multiculturalism" (Italian student)

"Living in various countries is better"

"In every country, you know somebody"

"Tasting new food"

"Seeing new places"



11. If not personal, what is your unforgettable memory in Turkey? What can not you forget about your Erasmus experience?



"Helpful people"

"Having no Christmas"

"The school was fun but very intense"
(Engineering student from Spain)

"I will tell my family that you must absolutely see
Turkey as soon as possible." (Spanish students)

"Kocatepe Mosque"



"Our Capadoccia Trip"



"Passing over Bosphorus on a boat"





Conclusion



The cultural differences between foreign students and local people lead to misunderstandings as the communication patterns are different.

Although Erasmus students face difficulties and challenges during their adaptation period, they are expected to behave and communicate effectively.

This may be possible if the students are internationally competent and respect to the host culture.*



Conclusion



As it is concluded from the responses of the students, they had difficulty in getting used to:

- Language obstacle
- Environmental issues
- Transportation
- Food
- Different habits of local people



Conclusion



They tried to get used to Turkish daily life, with the help of:

- Members of Erasmus Student Network
- Turkish friends from school
- Other foreign students



Conclusion



They think the cultural aspect of Erasmus Programme is significant because of the opportunities to :

- mix cultures
- know new people
- see different places
- experience different lifestyles
- create multicultural environments
- taste new food



Gazi University

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Resources



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THANK YOU, FOR YOUR ATTENTION.

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