

# **EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES: STUDENTS PERCEPTION OF EUROPE AND THEIR EUROPEAN IDENTITY**

EXPLORING HOW STUDENTS PERCEIVE EUROPE AND THEIR  
EUROPEAN IDENTITY AS A RESULT OF AN ERASMUS EXCHANGE  
AND THEIR ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

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Joppe Louage

Student number: 02011500

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Isis Vandelannote,  
Co-Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Melissa Ceuterick

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the mechanisms of European identification among young individuals, focusing on the impact of social environments and international experiences such as the Erasmus+ program. Utilizing in-depth interviews with Belgian university students from Ghent, the research investigates how students perceive and evaluate Europe and their European identity. The analysis differentiates between students enrolled in STEM or humanities and those who have participated in Erasmus and those who have not. Using thematic analysis, findings reveal that while a unified European identity does not exist among respondents. Despite that, Europe and the EU are generally perceived and evaluated positively, especially for their practical benefits. International experiences, particularly Erasmus, enhance connections with Europe by broadening perspectives and building international networks. Socialization through education and daily interactions significantly influences perceptions of Europe. The study supports the notion that European identity is socially constructed, while at the same time underscoring the importance of things like European perception and evaluation besides identification. It also addresses the need for more nuanced and expanded research to further clarify the mechanisms of European identification and to establish a concrete definition of European identity.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1957, the signing of the Treaty of Rome led to the foundations of the European Union (EU) as we know it today (Capello, 2018). Ever since then, concepts like European integration and European identity became part of the official discourse in both the political and economic European sphere. These concepts became linked to values and goals, such as democracy, social equality and peace, which had to be achieved, built and protected over time (Capello, 2018). The official discourse states that European unity, integration and a common European identity are rooted in a shared history and heritage, similar values and norms and even cultural relations (King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). From a functional perspective, the development of a European identity could be a way to legitimize Europe and the EU (Bergbauer, 2018a). Today, one of Europe's most important tools to enforce future integration and identification is the Erasmus+-program (Oborne, 2013).

The Erasmus+ program can be seen as one of Europe's most visible success stories (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2023). The entire program coordinates, supports and facilitates transnational cooperation between thousands of organizations and people in the fields of education, sports, youth and training. Its biggest and most known achievement is the support they give for the mobility of students and staff in higher education, where they spend between three-to-twelve months abroad in another European country for their studies or internships. The idea is that the increasing number of interactions between Europeans will lead to a growing recognition of each other's similarities which will lead to an increased Europe-feeling, integration and identification (Oborune, 2013).

However, despite the growing amount of research investigating the link between student mobility programs such as Erasmus and identification with Europe, two issues persistently reoccur and leave academics divided (Bergbauer, 2018a; Goksu, 2020; Oborune, 2013; Sigalas, 2010; Van Mol, 2022). The first issue is that most studies use the same, standardized questions about Europe and European identity. This way of measuring European identification might help compare studies in different contexts, but is problematic because this assumes that everyone describes the same meaning to their European identity (Van Mol, 2022). The meaning ascribed to Europe and the European identity can

differ a lot even though the same words and questions are used, depending on the context, timeframe and respondents (Bergbauer, 2018a ; Capello, 2018; Cores-Bilbao, Méndez-Garcia, Fonseca-Mora, 2020; Jenkins, 2008; Van Mol, 2022). The second issue is that not all researchers are convinced of the impact of Erasmus on European identification (Sigalas, 2010; Van Mol, 2022). They argue that the fact that Erasmus students show a greater identification with Europe is because they already have a more pro-European attitude before they go on an exchange. In addition, there is sufficient data showing that students' European identity and how they experience it, depends on a multitude of factors in their social environment besides Erasmus (Crains, 2019; European Commission, 2021).

Given the importance of European integration for the EU and the critical remarks from social scientists, this study aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the matter. Firstly, to move beyond the static, quantitative definition of European identity, this paper will explore how people perceive and evaluate Europe and their European identity for themselves. Secondly, rather than merely investigating whether Erasmus has an impact, this study will seek to understand how Erasmus might influence individuals' perceptions and evaluations of Europe and their European identity. To better comprehend these two aims, the article will give special consideration to the social environment of students, which is expected to provide a more thorough view of students' perceptions of Europe and European identity, as well as the impact of Erasmus. To do so, students' fields of study will be considered, as this is a crucial aspect of their student life and has previously shown to influence their attitudes in other areas as well (Fischer et al., 2017; Pavić & Šuljok, 2022). The respondents will be divided in two groups: science-technology-engineering-mathematics (STEM) and humanities (social sciences, psychology and law). This distinction is made based on earlier research, showing its value in investigating people and their attitudes (Chang & ChangTzeng, 2020; Olmos-Peñuela, Benneworth & Castro-Martínez, 2015). Combining all these questions leads to the following research aim(s): *to contribute to the existing literature by examining the mechanisms of European identification among young individuals and how these are shaped by their social environments and international (Erasmus) experiences.*

To understand how students perceive and shape their European identity, a series of in-depth interviews with Belgian university students from the city of Ghent were held. During these interviews, respondents were asked about their (possible) Erasmus experience, how they perceive Europe and European identity and which aspects from their field of study, Erasmus and daily life influences their perception. Using interviews as a tool of data collection and analyzing them using qualitative data analysis techniques, allows for a certain depth in understanding the meanings students ascribe to certain events, interactions and related concepts. In total, 16 interviews were conducted over four groups of interviewees: Erasmus participants in humanities, Erasmus participants in STEM, non-Erasmus participants in humanities, and non-Erasmus participants in STEM. The differentiation between Erasmus and non-Erasmus was made to see the difference in experiences and the impact of (not) going on an international exchange. The differentiation between humanities and STEM sciences was, as explained above, made to see the impact of their social environment. The resulting data was analyzed using thematic analysis, as this was perceived as the best way to really grasp the meaning which respondents ascribe to Europe and European identity.

The following sections will provide an overview of the current literature on Erasmus, European identity and possible identification processes. It starts by explaining the objectives, functioning, and impact of the Erasmus program, before presenting several frameworks on European identification and examining the impact of academic study on the overall question. Following this, the methodology section will go into detail on how data was collected and analyzed. It will address questions regarding the selection of the research population, the coding techniques employed, and the considerations for conducting in-depth interviews. Successively, an overview of the findings and results will be presented. Finally, it concludes with a summary of the findings, critical remarks and recommendations for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Erasmus and European integration

The EU has two main reasons to support international student mobility and the Erasmus+ program (Crains, 2019; Krupnik & Krzaklewska, 2013; Lesjak et al., 2015; McCormick, 2013; Van Mol, 2013). First, there is the economic objective, which is to create a mobile, growing competitive labor market and strengthen the European economy compared to the rest of the world. Secondly, there is the cultural objective of supporting European integration, identification and citizenship. The cultural objective is based on the idea that increased interaction between people from different nationalities will eventually lead to an integrated community of states (Goksu, 2020; Sigalas, 2010). According to the intergroup contact theory written by Allport (1954), social interaction between groups will contribute to a sense of community and eventually, over time lead to an integrated society. The central argument underlying this pioneering theory is that during positive social interactions between different groups, prejudice and bias might disappear, leading groups to re-categorize themselves as a single group instead of seeing themselves as separate groups (Goksu, 2020; Pettigrew, 1998). Cross-border mobility might be the most efficient tool to encourage transnational interactions because people from different nationalities get in direct touch, which can result in a stronger 'we-feeling' (Sigalas, 2010).

Reflecting on Europe, Fligstein (2008) makes a similar statement about increased European interactions which, according to him, will lead to a shared European identity. He argues that people who have international contacts “*see each other less as Italian and French, and thus foreign, and more and more as sharing coming common interests, a process that eventually will lead to seeing themselves as Europeans and less as having merely a national identity*” (Fligstein, 2008, 139). However, some scholars argue that existing literature still lacks sufficient reliable data to conclusively establish the correlation between intra-European student mobility and the formation of a European identity (Goksu, 2020; King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Sigalas, 2010; Van Mol, 2022). The primary argument here posits that students who decide to participate in an Erasmus exchange, already possess a stronger sense of European identity prior to their departure compared to non-participants. Van Mol (2022) finds, by using quantitative methods, that non-mobile students

score significantly lower on several latent dimensions associated with being connected to Europe compared to both future mobile and mobile students. Oborune (2013) conducted a similar study in which she concludes that Erasmus is more a catalysator, rather than a promoter of European identity.

Whether the Erasmus+ program acts as a catalyst or a promoter, sufficient data indicates that students' general European identity perception depends on a multitude of factors (Cairns, 2019; European Commission, 2021). First of all, a lot depends on structural factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), age and domicile. People with higher SES will be more likely to see themselves as Europeans, as are people who live in more urban areas and people whose country only joined the EU more recently (European Commission, 2021). Secondly, a person's individual attitudes, often molded by their social surroundings, also exert a certain influence. The most important and researched attitude influencing a person's European identity is their perception of their own national identity (Duchesne and Frogner, 2008; Risse, 2004). People strongly attached to their national identity often reject a European one, fearing it as a threat, while those who don't perceive it as a threat see it as an addition to their national identity. Quantitative research has proven the importance of someone's social environment and attitudes in how they evaluate Europe and their European identity. However, proving the relationship between these concepts, gives only limited information about the mechanisms behind them. This leaves a lot of room for more qualitative, in-depth studies to really investigate these mechanisms behind someone's personal identity experiences.

Therefore, this article *aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the mechanisms of European identification among young individuals and how these are shaped by their social environments and international (Erasmus) experiences*. This overall question can be divided into two parts: 1) 'How young people experience Europe and the European identity for themselves?'; and 2) 'Which mechanisms enhance the European identity of young people and their perspective on Europe because of their social environments and international (Erasmus) experiences and how do they work?'. To address these broad questions, it is essential to first examine the issue of how to define European identity and explore possible identification processes.



## European identity as a social Identity

The increasing interest and literature surrounding European identity and the sense of being European have led to countless ways of defining them (Bergbauer, 2018a; Capello, 2018; Cores-Bilbao et al., 2020). Generally, there are two types of models to describe European identity, namely: a cultural model and a structural model (Oborune, 2013; Recchi, 2014). The former sees institutional processes and the establishment of European symbols as the key features which trigger European identification. European identity formation, in this sense, is something that is generated and reproduced by culture and cultural discourse in society itself. The latter assumes that European identity is formed bottom-up by individuals and the relational dynamics between individuals (Oborune, 2013; Recchi, 2014). The structural model states that European identity is shaped by interactions, social relations and shared spatial contexts.

Based on these models, identity is something to be conceptualized as a dynamic process and a result of interaction and the meaning given to this interaction (Jenkins, 2008; Oborune, 2013; Van Mol, 2013). Bergbauer (2018a) understands European identity as a social identity, which indicates that it can be seen as the perception of oneself as part of a larger social collective or group. It is about the category a person is connected to and the attributes and attitudes that a person is expected to possess in relation to others (Clarke, 2013). A social identity helps people categorize themselves in the same groups and create a certain 'we-feeling', based upon similarities among themselves and differences with people with whom they do not categorize (Jenkins, 2008). This results from interactions and social events which influence a person or a group's social identity. The main idea is that during these social events and interactions, people ascribe meaning to these events and interactions, which is essential for identity construction (Pozarlik, 2013). By categorizing oneself and describing meaning to these categories, identity becomes a supporting role in social interactions by setting a frame for actual behavior. Applying this to the concept of a European identity, Oborune argues that:

*"... European identity is part of multiple identities that one can have. Third, identity is a dynamic social phenomenon that can change. Last but not least, the definition of*

*identity I prefer: identity is a feeling of belonging to a specific category determined by common characteristics and recognized by other members. This definition reflects the “collectivity” element that is prescribed to the European identity.”* (Oborune, 2013, 186).

## How Erasmus and study field shape European identity.

Building on identity research and Erasmus literature, and considering that the research population consists of students, this study will examine how students' fields of study influence their Erasmus experience and European identification. Fields of study significantly impact social reality and (political) attitudes (Fischer et al., 2017; Pavić & Šuljok, 2022). Considering academic study helps highlighting a key social environment factor and offers a unique perspective from this research topic. Taking a step back to motivate the academic field, this study follows Bergbauer (2018b) and her broad summarizing work on European identity formation. She suggests that European identity formation, defined as a social identity, depends on two pathways. These are access to information about Europe (information-pathway) and personal experiences and contacts with other Europeans (experience-pathway). The former assumes that citizens are expected to become aware of shared norms and values and the shared ‘we-feeling, to the extent that they receive information about Europe and the European community. The latter assumes that this awareness is a consequence of interactions with other Europeans and European institutions. However, Bergbauer’s work, although very broad and thoroughly, remains mostly quantitative, leaving the underlying identification mechanisms largely grounded in assumptions (Bergbauer, 2018b). In this study, the experience-pathway can be perfectly explained using the philosophy of the Erasmus program: having more transnational experiences, more frequent contact with other Europeans and being part of the European space and community will all lead to feeling more European (Bergbauer, 2018b; Recchi, 2014; Rohkrämer & Schulz, 2009).

The information-pathway, which Bergbauer (2018b) assumes to influence individual identification with Europe, is exposure and access to information related to Europe, the EU and all related aspects. Europeans are expected to identify with Europe to the extent that they are exposed to (discursive) messages, which will extend their knowledge, feelings

and ideas about the EU (Bergbauer, 2018b; Recchi, 2014). Research shows that there are strong correlations between the national, macro-level factors, such as media exposure, geography and historical background and the perceptions and ideas citizens have about European identity (Bergbauer, 2018b; Datler, Rössel, & Schroedter, 2021; Van Mol, 2013). First, the research population of this study are Belgium students, so searching for the influence of national factors is quite pointless. Second, this study wants to understand how people construct and reconstruct their social identity and reality on a meso- and micro-level, in this case their environment, their daily practices and interactions (Risse, 2004).

In order to comprehend the meso- and micro-level reality in which people are socialized and exposed to European-related messages, this study will explore how students' choice of academic study and relevant coursework in their university influences this socialization. Field of study is expected to shape their daily routines and the (possible) European-related information they encounter. This assumption is based upon the idea that the perception of European identity is influenced by someone's political and nationalistic attitudes, which in its turn are influenced by someone's field of study (Duchesne & Frogner, 2008; Fischer et al., 2017; Risse, 2004). The respondents will be divided in STEM and humanities, as this distinction is commonly used to consider the impact of field of study on people and their attitudes (Chang & ChangTzeng, 2020; Olmos-Peñuela et al., 2015; Fischer et al., 2017; Pavić & Šuljok, 2022).

Although this model is divided in an experiences- and information-based pathway, in reality a lot of interaction is expected between both ways (Bergbauer, 2018b; King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). A person might receive a lot of information about Europe during his/her Erasmus, while another person might have a lot of international friends in his/her classes in Belgium. As European identity is defined as a social identity, it is expected to be constructed through all sorts of interactions in addition to the ones investigated here (Jenkins, 2008; Oborune, 2013; Van Mol, 2013). Secondly, European identity can also be deconstructed in the same sense as it can be constructed if the interactions and messages related have a negative connotation. Thirdly, Berghauer's model (2018b) is a strong, quantitative model which can be used to motivate the choices for the interviews and help to reflect back to the literature. Despite that, the purpose is still to derive as much information inductively and directly from

the respondents, not to control for the model. The next part will explain how this study will investigate the research question by using in-depth interviews with Belgium university students, which are analyzed using qualitative data analyses.

## METHODS, DATA-COLLECTION AND RESEARCH-POPULATION

### A qualitative approach

While quantitative surveys like the Eurobarometer or the European Social Survey (ESS) are often employed for large-scale identity research due to their ease of standardization and international comparability, there is a notable shift towards small-scale qualitative identity studies (Brekhus, 2008; Grundy & Jamieson, 2005). The reason is that there is a growing recognition for identity as a multifaceted, dynamic and complex phenomenon, influenced by social interactions and the individual's perception. Cores-Bilbao et al. (2020), whom summarizes qualitative literature on European identity, argue for the advantages of qualitative methods as they allow more in-depth results of the meaning respondents themselves ascribe to their European identity. Qualitative research, especially when it follows a constructivist paradigm, can grasp how people create and describe meaning to their own reality in relation to social interactions and experiences (Mortelmans, 2020). As the purpose of this study is to investigate identification processes, a qualitative method was expected to be most valid. Another reason which made qualitative research more suitable is its open character (Mortelmans, 2020; Roose & Meuleman, 2017). Data-collections are often done in different cycles or periods, and it is exactly this open character which allows researchers to adapt their methods or tools based upon new information assembled in earlier cycles.

For this study, in-depth, face-to-face interviews with Belgian university students were held. The participants were selected based on various criteria to offer comprehensive insights into the research questions. All participants were required to be enrolled in their final year of bachelor's or pursuing a master's degree in the city of Ghent, either Ghent University or KU Leuven (which has several campuses in Ghent). Additionally, they must have had the

option to participate in an Erasmus exchange within the EU and be studying either a STEM or a humanities discipline. Half of the interviewees were specifically chosen for their participation in an Erasmus exchange, while the remaining half opted out of such opportunities. Furthermore, each of these groups was further divided: one group had pursued studies in humanity disciplines for the past three-to-four years, while the other group enrolled in STEM disciplines. These pre-established groupings resulted in four categories of interviewees, each consisting of four participants. These categories were as follows: Erasmus participants in humanities, Erasmus participants in STEM, non-Erasmus participants in humanities, and non-Erasmus participants in STEM. In total, 16 face-to-face interviews were conducted to thoroughly examine these categories. By selecting four students for each possible category, a maximum amount of theoretical variation was achieved. This seemed relevant as the goal is to investigate how these students perceive Europe and how the social context of each category has a different impact on the perception and formation of European identity. The students who went on an Erasmus exchange went to France (Bordeaux, Aix-en-Provence & Lille (3)), Spain (Valencia (1)), Denmark (Aarhus (1)), Sweden (Stockholm (2)) or Poland (Krakow (1)). Seven of them went for a semester, one girl for a whole year and they all went somewhere between August 2022 and February 2024. The STEM students were active in the field of Biology (1), bioengineering (1), biochemistry (3), industrial engineering (1), civil engineering (1) or veterinary medicine (1), while the humanities were active in sociology (4), political science (3) or psychology (1). All the respondents were active university students in Ghent at the time of the data-collection, were born between 2001 and 2003 and there were nine female and seven male respondents. In the appendix (see page 50), an overview of the respondents (pseudonyms) and their attributes is given.

To address the research questions, all respondents were asked about their motivations and expectations related to the Erasmus-program and how this had influenced their choice to (not) participate. After that they were asked about how they perceive Europe, European people and their own connection with Europe and their European identity. After that, they were asked how their academic study had influenced the above topics. To finish up, they were asked a series of questions related to European identity, what that meant for them, how they expect this to play a role in the future and how this relates to their Belgium identity.

The only difference was that the respondents who participated in an Erasmus, had an extra part related to their Erasmus experiences. The interviews were mostly between 30 and 45 minutes. The entire interview questionnaire can be found in the appendix (page 35-47).

## Thematic analysis

These interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis (TA). Thematic analysis is an upcoming method of qualitative data analysis which allows to identify or develop patterns of meaning, central ideas or themes (as they are referred to) pertaining to a given dataset (Dusi & Stevens, 2023). Its purpose is to investigate how people experience, define and perceive certain phenomena related to their social context. As the goal here is to discover how people perceive Europe and their European identity in relation to their Erasmus and academic study, this approach seemed most suited. In comparison, it would be less suitable for Qualitative Content Analysis, as the goal is not to merely describe the phenomena, but to investigate and understand the concepts of the research but their relationship as well. In order to make the qualitative research more efficient, manageable and understandable, the qualitative data-analysis software NVivo was used.

There are two dominant approaches when using TA (Dusi & Stevens, 2023): 1) the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) and the approach of Boyatzis (1998). They are alike in the sense that both approaches emphasize formulating research questions before data collection begins, their proposition that themes can emerge through inductive or deductive methods, marking the importance of coherent themes and recommending that thematic coding should be performed systematically and consistently to enhance the quality of the analysis. Braun and Clarke provide a more flexible, inductive process, whereas Boyatzis offers a structured, potentially quantitative method with an emphasis on predefined themes and codebooks (Dusi & Stevens, 2023). As the purpose here was to really inductively derive the perceptions of the respondents from the interviews, following the Braun and Clarke approach seemed most appropriate. However, although Braun and Clarke are used as a guideline, there is also a certain reliance on Boyatzis quantitative dimension in order to compare the different groups.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis (TA) there are six phases of analysis: 1) familiarizing with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; 6) and producing the report (Dusi and Stevens, 2023). In the first phase of familiarizing with the data, six transcripts were used which, subjectively, contained a lot of valuable information. By reading and interpreting them multiple times, an early list of codes and subcodes was formulated which were potentially meaningful and valuable for further data-analysis. In the second phase all transcripts were uploaded in the NVivo program and the transcripts were coded according to the initial codes from the first phase. What followed was a process of switching between coding the data and adapting and generating codes with the data. This process continued until there was a solid coding framework with codes and subcodes which was fit to code all the data transcripts. This inductive way of coding separates Braun and Clarke from Boyatzis, who develops the coding framework early on and is more reliant on literature. Based upon these codes and the coding framework, this third phase is meant to find overarching themes among them. A theme separates itself from a code by, instead of describing a specific meaning, describing a shared, broader meaning (Dusi and Stevens, 2023). In the fourth phase, the initial themes are critically reviewed by revisiting the original data to assess their fit. The aim is to finalize the themes, ensuring they align and are coherent with the original data, are relevant and valuable to the research questions, and are distinct yet interconnected with other themes. The fifth and sixth phase are the ones ascribed in the next chapter of this study. The former defines, refines and ascribes a name to the different themes. Here the themes are described and given a clear focus, boundaries which separates it from other themes and a narrative in relation to the research question and the other themes. The latter rounds the themes up into a coherent report which can answer the research question.

## Remarks and consent

As this is a small-scale thesis study, the choice to interview Belgian, Dutch-speaking students from Ghent was based on convenience sampling. All interviews were held in Dutch as this was easier for most respondents. All the quotes derived from the data in the

following parts of this article are translated by the author. The majority of the respondents were selected through personal connection with the author, the other ones through several middlemen. They were all contacted through social media or mail and the interviews were held either face-to-face or face-to-face during a video call, depending on what was more convenient for the respondents. All the respondents were informed they would participate in a thesis-interview concerning 'Europe', 'European identity', 'Erasmus' and their academic study and how these concepts were connected. The reason for this limited information was to avoid that respondents might predetermine their answers before participating. The interviews were held in two cycles: the first cycle of interviews (March 2024, seven respondents) and the second cycle (April-May 2024, nine respondents). The difference between the two cycles was an adaptation and simplification of several questions in the questionnaire of the second cycle related to how respondents perceive Europe. The reason for this change was the experienced difficulty for interviewees of the first cycle to explain or express how they perceive Europe and European identity. Both questionnaires are added in the appendix (see page 35-47). In order to ensure both the respondents and Ghent University that all the universities ethical standards such as data-protection, anonymity and volunteered participation were taken into account, both the author and the respondents signed a pre-written informed consent concerning these standards, which is added in the appendix (see page 32-33) together with a short drop-off the respondents had to fill out (see page 34). All documents added in the appendix which were used for the interviews are as well in Dutch.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

After transcribing and coding all the data, eight categories were identified, each encompassing several codes and subcodes. These categories include everything the respondents mentioned about a specific topic in relation to the research question. All categories, codes, and subcodes were inductively derived from the interviews, a method preferred by Braun and Clarke (Dusi and Stevens, 2023). The results and conclusions are based entirely on the respondents' narratives during the interview. These categories were: Erasmus expectations and motivations, Erasmus experiences, connection with Europe,



perception of Europe through culture, perception of Europe through EU, perception of Europe through evaluation, personal reflections on identity and personal reflections on Belgium. An overview of the final coding structure is added in the appendix (see page 49-50). In order to find overarching themes within and across these categories, several memos were written. Six relevant themes derived from this: connection through experience, Europe in cultural regions, internationalization of academics, global perspective on Europe, European folk and personal reflections on European identity. Some of these themes were found across all groups while others only in some of them. All themes will be discussed and explained in the three following parts.

Before explaining the conclusions using the themes, several clear determinations can be observed regarding Europe, the EU and European identity. First of all, none of these concepts has a defined, static meaning. This observation did not come as a surprise as the above literature already indicated that European identity is a social identity (Bergbauer, 2018a; Cores-Bilbao et al., 2020). All respondents give interpretations based on their personal experiences and social context. They use examples out of their own life, lay accents on different aspects and perceive and evaluate these concepts all differently. Following this, it is very clear from the interviews that European identity is a very vague concept for the majority of the respondents and something they had a lot of difficulties talking about. Most answers are more related to Europe in general and aspects of Europe with which they could get in touch. The third observation is the impact of academic study and Erasmus participation on Europe, the EU and European identity. Erasmus participants connect with and evaluate Europe in a different way than non-participants, while STEM students perceive Europe and the EU not in the same way as humanity students. More importantly, some of the themes and narratives from the respondents helped explaining these differences. The last general observation is that there are also a lot of similarities among the respondents as they are all students, speaking the same language, in a similar period in their life and living in the same city. This gives a lot of limitations to the data, but opens the door for future research with different and more diverse populations. In the next part the three main findings will be discussed using the themes, respectively: the impact of Erasmus on students' connection with Europe, the different perspectives on Europe related

to one's academic field and the general evaluation and perception of Europe, the European identity and students' own identity.

## A European network: the impact of Erasmus

*'... I see Europe differently because it seems like I've met someone from every country, and I can picture something of a person on the countries instead of just being 'oh that country exists'.'*

*(Eline, bioengineer, Valencia)*

When asked about how respondents get in touch with Europe (related to their actions) or feel connected with Europe (related to their feelings), several different topics come up consistently which are different between Erasmus respondents and non-Erasmus respondents. However, all respondents use their personal experiences to explain their connection(s) with Europe. This is the first theme derived from the data. On the one hand, the large majority of non-Erasmus respondents expressed that traveling with friends and family was their primary connection with Europe and other European countries. They often started to make a summary of their travel experiences. Other topics some of them mention are certain media channels which connect them with news or international events, Europe as their place of living or just having limited connections in general. Compared to traveling as a tool of connection, these topics are more sporadically and don't differentiate much with some of the Erasmus respondents. On the other hand, all the respondents who went on an Erasmus related their connection with Europe with their exchange. Over all interviews, they consistently use their social network of international students and friends, which they build during their Erasmus, as their connection with Europe and how they see Europe. During their exchange, Erasmus students are introduced to an Erasmus community in their host town or country. Their social life exist mostly of international people of which the majority is European. While being abroad, they spend most of their time with these people, learning about each other and the similarities and differences between their culture and countries. It is the increase in knowledge, the new perspective and bond they created with other international students which reshapes their perspectives on Europe. As mentioned in the literature, Bergbauer (2018b) attributes this phenomenon to social interactions among individuals from diverse backgrounds and regions, leading to better

mutual understanding, re-evaluation of stereotypes about other Europeans, and the discovery of commonalities presumed to be shared by all Europeans (Capello, 2018).

*'...It's by getting involved with other cultures that you can see, 'ow we aren't that different and we do have much alike'. ... I think, once you've had contact with people from a certain country, you'll feel more connected with those than the ones you've never been in touch with.'*

*(Michee, political sciences, Lille)*

However, Bergbauer's (2018b) theory implies that people are expected to increase their 'we-feeling' as European citizens, see the cultural entity in the EU and ultimately have a stronger European identity. Although most of them had a better connection with Europe because of their international experiences and interactions, only a limited number of them assume an increase in their European identity. A more thorough analysis on the topic of European identity will be conducted in one of the following paragraphs. Secondly, around half of the respondents expressed that they did not connect with the whole of Europe equally. By meeting someone from a certain country and learning about this person's culture and life, the Erasmus respondents use that experience to visualize and connect with that certain country, not Europe as a whole. A last observation is that the Erasmus respondents did not only use people to explain their increased connection with Europe, but also places. Five out of eight respondents stated that by living in another country they also felt an increased connection specifically with that place.

Erasmus has a huge impact on the way students feel connected with Europe. While non-Erasmus students connect themselves mostly through their travels and media, Erasmus students see their international network as the primary source of European connection. This network gives them an increased knowledge and broader perspective about a lot of countries and helps them visualize these. They feel more connected to Europe than before, but this connection is mostly limited to the countries and cultures they came across because of their international friends and Erasmus exchange.

## Europe in four cultural regions, the impact of academic study

*'Yes, I would still say there are differences. Maybe more between the larger regions of Europe. For example, East-Europe, that we might look different to life in West-Europe. Or in the Mediterranean areas, different than the North.'* (Augustijn, sociology)

When analyzing and coding the transcripts, two themes consistently appeared in relation to the type of study in which the respondents are enrolled: Europe in cultural regions and internationalization of academics. Both of the themes will be discussed here. Looking at the first one, when respondents were asked how they perceive Europe, how they see Europe as an entity, what the internal differences or similarities were or where they would draw the internal and external borders of Europe they would often refer to four European regions. The large majority of the respondents referred to two, three or all of these regions to express themselves when speaking about Europe. Three respondents even literally phrased that they see these regions as separated culture entities in Europe. The regions are the following: Scandinavia, West-Europe, the South with countries like Spain and Italy and East-Europe with countries like Poland and Hungary. Except for Scandinavia, there are no clear borders for these cultural entities. Some respondents see France more like West-Europe, while others associate it culturally more with the South. Other countries like from the Balkan or the UK are not mentioned at all. There is no clear distinction between the EU and Europe in these themes. However, besides the general perception of students to see Europe in these four, vaguely bordered, cultural regions, there is a notable difference in how students from different studies perceive these distinctions and how they draw these cultural lines. As the next paragraphs will show, these differences are based mostly on different information they receive in their daily life as predicted by Bergbeaur's model (2018b).

*'Yes, mostly East-Europe. You can see it in the Eu all the time, how Poland and Hungary constantly obstruct Western values, at least, the values perceived as Western values. Values which are accepted by other European countries without any boo or baa. So yes, the more East-European countries and I would use Poland and Hungary as example.'* (Jeroen, political science)

When discussing Europe as an entity, the mentioning of internal differences within Europe is almost a constant in the interviews. The majority of humanity students highlight the distinctions between Eastern and Western Europe. The quote above, for instance, is a response to the question: "Where do you see the differences in Europe?". These students believe cultural values and general ideology are the root of this separation. Firstly, they are more inclined than STEM students to spontaneously group countries like the Netherlands and Germany with Belgium under umbrella terms like Western Europe or Western

European values. Secondly, they differentiate "their Western Europe" from Eastern Europe, associating Eastern European countries with opposition to the EU, its values, and its operations. An example of this which is mentioned by three different humanity respondents is their view on LGBTQ laws which are seen as anti-Western. A possible explanation could be the fact that they learn way more about certain value-related topics, Europe and the EU in their university courses compared to STEM students. The large majority of the humanity students mentioned that they learned a lot about Europe and the EU during their study, while for the STEM students this was extremely limited. Whether or not this West-East perspective on Europe has a narrative related to their study, explaining it in relation to the information received during their study or interest in Europe can only be given as an assumption as the data does not provide a clear connection.

*'... Europe is a very divided picture, at least concerning science. Like, the Nordic countries etc. are a few steps ahead, in like science and healthcare etc. In the South, it's less developed for now. Like with laws that are voted against...'*  
(Joren, biochemistry, Aarhus)

While the majority of respondents enrolled in humanities refer to West-East separation based on cultural values and general ideology, the majority of respondents enrolled in STEM refer to a North-South separation. The latter, however, has a totally different narrative compared to the former. For them the separation between Scandinavia and South-Europe is based on academic and professional development, their position in the European and global system and the international labor market opportunities. Scandinavia has an image of being academically superior compared to the rest of Europe and provide more opportunities for their own and general scientific development. The south of Europe, which is mostly referred to by naming Mediterranean countries is, to lesser extent, associated with less development and as a holiday destination.

*'...maybe in Greece and Italy I also have, if I'm on holiday, a similar vibe. But it's a totally different vibe compared to Belgium. In Belgium and France and Germany I have a similar vibe. And then there is Scandinavia which, for me, is totally different because people are way more down-to-earth, are less in a rush and in a very good life. People there are healthy, prosperous, so...'*  
(Charlotte, biochemistry, Stockholm)

Compared to the relationship between West-East perspective and social science, this

finding can be explained by a clear theme across a large majority of the interviews with students enrolled in STEM: internationalization of academics. Although they don't learn about Europe directly, they express way more interaction with European actors and global actors in relation to their study. First of all, while the academic improvement in humanities is more referred to in terms of 'a nice bonus' or 'something that turned out to be' when asked about Erasmus motivations and experiences, this was an essential for most of the STEM respondents. Following that, they were also more keen to express academic improvement because of their Erasmus. Secondly, while social scientists learn about Europe in general, students enrolled in natural science learn about the implications Europe has on their field. They learn about certain laws, legal charters and possibilities they and their field have in the European and even global sphere. For example, the European guidelines for veterinary medicine in higher education, nature protection policies concerning different biospheres or the increased use of English in tasks and fieldwork as a significant part of them are expected to work in an multilingual, internationalized firm. Thirdly, a small majority of these respondents mention the presence of many international students and doctoral students in their field and on their campus. This observation is rarely mentioned by students in humanities. Lastly, five of the STEM respondents talk about the possibility or even the intention to work abroad because of their study. Three of them even mentioned Erasmus as a bridge towards an international career. All these topics that consistently come back in the STEM student's interviews, leads to the conclusion that there is an important narrative of Europeanization and globalization in these disciplines. These studies seem to be more responsive towards the growing international opportunities and prepare both their students and their academic courses for this. Reflecting on this narrative, STEM students seem to perceive Europe way more as a place of professional opportunity and as a possible future labor market, something which is mostly absent in the data of the humanities students. Reflecting all this information on the North-South separation gives the following conclusion: In the context of the STEM disciplines, which are highly internationalized, working or studying (even temporarily) in an international environment, particularly in Scandinavia - viewed as surpassing the rest of Europe - is perceived as an exceptional achievement. However, an important remark should be made. Although it's a minority, on several occasions the respondents switch between discussing Europe

specifically and globalization more generally. This supports the conclusion related to internationalization, but it reduces the reliability of the assumption that they focus solely on Europe.

When asked about Europe, the majority of respondents perceive it as divided into four cultural entities: Nord-, South-, East- and West-Europe. However, there is a difference in focus. While the literature suggested an impact of the academic field towards people's attitudes, the data from the respondents showed mostly an impact on their perceptions (Fischer et al., 2017; Pavić & Šuljok, 2022). According to the data, most humanity students emphasize the separation between Eastern and Western Europe, attributing it to differences in values. However, the interviews do not provide a clear explanation for this perspective. On the other hand, STEM students tend to view Europe more in terms of a North-South distinction based on development and professional opportunities. They associate the North with better opportunities and the South with holidays. This perspective is influenced by the narrative of internationalization prevalent in natural science studies. These students see Europe as a place full of professional opportunities and a potential labor market, as their field is more adapted to the increasing Europeanization. Within this narrative, Scandinavia is regarded as a top region. These are indications that the information-pathway from Bergbauer does play a significant role in people's perceptions about Europe, despite that the original model is about identification (2018b). An important remark that should be made concerning this finding is that all respondents came from the same region in Europe, which undoubtedly influences the regional separations they make about Europe. Future research could investigate how and if people from other regions make similar distinctions.

### European perspective: Global, macro and micro

While the previous two parts indicate a large number of differences between the groups in how they connect with and look at Europe, this next part focuses on three remaining themes which were quite similar across the groups: global perspective on Europe, European folk and personal reflections on European identity. First, two remarks should be

made. The first is that all the following results will apply for all groups, as they were mentioned by the majority of all people in all groups. The second is that European identity is a concept which is way more complex than described in policies or literature (Oborune, 2013; Recchi, 2014). Respondents often had a hard time answering questions related to European identity. The answers differed between respondents, but initial reaction was mostly in line with 'I've never thought of it before', 'it's something far away' or 'what do you mean with European identity?'. For this reason, the interview was changed between the two cycles, to help the upcoming interviews in receiving more in-depth, spontaneous answers. Depending on the level of perspective which was discussed, the general conclusions in relation to European identity vary considerably.

*'You see that the same things are present. And I also just know that the way of communicating and getting along, in the end it is all so easy and I've never noticed that before, and I think that's because it was so easy. Because in the end, we all live the same way.'*

*(Carla, Sociology, Cracow)*

The interest in the EU varies among respondents but can be stated as rather limited. Except with the three political science students showing clear-cut interest in the EU itself and the direct relation with their general interest in politics. When talking about Europe, cultural differences are highlighted, rooted in diverse histories, traditions, and habits. These differences are generally viewed positively, with some respondents appreciating the diversity. The explanations they give for Europe's cultural variations depend on personal experiences or, in the absence of international exposure such as an Erasmus, cultural stereotypes or more manifest differences from media or travels. Despite these differences, many respondents feel a stronger, more latent sense of similarity within Europe, primarily tied to shared values and a sense of ease when visiting or interacting with other European countries. These similarities often evoke a sense of European identity and European well-being that often surpasses the EU framework. When talking about this, respondents frequently compare Europe favorably to other continents and use that to distance themselves from other continents or large countries. References that are often made are Europe compared to America or Russia or Europe as a safe haven. When discussing Europe, 12 respondents directly link it to politics and EU policies, with half of them even stating that for them Europe and the EU are similar. The majority perceive the EU as a hub



of connection and cooperation, enabling significant policy changes and improvements. All groups appreciate Europe because of its practical benefits, particularly the freedom of travel. The few critics, primarily non-Erasmus students, express dissatisfaction with certain policies and the EU's perceived remoteness. Overall, the general sentiment is positive, recognizing Europe as a platform for change and collaboration.

*'I don't think so. I don't think that exist such a European folk. Or at least not internally, maybe compared to other parts of the world who might think so. But I don't think that it exists internally, most Europeans won't identify with Europe' (Margot, sociology)*

When asked about the existence of a unified European identity or folk, all respondents, though with varying degrees of certainty, agreed that no such identity or folk currently exists. They attributed this primarily to the significant differences, as discussed above, in habits, traditions, and nationalism, as well as Europe's divided history. However, six respondents believe that Europe will grow closer over time due to modernization, increased European laws, or the passage of time. Opinions on whether or not a unified European identity would be a utility were inconclusive. The concept of European identity itself was considered challenging to define, though common themes included diversity and shared values such as equality.

Regarding their personal European identity, the narrative takes a different turn. 14 respondents tied their sense of identity to their geographical and social upbringing. Twelve identified as Belgian, with half of them rejecting a European identity and the other half viewing European identity as an addition to their national identity. One respondent emphasized her European identity as most important, linking it to her aspiration to leave Belgium to go live and work somewhere in Europe, while another prioritized his Flemish identity because he expressed to live in Flanders more than in Belgium. 11 respondents expressed a sense of connection to Europe, among them six Erasmus participants noting that their European connection had strengthened through their experiences abroad, interactions with people, and exposure to different cultures. Of the five remaining respondents, three of them expressed a global connection, surpassing Europe.

## CONCLUSIONS, CRITICS AND REMARKS

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing literature by examining the mechanisms of European identification among young individuals and how these are shaped by their social environments and international (Erasmus) experiences. Based on information and models from previously existing literature a series of interviews were held with young, Belgian students who either did or did not participate in an Erasmus exchange and were either enrolled in STEM or humanities. The results, which are all inductively derived from the respondents' answers, lead to several conclusions which address the research goal.

It can be said that a unified European identity does not exist among the respondents. Differences in habits, traditions, nationalism, and history are cited as barriers to such an identity. Despite the lack of a unified identity, respondents generally view Europe and the EU positively, particularly appreciating the practical benefits of EU membership such as freedom of travel and cooperation. This supports the literature's assertion that European identity is indeed a social identity (Jenkins, 2008; Oborune, 2013; Van Mol, 2013). Each respondent ascribes different meanings to European identity, both personally and collectively, based on their experiences, knowledge, and socialization. However, the data does not provide sufficient clarity to explain the mechanisms of European identification, as many respondents struggled to define European identity or stated that they do not possess one.

Despite the lacking information on identification mechanisms, the interviews provide incredibly rich data with regard to the mechanisms behind the evaluation, perception and connection of young people towards and with Europe, especially regarding how these are shaped by their social environments and international (Erasmus) experiences. First, international experiences, such as an Erasmus, increase the connection people have with Europe. An international network is a key source of European connection. This network gives people an increased knowledge and broader perspective about a lot of countries and helps them visualize these. A similar thing can be said about for example traveling as an international experience, but its effect is way more limited because it often lacks deep,

friendship connections with other Europeans. The literature describes these processes, but in relation to identification, which might be a few steps too far according to this study's inductive data (Bergbauer, 2018b; Capello, 2018). Second, the knowledge people receive and the information used to socialize them has an important impact on how they perceive Europe. Students use mostly information from their own field of study to describe Europe, what is important about it and what it means for them. To conclude this, international experiences are a very important mechanism for European connection because of the increased network of international people and places, which increases knowledge and gives broader perspective about a lot of countries and helps them visualize these. More and longer international experiences have a stronger impact. People's socialization is a very important mechanism for European perception. People's daily experiences and interactions with Europe shape their perceptions of it. The information they receive influences what they consider important and relevant. These mechanisms of connection and perception are crucial in how people assess Europe. Positive experiences tend to lead to positive evaluations, and vice versa.

Reflecting on Bergbauer's information- and experience-pathway model, this study confirms similar mechanisms as her model does (2018b). However, she states that it will lead to European identifications, while this study and its data only indicates a better evaluation and connection. Whether or not this could be defined as increased European integration, depends on how one defines this. However, such expansion would require an entire new investigation. Another suggestion for future research would be to expand the research population as they were selected on a very specific set of attributes. Possible differentiations that could be made are based on nationality, age, field of study, Erasmus destination or length of Erasmus. A final suggestion for future research is to establish a more concrete meaning of European identity. The results of this article are strongly inductively and are not capable to construct a more general meaning of this concept, which makes it harder to reflect back on existing literature which uses more concrete definitions.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: consent form

## Deelname onderzoek 'Erasmus en identiteit'

---

Beste student,

Ik wil jou vriendelijk vragen deel te nemen aan een onderzoek in het kader van het schrijven van een masterthesis aan de Universiteit Gent. Het onderzoek gaat over de impact van een Erasmus-uitwisseling op studenten en hoe dit hun visie over Europa beïnvloed. Daarom wil ik graag jou een paar vragen stellen aan de hand van een interview. Dit zal gaan over hoe jij jou voelt bij Europa en de EU, de impact van jouw uitwisseling en jouw (Europese) nationaliteit.

Het interview wordt afgenomen door Joppe Louage, student Master of Sociology aan de Universiteit Gent. Het interview zal plaatsvinden op een locatie en een tijdstip van uw voorkeur, met de mogelijkheid dit face-to-face te doen of via een video call. Daarnaast zullen er enkele persoonsgegevens gevraagd worden zoals uw leeftijd, woonplaats en studierichting. Alle verzamelde gegevens zullen enkel gebruikt worden voor het onderzoek en zullen op geen enkele manier publiek gemaakt worden. Om uw privacy te garanderen worden al uw gegevens volledig anoniem gemaakt.

Ik wil u graag vragen voor uw toestemming voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. Indien u toestemming geeft, kunt u dit doen door op de volgende pagina uw naam en handtekening te zetten. Indien u meer vragen heeft of individuele feedback wilt over de resultaten van het onderzoek, kunt u contact opnemen met Joppe Louage.

Hartelijk dank voor uw medewerking!

Joppe Louage

Email: [joppe.louage@ugent.be](mailto:joppe.louage@ugent.be)

(Masterstudent)



## Deelname onderzoek 'Erasmus en identiteit'

---

Ik, \_\_\_\_\_ (uw volledige naam in drukletters a.u.b.), stem toe mijn medewerking te verlenen aan het onderzoek en ga akkoord met de volgende voorwaarden:

- Ik heb voldoende informatie gekregen over het doel van het onderzoek en er is mij de mogelijkheid geboden om meer informatie te krijgen;
- Ik neem totaal uit vrije wil en op vrijwillige basis deel aan het onderzoek;
- Ik geef de toestemming aan de onderzoeker om de resultaten van het onderzoek waar ik aan deelneem, op een vertrouwelijke en anonieme wijze te bewaren, te verwerken en te rapporteren;
- Ik begrijp dat alle gegevens die ik in het interview en tijdens de observaties geef, geheel vertrouwelijk en anoniem worden verwerkt en alleen in functie van onderzoek zal worden gebruikt
- Ik ben op de hoogte van de mogelijkheid om mijn deelname aan het onderzoek op ieder moment stop te zetten zonder hier een reden voor te geven;
- Ik ben ervan op de hoogte dat ik op aanvraag een samenvatting van de onderzoeksresultaten kan krijgen nadat de studie is afgerond en de resultaten bekend zijn.

Gelezen en goedgekeurd op: Gelezen en goedgekeurd door:  
(datum) (uw handtekening)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Naam van de onderzoeker:

Joppe Louage

\_\_\_\_\_  
Handtekening van de onderzoeker:



## Appendix 2: drop-off

### Gegevens interview-respondent

NAAM: \_\_\_\_\_.

- Studierichting: \_\_\_\_\_.
  - STEM (science-technology-engineering-math) – Social Science (omcirkel)
  - Bachelor – Master (omcirkel)
- Erasmus in Europa? JA – NEE (omcirkel)
  - JA? Naar \_\_\_\_\_.
  - JA? Van \_\_\_\_\_ (maand/jaar)  
tot \_\_\_\_\_ (maand/jaar).
- Gender: M – V – X (omcirkel)
- Geboortejaar: \_\_\_\_\_.
- Nationaliteit: \_\_\_\_\_.
- Alle data zal onder een pseudoniem verschijnen om te voldoen aan de consent form. Welke pseudoniem zou jij graag krijgen?
  - \_\_\_\_\_.

## Appendix 3a: Interview questionnaire 1st cycle – Erasmus

### Interview Erasmus studenten

#### *ERASMUS*

**Hoe was jouw Erasmus ervaring?** (Hoogtepunten? Hoe waren de eerste weken? Heb je rondgereisd? Hoe was je Erasmus stad?)

**Wat was jouw motivatie om op Erasmus te gaan?** (Wie/wat was je initiatie aan het programma? Wat heeft de doorslag gegeven? Wat waren je verwachtingen van een Erasmus? Waarom heb je gekozen voor een Erasmus binnen Europa? Academisch/taal/ervaring motivaties?)

**Wat waren je voornaamste bezigheden op Erasmus? En met wie ging je vooral om?** (Lag dit in lijn met je oorspronkelijke prioriteiten/ verwachtingen? Reizen, feesten, studeren, afspreken, sporten? Nieuwe dingen leren kennen, nieuwe skills leren, nieuwe hobby's?) **Hoe was je sociaal leven op Erasmus en onderhoud je daar nog iets van nu? Hoe was je academisch leven?**

**Heb je het idee dat er persoonlijke veranderingen zijn (en die veranderingen zijn beïnvloed door jouw Erasmus-ervaring)? Zo ja, op welke manier?** (Waarden en normen? Skills? Gewoontes? Bewustwordingen? Interesses? Prioriteiten? Inzichten?)

**Welke zaken heb je op je Erasmus geleerd of ontdekt die je vandaag nog sterk bijblijven?** (Inzichten? Vrienden en netwerken? Taal skills? Nieuwe hobby's?)

**Op welke manier is je beeld over Europa veranderd als gevolg van je Erasmus?** (Op welke manier? Welke inzichten zijn er veranderd? Welke gebeurtenissen/events zijn je bijgebleven die je deden stilstaan? **Over de wereld?**

**Heb je het gevoel dat er meer gelijkenissen zijn tussen jou en andere Europeanen of juist meer verschillen?** (Kan je hier voorbeelden voor geven?)

**Voel je je meer verbonden met Europa na je Erasmus?** (Hoe merk je dit vandaag? Op welke manier voel je je verbonden? Met welke delen van Europa voel je je dan verbonden? Vrienden, mensen, plaatsen, waarden? Hoe onderhoud je deze band sinds je terug bent?) **Over de wereld?**

**Zou je kunnen stellen dat je door je Erasmus een sterkere Europese identiteit hebt ontwikkeld? (Wereldburger?)**

Ja? Welke zaken/events hebben hier dan vooral voor gezorgd? (Taal, vriendschappen, gevoelens, gebeurtenissen?)

Nee? Kan je een alternatieve stelling geven die meer bij jou aansluit (Waarom deze beter aansluit? kan je dit motiveren, kan je aangeven waarom dit voor jou niet het geval is?)

*Opleiding*

**Als ik zeg Europa en je ik vraag om daar enkele woorden mee te associëren, welke woorden komen dan bij jou op? (Politiek/cultuur/...?)**

**Is Europa en de EU iets wat jou interesseert?** (Welke aspecten vind je interessant, politiek, economie, wetenschap, landen, cultuur, reizen? Heb je het gevoel dat je veel weet/ Goed op de hoogte bent? Vanwaar komt die interesse?)

**Waar haal je jouw informatie vandaan?** (Media? Nieuws? Socials? Studierichting? Lessen? Bijscholing? Vrienden? Ouders? Job?... Wat voor informatie is dit dan?)

**Op welke manier heeft jouw studierichting al bijgedragen tot kennis over Europa en EU?** >< welke impact heeft het studeren van XXX op je kennis/gevoelens over Europa en EU? (Inhoudelijk? Netwerken die je opgebouwd hebt? Welke invloed hebben studiegenoten of lesgevers?)

**Op welke manier heeft jouw studierichting invloed gehad bij de keuze om op Erasmus te gaan?** (Aangemoedigd, drukke van het programma? Meerwaarde academisch? Peers?)

**Wat is jouw mening over de EU? Hoe is de veranderd over de laatste jaren?** (Ben je kritischer geworden tegenover de EU? Heb je meer belangstelling/respect gekregen? Zie je bepaalde voor- en nadelen?)

## *Europa*

**Hoe heeft jouw Erasmus een impact gehad op jouw kijk op België en de Belgische identiteit?** (Een positieve/negatieve impact? Impact op welke aspecten: politiek, cultureel, nationalisme? Heb je bepaalde zaken leren appreciëren of ontdekt waar je eerder niet stil bij stond of eerder frustraties opgebouwd?)

**Hoe zou jij nationale identiteit plaatsen tegenover Europese identiteit?** (Contrast? Rankschikking? Zie je veel gelijkenissen of eerder veel verschillen? Met wat associeer je nationale identiteit itt Europese identiteit? Wat zijn voor jou de essentiële onderdelen van een nationaliteit? Verschilt dit veel van Europese identiteit?)

**Bestaat er volgens jou een ‘Europees volk’ zoals er ook een Belgisch volk bestaat?** (Argumenteer? Waar liggen de verschillen voor jou? Waar liggen de gelijkenissen? Welke sterke punten heeft de ene dat de andere niet heeft? Hoe zie jij dit in de toekomst evolueren?)

**Hoe zou je je persoonlijke connectie met Europa/de EU omschrijven? Hoe kijk jij naar Europa?** (Welke gevoelens (positief/negatief/ andere...) heb je bij Europa en de EU? Welke voor- of nadelen kan je bedenken bij Europa? Op welke manier voel je je verbonden met Europa en de EU? Welke herinneringen, gebeurtenissen of ervaringen heb je die deze connectie hebben gemaakt/ beïnvloed, bv reizen/Erasmus? Kom je veel in contact met andere Europese landen/culturen/mensen en hoe beïnvloed je dat?)

**Hoe zou je Europese identiteit omschrijven?** >< “stel dat je Europa/het Europese volk zou moeten omschrijven aan mensen uit Amerika” (Hoe zou je het Europese volk omschrijven? Welke associaties maak je bij het Europese volk? Welke kenmerken delen Europeanen? Geschiedenis? Cultuur? Gewoontes? Waarden en normen? Politieke instellingen? Talen? Wat maakt Europeanen anders dan mensen buiten Europa? Welke grenzen bepalen Europa voor jou en waarom?)

## *Afronders*

**Van alle zaken die tijdens dit gesprek aan bod zijn gekomen? Welke waren daarvan het belangrijkste volgens jou?**

**Heb je zelf nog aanvullingen over hoe (Erasmus en) jouw studie invloed hebben gehad op je Europese identiteit?**

## Appendix 3b: Interview questionnaire 1st cycle – non-Erasmus

### Interview non-Erasmus studenten

#### *Erasmus*

**Wat was jouw motivatie om niet op Erasmus te gaan?** Wie/ wat was je initiatie aan het programma? Wat heeft de doorslag gegeven? Wat waren je verwachtingen van een Erasmus? Waarom heb je niet gekozen voor een Erasmus binnen Europa?

**Hoe ziet jouw dagelijkse leven in België eruit?** (Lag dit in lijn met je oorspronkelijke prioriteiten/ verwachtingen? Reizen, feesten, studeren, afspreken, sporten? Nieuwe dingen leren kennen, nieuwe skills leren, nieuwe hobby's?)

**In welke mate kom je in contact met Europa?** (Reizen, studies, films? In het dagelijkse leven?)

**Heb je het gevoel dat er meer gelijkenissen zijn tussen jou en andere Europeanen of juist meer verschillen?** (Kan je hier voorbeelden voor geven?)

#### **Stelling: Ik heb een sterke Europese identiteit**

Ja? Welke zaken/events hebben hier dan vooral voor gezorgd? (Taal, vriendschappen, gevoelens, gebeurtenissen?)

Nee? Kan je zaken aangeven die juist het omgekeerde hebben veroorzaakt? (Taal, vriendschappen, gevoelens, gebeurtenissen?)

**Hoe is die geëvalueerd doorheen de jaren?**

#### *Opleiding*

**Als ik zeg Europa en je ik vraag om daar enkele woorden mee te associëren, welke woorden komen dan bij jou op?** (Politiek/cultuur/...?)

**Is Europa en de EU iets wat jou interesseert?** (Welke aspecten vind je interessant, politiek, economie, wetenschap, landen, cultuur, reizen? Heb je het gevoel dat je veel weet/ Goed op de hoogte bent? Vanwaar komt die interesse?)

**Waar haal je jouw informatie vandaan?** (Media? Nieuws? Socials? Studierichting? Lessen? Bijscholing? Vrienden? Ouders? Job?... Wat voor informatie is dit dan?)

**Op welke manier heeft jouw studierichting al bijgedragen tot kennis over Europa en EU?** >< welke impact heeft het studeren van XXX op je kennis/gevoelens over Europa en EU? (Inhoudelijk? Netwerken die je opgebouwd hebt? Welke invloed hebben studiegenoten of lesgevers?)

**Op welke manier heeft jouw studierichting invloed gehad bij de keuze om niet op Erasmus te gaan?** (Aangemoedigd, drukke van het programma? Meerwaarde academisch? Peers?)

**Wat is jouw mening over de EU? Hoe is de veranderd over de laatste jaren?** (Ben je kritischer geworden tegenover de EU? Heb je meer belangstelling/respect gekregen? Zie je bepaalde voor- en nadelen?)

**Heb je het idee dat er persoonlijke veranderingen zijn in de laatste jaren als student? Zo ja, op welke manier?** (Waarden en normen? Skills? Gewoontes? Bewustwordingen? Interesses? Prioriteiten? Inzichten?)

## *Europa*

**Hoe kijk jij zelf naar België en de Belgische identiteit?** (Een positieve/negatieve impact? Impact op welke aspecten: politiek, cultureel, nationalisme? Heb je bepaalde zaken leren appreciëren of ontdekt waar je eerder niet stil bij stond of eerder frustraties opgebouwd?)

**Hoe zou jij nationale identiteit plaatsen tegenover Europese identiteit?** (Contrast? Rankschikking? Zie je veel gelijkenissen of eerder veel verschillen? Met wat associeer je nationale identiteit itt Europese identiteit? Wat zijn voor jou de essentiële onderdelen van een nationaliteit? Verschilt dit veel van Europese identiteit?)

**Bestaat er volgens jou een ‘Europees volk’ zoals er ook een Belgisch volk bestaat?** (Argumenteer? Waar liggen de verschillen voor jou? Waar liggen de gelijkenissen? Welke sterke punten heeft de ene dat de andere niet heeft? Hoe zie jij dit in de toekomst evolueren?)

**Hoe zou je je persoonlijke connectie met Europa/de EU omschrijven? Hoe kijk jij naar Europa?** (Welke gevoelens (positief/negatief/ andere...) heb je bij Europa en de EU? Welke voor- of nadelen kan je bedenken bij Europa? Op welke manier voel je je verbonden met Europa en de EU? Welke herinneringen, gebeurtenissen of ervaringen heb je die deze connectie hebben gemaakt/ beïnvloed, bv reizen/Erasmus? Kom je veel in contact met andere Europese landen/culturen/mensen en hoe beïnvloed je dat?)

**Hoe zou je Europese identiteit omschrijven?** >< “stel dat je Europa/het Europese volk zou moeten omschrijven aan mensen uit Amerika” (Hoe zou je het Europese volk omschrijven? Welke associaties maak je bij het Europese volk? Welke kenmerken delen Europeanen? Geschiedenis? Cultuur? Gewoontes? Waarden en normen? Politieke instellingen? Talen? Wat maakt Europeanen anders dan mensen buiten Europa? Welke grenzen bepalen Europa voor jou en waarom?)

### *Afronders*

**Van alle zaken die tijdens dit gesprek aan bod zijn gekomen? Welke waren daarvan het belangrijkste volgens jou?**

**Heb je zelf nog aanvullingen over hoe (Erasmus en) jouw studie invloed hebben gehad op je Europese identiteit?**



## Appendix 4a: Interview questionnaire 2nd cycle – Erasmus

### Interview Erasmus studenten

#### *ERASMUS*

**Hoe was jouw Erasmus ervaring?** (Hoogtepunten? Hoe waren de eerste weken? Heb je rondgereisd? Hoe was je Erasmus stad?)

**Wat was jouw motivatie om op Erasmus te gaan?** (Wie/ wat was je initiatie aan het programma? Wat heeft de doorslag gegeven? Wat waren je verwachtingen van een Erasmus? Waarom heb je gekozen voor een Erasmus binnen Europa? Academisch/taal/ervaring motivaties?)

**Wat waren je voornaamste bezigheden op Erasmus? En met wie ging je vooral om?** (Lag dit in lijn met je oorspronkelijke prioriteiten/ verwachtingen? Reizen, feesten, studeren, afspreken, sporten? Nieuwe dingen leren kennen, nieuwe skills leren, nieuwe hobby's?) **Hoe was je sociaal leven op Erasmus en onderhoud je daar nog iets van nu? Hoe was je academisch leven?**

**Heb je het idee dat er persoonlijke veranderingen zijn (en die veranderingen zijn beïnvloed door jouw Erasmus-ervaring)? Zo ja, op welke manier?** (Waarden en normen? Skills? Gewoontes? Bewustwordingen? Interesses? Prioriteiten? Inzichten?)

**Welke zaken heb je op je Erasmus geleerd of ontdekt die je vandaag nog sterk bijblijven?** (Inzichten? Vrienden en netwerken? Taal skills? Nieuwe hobby's?)

**Op welke manier is je beeld over Europa veranderd als gevolg van je Erasmus?** (Op welke manier? Welke inzichten zijn er veranderd? Welke gebeurtenissen/events zijn je bijgebleven die je deden stilstaan?) **Over de wereld?**

**Heb je het gevoel dat er meer gelijkenissen zijn tussen jou en andere Europeanen of juist meer verschillen?** (Kan je hier voorbeelden voor geven?)

**Voel je je meer verbonden met Europa na je Erasmus? (Hoe merk je dit vandaag? Op welke manier voel je je verbonden? Met welke delen van Europa voel je je dan verbonden? Vrienden, mensen, plaatsen, waarden? Hoe onderhoud je deze band sinds je terug bent?) Over de wereld? Zou je kunnen stellen dat je door je Erasmus een sterkere Europese identiteit hebt ontwikkeld? (Wereldburger?)**

Ja? Welke zaken/events hebben hier dan vooral voor gezorgd? (Taal, vriendschappen, gevoelens, gebeurtenissen?)

Nee? Kan je een alternatieve stelling geven die meer bij jou aansluit (Waarom deze beter aansluit? kan je dit motiveren, kan je aangeven waarom dit voor jou niet het geval is?)

### *Opleiding*

**Als ik zeg Europa en je ik vraag om daar enkele woorden mee te associëren, welke woorden komen dan bij jou op? (Politiek/cultuur/...?)**

**Hoe zou jij Europa vanuit een 'politiek/cultureel/geografisch' perspectief? (Afhankelijk welk thema ze aanhalen) Daarna de andere thema's aanhalen. (Steeds andere volgorde afhankelijk van respondenten om priming te voorkomen.)**

**Is Europa en de EU iets wat jou interesseert? (Welke aspecten vind je interessant, politiek, economie, wetenschap, landen, cultuur, reizen? Heb je het gevoel dat je veel weet/ Goed op de hoogte bent? Vanwaar komt die interesse?)**

**Waar haal je jouw informatie vandaan? (Media? Nieuws? Socials? Studierichting? Lessen? Bijscholing? Vrienden? Ouders? Job?... Wat voor informatie is dit dan?)**

**Op welke manier heeft jouw studierichting al bijgedragen tot kennis over Europa en EU? >< welke impact heeft het studeren van XXX op je kennis/gevoelens over Europa en EU? (Inhoudelijk? Netwerken die je opgebouwd hebt? Welke invloed hebben studiegenoten of lesgevers?)**

**Op welke manier heeft jouw studierichting invloed gehad bij de keuze om op Erasmus te gaan? (Aangemoedigd, drukke van het programma? Meerwaarde academisch? Peers?)**

**Wat is jouw mening over de EU? Hoe is de veranderd over de laatste jaren?** (Ben je kritischer geworden tegenover de EU? Heb je meer belangstelling/respect gekregen? Zie je bepaalde voor- en nadelen?)

### *Europa*

**Hoe heeft jouw Erasmus een impact gehad op jouw kijk op België en de Belgische identiteit?** (Een positieve/negatieve impact? Impact op welke aspecten: politiek, cultureel, nationalisme? Heb je bepaalde zaken leren appreciëren of ontdekt waar je eerder niet stil bij stond of eerder frustraties opgebouwd?)

**Hoe zou jij nationale identiteit plaatsen tegenover Europese identiteit?** (Contrast? Rankschikking? Zie je veel gelijkenissen of eerder veel verschillen? Met wat associeer je nationale identiteit itt Europese identiteit? Wat zijn voor jou de essentiële onderdelen van een nationaliteit? Verschilt dit veel van Europese identiteit?)

**Bestaat er volgens jou een ‘Europees volk’ zoals er ook een Belgisch volk bestaat?** (Argumenteer? Waar liggen de verschillen voor jou? Waar liggen de gelijkenissen? Welke sterke punten heeft de ene dat de andere niet heeft? Hoe zie jij dit in de toekomst evolueren?)

**Hoe zou je je persoonlijke connectie met Europa/de EU omschrijven? Hoe kijk jij naar Europa?** (Welke gevoelens (positief/negatief/ andere...) heb je bij Europa en de EU? Welke voor- of nadelen kan je bedenken bij Europa? Op welke manier voel je je verbonden met Europa en de EU? Welke herinneringen, gebeurtenissen of ervaringen heb je die deze connectie hebben gemaakt/ beïnvloed, bv reizen/Erasmus? Kom je veel in contact met andere Europese landen/culturen/mensen en hoe beïnvloed je dat?)

**Hoe zou je Europese identiteit omschrijven?** >< “stel dat je Europa/het Europese volk zou moeten omschrijven aan mensen uit Amerika” (Hoe zou je het Europese volk omschrijven? Welke associaties maak je bij het Europese volk? Welke kenmerken delen Europeanen? Geschiedenis? Cultuur? Gewoontes? Waarden en normen? Politieke instellingen? Talen? Wat maakt Europeanen anders dan mensen buiten Europa? Welke grenzen bepalen Europa voor jou en waarom?)

- ➔ Terugvallen op vragen van onderwijs over associaties die gemaakt werden met Europa zelf, of die te projecteren zijn op Europeanen.

### *Afronders*

**Van alle zaken die tijdens dit gesprek aan bod zijn gekomen? Welke waren daarvan het belangrijkste volgens jou?**

**Heb je zelf nog aanvullingen over hoe (Erasmus en) jouw studie invloed hebben gehad op je Europese identiteit?**

## Appendix 4b: Interview questionnaire 2nd cycle – non-Erasmus

### Interview non-Erasmus studenten

#### *Erasmus*

**Wat was jouw motivatie om niet op Erasmus te gaan?** Wie/ wat was je initiatie aan het programma? Wat heeft de doorslag gegeven? Wat waren je verwachtingen van een Erasmus? Waarom heb je niet gekozen voor een Erasmus binnen Europa?

**Hoe ziet jouw dagelijkse leven in België eruit?** (Lag dit in lijn met je oorspronkelijke prioriteiten/ verwachtingen? Reizen, feesten, studeren, afspreken, sporten? Nieuwe dingen leren kennen, nieuwe skills leren, nieuwe hobby's?)

**In welke mate kom je in contact met andere landen?** (Reizen, studies, films? In het dagelijkse leven?)

**In welke mate kom je in contact met Europa?** (Reizen, studies, films? In het dagelijkse leven?)

**Heb je het gevoel dat er meer gelijkenissen zijn tussen jou en andere Europeanen of juist meer verschillen?** (Kan je hier voorbeelden voor geven?) desnoods in enkele aparte vragen stellen. Eerst vragen voor tussen landen, dan pas tussen mensen.

#### **Stelling: Ik heb een sterke Europese identiteit**

Ja? Welke zaken/events hebben hier dan vooral voor gezorgd? (Taal, vriendschappen, gevoelens, gebeurtenissen?)

Nee? Kan je zaken aangeven die juist het omgekeerde hebben veroorzaakt? (Taal, vriendschappen, gevoelens, gebeurtenissen?)

**Hoe is die geëvalueerd doorheen de jaren?**

#### *Opleiding*

**Als ik zeg Europa en je ik vraag om daar enkele woorden mee te associëren, welke woorden komen dan bij jou op?** (Politiek/cultuur/...?)

**Hoe zou jij Europa vanuit een 'politiek/cultureel/geografisch' perspectief? (Afhankelijk welk thema ze aanhalen)**

→ **Daarna de andere thema's aanhalen. (Steeds andere volgorde afhankelijk van respondenten om priming te voorkomen.)**

→

**Is Europa en de EU iets wat jou interesseert?** (Welke aspecten vind je interessant, politiek, economie, wetenschap, landen, cultuur, reizen? Heb je het gevoel dat je veel weet/ Goed op de hoogte bent? Vanwaar komt die interesse?)

**Waar haal je jouw informatie vandaan?** (Media? Nieuws? Socials? Studierichting? Lessen? Bijscholing? Vrienden? Ouders? Job?... Wat voor informatie is dit dan?)

**Op welke manier heeft jouw studierichting al bijgedragen tot kennis over Europa en EU?** >< welke impact heeft het studeren van XXX op je kennis/gevoelens over Europa en EU? (Inhoudelijk? Netwerken die je opgebouwd hebt? Welke invloed hebben studiegenoten of lesgevers?)

**Op welke manier heeft jouw studierichting invloed gehad bij de keuze om niet op Erasmus te gaan?** (Aangemoedigd, drukke van het programma? Meerwaarde academisch? Peers?)

**Wat is jouw mening over de EU? Hoe is de veranderd over de laatste jaren?** (Ben je kritischer geworden tegenover de EU? Heb je meer belangstelling/respect gekregen? Zie je bepaalde voor- en nadelen?) (Is de EU iets wat volgens jou dichtbij of juist ver weg staat?)

**Heb je het idee dat er persoonlijke veranderingen zijn in de laatste jaren als student? Zo ja, op welke manier?** (Waarden en normen? Skills? Gewoontes? Bewustwordingen? Interesses? Prioriteiten? Inzichten?)

### *Europa*

**Hoe kijk jij zelf naar België en de Belgische identiteit?** (Een positieve/negatieve impact? Impact op welke aspecten: politiek, cultureel, nationalisme? Heb je bepaalde zaken leren appreciëren of ontdekt waar je eerder niet stil bij stond of eerder frustraties opgebouwd?)

**Hoe zou jij nationale identiteit plaatsen tegenover Europese identiteit?** (Contrast? Rankschikking? Zie je veel gelijkenissen of eerder veel verschillen? Met wat associeer je nationale identiteit itt Europese identiteit? Wat zijn voor jou de essentiële onderdelen van een nationaliteit? Verschilt dit veel van Europese identiteit?)

**Bestaat er volgens jou een ‘Europees volk’ zoals er ook een Belgisch volk bestaat?** (Argumenteer? Waar liggen de verschillen voor jou? Waar liggen de gelijkenissen? Welke sterke punten heeft de ene dat de andere niet heeft? Hoe zie jij dit in de toekomst evolueren?)

**Hoe zou je je persoonlijke connectie met Europa/de EU omschrijven? Hoe kijk jij naar Europa?** (Welke gevoelens (positief/negatief/ andere...) heb je bij Europa en de EU? Welke voor- of nadelen kan je bedenken bij Europa? Op welke manier voel je je verbonden met Europa en de EU? Welke herinneringen, gebeurtenissen of ervaringen heb je die deze connectie hebben gemaakt/ beïnvloed, bv reizen/Erasmus? Kom je veel in contact met andere Europese landen/culturen/mensen en hoe beïnvloed je dat?)

**Hoe zou je Europese identiteit omschrijven?** >< “stel dat je Europa/het Europese volk zou moeten omschrijven aan mensen uit Amerika” (Hoe zou je het Europese volk omschrijven? Welke associaties maak je bij het Europese volk? Welke kenmerken delen Europeanen? Geschiedenis? Cultuur? Gewoontes? Waarden en normen? Politieke instellingen? Talen? Wat maakt Europeanen anders dan mensen buiten Europa? Welke grenzen bepalen Europa voor jou en waarom?)

→ Terugvallen op vragen van onderwijs over associaties die gemaakt werden met Europa zelf, of die te projecteren zijn op Europeanen.

→

*Afronders*

**Van alle zaken die tijdens dit gesprek aan bod zijn gekomen? Welke waren daarvan het belangrijkste volgens jou?**

**Heb je zelf nog aanvullingen over hoe (Erasmus en) jouw studie invloed hebben gehad op je Europese identiteit?**

## Appendix 5: coding structure

Category	Description	Description (sub)codes	Applicability	Examples
Erasmus expectations and motivations	Expectations and motivations respondents expressed in their choice to participate (not) in an Erasmus exchange	discovering new things; experience; academic improvement; supported by environment; having fun; not worth it; too much effort; leaving stable life	By looking at the motivations and expectations the different groups had, we can compare them and search how they impacted the Erasmus experience and see how the groups differ before their exchange	"Maybe I didn't wanna go because I have my hobby at home which takes a lot of my time. And my friends, like the people you know you can rely on" (Bo, biochemistry)  "...I knew that in France, the Science Po schools especially, have a great reputation. So for me it was very valuable to be like, okay, I'm going to study at a prestigious political school." (Pia, political science, Aux-en-Provence)  "really to get to know new things and to open up the perspective" (Carla, sociology, Cracow)
Erasmus experiences	Experiences (Erasmus) respondents had while being on an Erasmus exchange	Learning and growing (academically, personally, socially and skills); daily life Erasmus; social life; evaluations; travelling and exploring	Erasmus experience lets the respondents themselves express how Erasmus has had an impact on them and what they did and lets us compare it with the non-participants	"... but it did open my view in a certain way. Like in what I want to do, what my options are for the future. So certainly in that way did it change the way I look to the future." (Iris, biology, Stockholm)  "Well, it didn't take long or I had a group of my own. The groups was composed of two Dutchmen, a Norwegian, a Swedish, a Canadian, and American and an Australian." (Michee, political science, Lille)  "We did some trips, taking the train or bus somewhere. We also went a weekend to Norway. A lot of different things." (Joren, biochemistry, Aarhus)
Connection with Europe	Ways the respondents get in touch with or feel connected to Europe	foreign students; interest; international experience; knowledge; little connection; place of living	Understanding how respondents connect to Europe helps to get a bigger picture on why they perceive Europe and their Identity in certain ways + let us compare the groups	"I'm enrolled in European studies, so of course I have to be aware about what's going on, at least in Europe. So for my I would say I'm mostly interested in European countries..." (Jeroen, political science)  "... I see Europe differently because it seems like I've met someone from every country, and I can picture something of a person on the countries instead of just being 'oh that country exists'." (Eline, bioengineer, Valencia)  "... we had a course about combustion engines and emissions, so we saw how it evolved in Europe. So than the professors often give their opinion..." (Freddy, civil engineer)
Europe: perception through culture	Talking about Europe or European countries and how they perceive it based upon their habits and values	differences in Europe; cultural blocks; similarities in Europe; Europe vs continents	Helps to understand how respondents perceive Europe based on the people, their culture and lifes, which perspectives are important for them and why and how they motivate those + let us compare groups	"You know, like in Spain they have the Siesta. And so many different languages and, I don't know even different eating habits. Like in Spain pastas while in France the baguettes and pistolets" (Bo, biochemistry)  "You have a more South-like culture and a more Nord-like. It's a little geography based but you also see more similarities among those cultures I think." (Hanne, sociology, Bordeaux)  "But there is some sort of connection you know. If you go to a European country, it's not like you can't recognize the culture. There is some difference, but I think if you were to go to Asia or Africa, you would be like, 'shit, I left Europe'." (Carla, sociology, Cracow)



Europe: perception through EU	Talking about Europe or European countries and how they perceive it based upon their link with the European Union and its policy	EU politics; EU vs Europe; as a place of cooperation and to make changes	Helps to understand how respondents perceive Europe as a political and economic union, which perspectives are important for them and how they motivate those + let us compare groups	"Ursula Van Derleyen, yeah I have to think about her. Heads of state like Macron, Germany, Belgium, France, the World wars and how the EU came in to being." (Tom, industrial engineer)  "If you want to do something about the problems of today in this world, you have to do it on a European policy level, I think. Things like climate change and the migration crisis, all those problems are difficult to tackle on the Belgian level." (Augustijn, sociology) "If you read the news well from different sources, you get in touch immediately. That's the moment you realize the difference between Europe and the EU and what they both stand for." (Michee, political science, Lille)
Europe: perception through evaluation	How respondents evaluate Europe and the EU	positive; critical; as a safe place; professional future; something far away; convenient advantages	Helps to understand respondents opinions and evaluation about Europe and the EU and what they think of it and why they think a certain way.	"I think mostly advantages. You can travel and use the same currency, you don't need a passport. It's so convenient (Louis, Veterinary medicine)  "Yeah, see it's like that. I know to little about it to say something about it." (Lies, psychology)  "Because I want to be connected with my work. Way more than the national level, to be connected on European level." (Eline, bioengineer, Valencia)
Personal reflections on identity	Reflections the respondents make towards their own identity and the groups they might belong too	European identity; macro-level view; personal view; global identity; vague	Helps to understand how respondents think of identity in general, personal identity and European identity, why they think certain ways about identity and their own identification processes + shows differences between groups	"... respect for all, no racism and stuff. And yeah, like the conservations of cultures, Everybody can be who he wants to be. Those are the things that we can use to unite Europe." (Jeroen, political science)  "I would rather adress myself as a Belgian. There are to much differences between the countries. But anyhow, I feel more at home in Europe than any other continent." (Lies, psychology)  "... there is so much difference between all those countries connected in this union. European folk? No. There might be something like a European vision and a European Union. We differ so much but in some occasions we overlap and because of that you can see us as a group but not as a folk." (Tom, industrial engineer)
Personal reflections on Belgium	Reflections the respondents make towards Belgium in relation to Europe, Erasmus and identity	Critical; feeling Belgium; nuanced	Helped to give expression to topic related to identity since respondents often used their Belgium identity to explain their own and European one	"I never expected myself to feel so 'Belgian'. If I met someone from Belgium I was like, 'ow this and that'. (Eline, bioengineer, Valencia)  "...very little attention is paid to the mental well-being of students. There are organs for this, but you can start up such an organ and do nothing with it. We are still nowhere, let's say. The workload, the way of working. Yes, erm, the way you expose yourself to your students is zero here. In Denmark this is the case, you meet them in the hallway and at the same time they say let's go for a coffee. They don't know you because you are in too large a group. I think that is a difference with how I view Belgians." (Joren, biochemistry, Aarhus)

## Appendix 6: respondent overview

Respondents	Academic study		Erasmus		Gender	Year of birth	Bachelor/Masters
Augustijn	humanities	sociology	No		male	2002	Masters
Bo	STEM	bio-chemistry	No		female	2002	Masters
Carla	humanities	sociology	Yes	Cracow, Poland	female	2002	Masters
Charlotte	Natural science	bio-chemistry	Yes	Stockholm, Sweden	female	2003	Masters
Eline	STEM	bioengineer	Yes	Valencia, Spain	female	2001	Masters
Freddy	STEM	civil engineer	No		male	2002	Masters
Hanne	humanities	sociology	Yes	Bordeaux, France	female	2003	Bachelor
Iris	STEM	biology	Yes	Stockholm, Sweden	female	2001	Masters
Jeroen	humanities	political science	No		male	2002	Masters
Joren	STEM	bio-chemistry	Yes	Aarhus, Denmark	male	2002	Masters
Lies	humanities	psychology	No		female	2001	Masters
Louis	STEM	veterinary medicine	No		male	2002	Bachelor
Margot	humanities	sociology	No		female	2001	Masters
Michee	humanities	political science	Yes	Lille, France	male	2002	Masters
Pia	humanities	political science	Yes	Aux-en-Provence, France	female	2001	Masters
Tom	STEM	industrial engineer	No		male	2002	Masters