International students experiencing super-mobility in Scotland, Malta, Sweden, and Portugal through the TourDC programme

Submitted by

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Acknowledgments

And here I am, done with studying! What a journey it has been!

Since 2018 when I started my transnational journey, I have never stopped. My experiences in Finland, Georgia, Italy, Scotland, Malta, and Lisbon, through all kinds of Erasmus projects and exchanges, have literally changed my life. As a super-mobile student myself, I believe my mobility is not over and will never be. Europe brings us together and together we are stronger.

Undertaking an Erasmus Mundus master has been a living dream for me, meeting an international community, travelling, discovering different ways of teaching... Hayk, I could never thank you enough to have introduced me to Erasmus Mundus.

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Natalya, meine Berliner Sonne, I will be eternally grateful. Life has brough a great person in my life.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all my international friends I have met during the past few years, you have enriched me every day. My love especially goes out to my dear TourDC friends, I will never forget all our trips across Europe and beyond. Thank you for being such great supporters in my every day.

In this thesis I will mention "Erasmus generation", however for me, it is more about "Erasmus family"

Papa et Paul, merci pour votre soutien sans faille à chaque étape de ma vie. Je vous aime.

Abstract

This dissertation aims to explore and complete the existent literature regarding student mobility in Europe. Furthermore, it intends to provide an understanding of the motivations, perceptions, and pre-conceptions of Erasmus Mundus students, also known as `super mobile` students. This dissertation will focus on students undertaking the EMJMD in Tourism and Culture (TourDC), taking place in Scotland, Malta, Sweden, and Portugal. The research has been made through semi-structured interviews conducted amongst a sample of fourteen TourDC students or alumni X. It thus attempts to further our understanding about how students live their academic and cultural experiences during the Erasmus Mundus TourDC programme. The obligation of the findings are firstly understanding the motivations of Erasmus Mundus TourDC students; secondly, the study of the cultural acclimatisation to the countries visited during the programme; and finally the identification of potential patterns for Erasmus Mundus students in terms of family, education, and cultural backgrounds. This paper demonstrates that almost all the students had a positive experience throughout their mobilities and therefore now feel prepared to pursue their chosen career path after graduation.

Keywords: Student Mobility; Erasmus; Erasmus Mundus; European Identity; Mobility Capital; Culture; Higher Education Institutions

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and general information

Student mobility is not a recent phenomenon. Indeed, none can mention this type of migration without having in mind the iconic 17th century's Grand Tour of which involved British students and young aristocrats travelling through Europe and the Mediterranean basin to conclude their education. Cuvelier (1997) described the purpose of this custom as an essential part of a man's development in the world, making them acquainted with new cultures, peoples, civilisations and therefore "capable of speaking about the globes curiosities and nature". Universities encourage students to gain international knowledge by offering exchange programmes and for some students, this may even be a required part of their studies. The mobility of people has increased by virtue of rapid globalisation and interconnection, with the need for qualified individuals increasing.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) figures, the number of students enrolled in a university outside their home country increased from 0.8 million in 1975 to over 4.5 million in 2012 (OECD, 2014); and in 2021, there were 5,571,402 students undertaking a mobility as part of their education in the world (IESALC/UNESCO, 2019). Europe's flagship programme of mobility, Erasmus, has allowed over 9 million people to undertake a study, training or volunteering experiences abroad through the programme since its creation in 1987 and 2020 (European Commission, 2018a). Between 2019-2020, 312,800 student mobilities happened across Europe (European Commission, 2021a, p. 39). This trend demonstrates the gradual increase of enrolment in tertiary education around the world (Bhandari & Blumentha, 2011, p.1). Across the decades, demonstrated changes in the drivers of student mobility have occurred, as well as in the ways in which this migration takes place from the participants origin country to their destination country (Bhandari & Blumentha, 2011; Findlay, et al, 2012; Garneau & Mazzella, 2013; Raghuram, 2013). Much of which these motivations can be closely linked to the migration of skilled and highly skilled workers, as there is a desire to attract international students, often disposed to stay in the host country after their studies. Many countries acknowledge the value of students as migrants with emerging skills bringing the benefits of new knowledge to the labour market (Bhandari & Blumentha, 2011) and are valued both as drivers of economic growth as well as being more socially integrated (Findlay, 2011, p. 167; Raghuram, 2013, p. 138). As a result, many mobility programmes have emerged around the world, with Erasmus being the most prominent in Europe (Ballatore, 2010; Close, 2011; Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2013; Van Mol & Timmerman, 2013; Kalfas, 2018; Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021; Cairns et al., 2021).

1.2. Problematisation

The motivations of students to undertake a mobility are one of the most popular topics that has been researched within the student mobility field (Cairns et al, 2021). The benefits of an exchange semester abroad is a highly discussed theme, with a predominant focus on mobilities in Europe (Cairns et al., 2021). Yet, little attention has been paid specifically to the thoughts, feelings and acclimatisation of students participating in one of the most super-mobile university degrees within Europe: Erasmus Mundus Masters (Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021).

It is clear from the literature reviewed that student mobility is a well-researched topic (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Ravinet, 2009; Ballatore, 2010; Bhandari & Blumentha, 2011; Brooks & Waters, 2011; Close, 2011; Findlay, et al, 2012; Garneau & Mazzella, 2013; Raghuram, 2013; Van Mol & Timmerman, 2013; Beech, 2014; Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014; Cairns et al., 2021). There is some research focusing on Erasmus Mundus students and the programmes, however within a limited capacity (Hardouin, 2020; Terzieva & Unger, 2020; Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021). Like most of the research within student mobility, much of it is qualitative in nature with the factors focused on motivations, benefits or to a specific destination, rather than that of a specific course or degree with mobility embedded.

Whilst having a higher education is always valued, research can suggest that this is dependent on which university the degree is originating from (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Findlay et al., 2018; Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021). Research also shows the different attitudes in which students have towards university depending on where their origin country is, in Europe the literature is however limited (Beech, 2014, p. 172). Limited research has been conducted comparing the preconceptions and perceptions of an Erasmus Mundus Degree relating to the students personal and professional life, therefore there remains a gap in the literature.

1.3. Aims and research questions

In regard to the background and based on the gaps identified in the existing literature, this dissertation aims to understand the motivations, preconceptions, and perceptions that the international students undertaking an Erasmus Mundus Degree have experienced throughout their university journey whilst concluding the value of the course both on their personal and professional life. In order to answer

the following research question, I have identified three sub-questions, which lead to the main research question as follow:

Sub-question 1: Understanding the motivations of Erasmus Mundus TourDC students.

Sub-question 2: Studying the cultural acclimatisation to the countries visited during the programme (namely Scotland, Malta, Sweden, and Portugal).

Sub-question 3: Identifying potential patterns for Erasmus Mundus students in terms of family, education, cultural backgrounds.

Research question: How do students live their academic and cultural experiences during the Erasmus Mundus TourDC programme?

1.4. Academic and social relevance

A growing number of universities are now offering mobilities embedded into their degree offering, for bachelors, masters and PhD alike, normalising abroad mobilities as part of the educational experience (Kalfas, 2018, p.9). The link between 'the Grand Tour' and the value of preparing students for life through cultural exchange is ever evident, with more students undertaking a degree mainly for the study experience abroad (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 38). University partnerships (especially through the Erasmus programme) are making it easier for students to travel abroad for a semester, with scholarships and funding also making it more accessible for many students.

Students are reaping the benefits of these mobilities to gain a different set of skills that perhaps they would not have gained in their home country, which therefore can add to their hire ability once they have concluded their education (Beine, Noël and Ragot, 2014). These interpersonal skills are becoming more favoured in many countries as they can teach adaptability, language, and social and cultural awareness skills, especially a diploma obtained in a European institution (Choudaha and De Wit, 2014; Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014).

1.5. Structure of the thesis

This dissertation is structured as follows. After a review of the main research and studies on the phenomenon of the students' mobility, I will introduce the research methodology, focusing on the research goals and methods; as well as the quantitative data used for the research. Later, I will present

and bring to surface the main findings and results of the interviews. Some discussion and conclusions are provided.

2. Literature Review

In order to conduct this research and approach student mobility from a scientific perspective, I have carried out various theoretical and empirical readings that can help highlight and understand the phenomenon of student mobility. Not all the literature studied will be presented in the conceptual framework, however it has been used to increase my awareness on the topic. Instead, I decided to highlight only the most interesting authors, from my point of view, for instance those whose concepts were the most useful in answering the initial research question. Since the beginning of the century, studies on student mobility have been increasing, as the topic is relatively wide, it can be tackled by many fields of study including sociology, geography, and anthropology among others.

However, it is only since recently that student mobility literature is gravitating more towards qualitative methods of research. A large portion of the published work about student mobility tackles short-term mobility, usually exchange semesters, within the European Union. The research now presents more qualitative and contextualised studies about human mobility, beyond the perspective of considering students as only "customers" of higher education institutions (HEIs). The majority of work focuses on the theorisation of flows (Findlay, 2011), as well as the motivations to study abroad (Garneau & Mazzella, 2013; Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014; Choudaha & De Wit, 2014), and the barriers that stand in the way of student migration (Van Mol & Timmerman, 2013; Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014).

Generally, the results are quite similar, demonstrating language improvement, career prospects, autonomy, and adaptation. Nonetheless, large amounts of work about a mobility's characteristics, reasons, drivers, and barriers are putting aside the cultural, social and economic concepts linked to those transnational journeys and especially as they are the reasons why students are often traveling abroad. As per Cairns et. al (2021), there is a need to assess the potential contribution of a mobile student to the social and economic development of a society, in this case, the European Union (Cairns et al., 2021, p.69).

2.1. Context of study

2.1.1. Defining and labelling student mobility

Notable scholar researching student mobility, Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune was one of the first academics to conduct a qualitative small-scale study based on semi-directed interviews in 2002 among a

population of European students engaged in different types of mobility (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). The research was based on qualitative interviews providing access to "self-narratives" of which has built a rich portrait of mobile students by examining their perception of being mobile and how their trajectory was constructed according to their aspirations. The author has shown that participation and non-participation into a student mobility is not always a matter of country but more of social backgrounds. For her, it appears that previous mobility (for the student or their family) would encourage the pursuit of other transnational experiences (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002).

In her work, Murphy-Lejeune has interrogated which denomination should be favoured between "mobility" and "migration" to designate student mobility. However, Cairns et al. (2021) do not see an Erasmus stay as a migration; as according to the authors, "short-term, fixed-duration exchanges are not, by definition, migratory". Mobility emphasises the movement involved in migration rather than privileging the departure and reception of individuals from the perspective of the host countries (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). In the literature, mobility also refers to a shorter duration of this movement from one country to another with a high probability of return (as is the case for the Erasmus program). Longer trips, for example, for an entire program of three or four years, correspond to a statistical definition of international migration (King and Raghuram, 2013). Compared to other categories of migrants, King and Raghuram (2013) emphasise that international students are considered desirable migrants because of the skills they bring and develop in the countries they come to stay in. For context, the next section will outline the history and origins of the Erasmus program.

2.1.2. History of Erasmus

For the majority of European nationals, the term "ERASMUS" is directly associated with the mobility program that allows hundreds of thousands of European students to study abroad in European universities (Kalfas, 2018, p.3). The acronym "Erasmus" stands for 'European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students' but has been inspired by the Dutch theologian and philosopher of the same name, who travelled across Europe in the 15th century to study in Europe's largest monasteries (Kalfas, 2018, p.3). Erasmus takes its source in this era of collaboration between countries after World War II. In his paper, Malet Calvo (2017) gives a historical outline of the development of the programme; originating in 1987, by the agreement of twelve Ministries of Education of the European Community (EC) met together and agreed to establish a program allowing international educational exchanges.

One of the first European programmes promoting student mobility in Europe was the Joint Study Programme (JSP), introduced in 1976. This programme is the ancestor of Erasmus and was introduced to fund institutions willing to develop and implement exchanges between professors and/or students wanting to complete or pursue their higher education in foreign universities, of which belong to the EC. Between 1976 and 1986, more than 600 JSP involving more than 500 higher education institutions were created (Corbett, 2005, p. 118-119). In 1983, the Council of Ministers of Education defined the principles of cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe based on a new form of partnership between sending and hosting universities. This process has been made possible thanks to agreements between institutions like the latter, allowing the recognition and equivalence of foreign diplomas (Iwinska, 2010). However, it was not until 1987 that the Erasmus programme really came into being. After being rejected three times, the Council of Ministers of Education adopted the Erasmus program on June 15th, 1987. The initial objective was to guarantee at least 10% of higher education students to spend a period of study in another European country; the first year alone counted the participation of 3 244 students coming from 11 different countries.

After 8 years of existence, Erasmus was integrated in 1995 within Socrates I, the European program in education, set up for the period 1995-2000. Aiming to promote the European dimension of education, through various actions, this program covered the three stages of an educational journey: school (Comenius), university (Erasmus) and vocational education (Leonardo Da Vinci). The implementation of this program brought major changes to the organisational and educational structure of Erasmus; it allowed the transfer of administrative responsibility for student mobility to the central administration of higher education institutions. During this first phase of Socrates I, the total number of students in mobility has doubled from approximately 230,000 students from the period 1990-1995 to 460,000 students between the period 1995-2000 (Ravinet, 2009). The Socrates program was therefore renewed for the period 2000-2006 and re-adopted for the period 2007-2013. Taking into account the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy (2000), namely competitiveness and the modernisation of education and training systems in the Member States, the programme aims to increase the volume and quality of mobility (Ballatore, 2010).

The budget for Erasmus has increased from 950 million euros between the period 2000-2006, to 3.114 billion euros between 2007-2013. Between the two periods 2014-2020 and 2021-2027, the budget has risen from 14,7 billion euros to 26,3 billion euros (European Commission, 2021c) to maintain and encourage the involvement of peoples in the program. The latter being a success, it has been renewed in 2021 for six more years under the same name. Ultimately, Erasmus is the emblematic programme of the European Union focusing on student and staff mobility and encourages European cooperation between

higher education institutions and other key players in the knowledge economy. Through encouraging mobility, Erasmus has supported the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) which thus promotes innovation, growth and employment in the European Union.

2.1.3. EHEA

Bearing in mind all the aspects mentioned before relating to the rights established by the European Union, it is inconceivable to tackle the internationalisation of higher education without mentioning the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy. Initiated in 1998 by four European countries (France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom), the Bologna declaration was established in 1999 in the Italian city by 29 signatory countries. Today, 49 countries are part of it, including the 27 member states of the European Union. The Bologna Process aims to make the European Union a powerful and harmonised Education Area with three main objectives; to facilitate movement from one country to another within the European higher education area, in accordance with the freedom of movement, as inscribed in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights; to strengthen the attractiveness of European higher education, so it becomes the first study destination in the world for non-European nationals; and finally, the Bologna process wishes to provide Europe with a solid foundation of high-quality knowledge and to ensure that Europe develops as a peaceful and tolerant community (Charlier & Croché, 2003, p. 13; Leresche, et al., 2009).

The Bologna process is not based on an intergovernmental treaty, and it is therefore the responsibility of each signatory and its university community to decide whether to cancel or reject its principles (Croché, 2009). The implementation of the Bologna process does not imply that all the participating countries have the same higher education system, but essentially aims to promote the mobility of students and academics wishing to move from one education system to another or to one country to another. This system is based on a framework such as the three-cycle degree structure (bachelor, master's, doctorate), based on the European Credits Transfer System (ECTS), a system of credits which allows the different courses to be recognised by an equivalent diploma value. A year after the birth of the Bologna process, in order to relaunch economic growth, the EU adopted the Lisbon strategy in order to create a European area of research and innovation. With this strategy, the EU was aspiring to attract teachers and students that it considers to be of high quality by removing obstacles to mobility. Three years later, the Bologna process was extended to doctoral studies, an obvious agreement between the creation of a European area of higher education and of an area of research resulting from the Lisbon strategy (Leresche et al., 2009; Charlier and Croché, 2003).

2.1.4. The different types of student mobility

International student mobility is part of a stage of the life cycle (Ballatore, 2007, p. 26), that of studies. It is not originally definitive and consists of an emigration phase and an immigration phase. In this, international student mobility marks a temporal break with the country of departure. This mobility is based on a voluntary, unconstrained base, even if it is sometimes encouraged through being integrated into the curriculum of certain disciplines. Scholars Jallade, Gordon and Lebeau (1996) have distinguished two main types of student mobility. The first is spontaneous mobility, which concerns students who have chosen "individually" to enrol in a higher education institution that is not located in their country of origin, without intergovernmental agreements or financial institutional support. Most of the studies made in the second half of the 20th century on spontaneous mobility were based on the statistics of foreign students (Jallade, Gordon and Lebeau, 1996). This implies considering them as necessarily mobile and consequently overestimating student mobility. It is therefore important, as Jallade, Gordon and Lebeau (1996) have pointed out, to make a distinction between "resident foreign students" and "mobile foreign students". The survey shows that 73% of foreign students residing in one of the countries of the European Union can effectively be considered as "mobile". Within this group, undergraduates and postgraduate students can also be differentiated. We will only note here that this mobility escapes any institutionalization, structuring, on the part of the authorities or higher education establishments. Spontaneous mobility also has a longer history than the one I have chosen to analyse: "organised student mobility".

Namely, the second type of mobility can be characterised as "organised" or "institutionalised" student mobility, including that supported by the Erasmus+ programme. Likewise, international university exchanges take place between contractual organizations in relation, and include a certain reciprocity, even if it is sometimes deferred. This mobility can be described as "short-term", because unlike spontaneous mobility which includes students who have chosen to do an entire course abroad leading to a diploma, organized mobility takes place over a period not exceeding 9 months, included in the curriculum of the country of origin. In other words, unless it is an integrated course, the student obtains the diploma of his home university and not that of his host university (Kalfas, 2018, p.9).

Other studies refer to this distinction as "degree mobility" and "credit mobility"; with the former defined as "taking an entire degree at a university outside one's country of usual residence" and the latter referring to short-term exchange semesters (Universities UK, 2008, as cited in Findlay et al, 2012, p. 119). Within Europe, the most common form of student mobility is credit mobility (Brooks and Waters, 2011). In this research, we will focus on degree mobilities, as students have enrolled in the Erasmus

Mundus Joint Master Degree (EMJMD) Tourism Development and Culture (TourDC) program, an entire degree.

2.1.5. The case study: Erasmus Mundus

Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degree (EMJMD) is one of Erasmus+ actions allowing students to undertake a degree completed internationally. An EMJMD lasts for one or two years, resulting in the obtention of a degree (60, 90 or 120 ECTS) awarded by a consortium of international HEIs. These programmes take place in at least two countries (Terzieva & Unger, 2019). Launched in 2004, the Erasmus Mundus programme (initially only postgraduate which extended to PhD in 2009) illustrates the European Commission (EC) 's will to link the education, research, and innovation to the competitiveness of Europe. The EMJMD are "integrated study programmes delivered by an international consortium of higher education institutions […]" (European Commission, Erasmus+ Annual Report, 2020) and primarily attract non-European Union students, by providing them with scholarships. In the period 2014-2020, the first three countries with most HEIs (higher education institutions) involved in an Erasmus Mundus programme were France (62 HEIs), Germany (44 HEIs) and Italy (37 HEIs) (European Commission, 2021b, p. 5). During the academic year 2020/2021, there were 130 EMJMD ongoing, allowing 3,544 students to benefit from scholarships; two-thirds of which were offered to non-European Union students (European Commission, 2021a, p. 46). Statistics show that most of EM scholarship students were born between 1992 and 1996 and between the period 2014-2020, it appeared that scholarship holders were gender balanced, with 55% of them being female and 45% of them being male (European Commission, 2021b, p. 13).

There has been more financial support from the European Commission and European institutions over the years for EMJMDs and since the creation of the programme in 2004, a total of 25,000 scholarships have been awarded to students (Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021). As shown by Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska (2021) "the numbers in comparison to traditional Erasmus exchanges remain modest: approximately 223,500 students benefitted from Erasmus+ exchanges in 2017, whereas only 1556 students received scholarships for Erasmus Mundus, less than one per cent of the total number (European Commission 2018 p. 24 as cited in Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021, p. 201)". This research led to the same authors creating the concept of "super-mobile students", referring mainly to Erasmus Mundus students. The authors define the term as follows

"We define the super-mobile student, firstly, as one whose educational experience is embedded within mobility, where this mobility constitutes the bedrock of the study experience. Secondly, there is an anchoring in the consortium of universities itself: mobility takes place within a network wherein additional short duration study trips or intensive programmes organized for participating students further underscore the unified aspect of the course structure. Finally, the mobility itself is an intensive and routinized group experience in multiple locations within as little as two years. These three dimensions mean that 'super-mobile' students come to embody the multi-layered and complex entwining of contemporary transnational flows, similar to Vertovec's 'super diversity' concept (Vertovec 2007, 2019), also underscoring the attractiveness of enhanced experiences for young people and the rush that accompanies being constantly on the move." (2021, p. 201)

Authors Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska (2021) have identified three organisational types of EMJMD. The first most common and standard form of structure is based on a "continuation model", in which all the cohort's members start at the same HEI and proceed to the following HEIs as a cohort. The second structure of EMJMD is "the fork model" allowing the students to choose their mobility between at least two HEIs, and the last model of organisation is referred to as "the star model" in which students can choose their HEIs based on their interests and needs. There is one detail in these three models underlined by the authors; indeed, they do not include any home university. As per the authors "the students are never 'academically at home'" (Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021, p. 202).

The MSc Tourism Development and Culture is an EMJMD project which started on September 1st, 2018, and with an ending date on August 31st, 2024. The programme is described as follows

"The first semester at [University of Glasgow] is an introduction to the subject issues pertinent to the programme, a social science and history-based understanding of tourism development as well as cultural interpretation. In the second semester students attend [University of Malta] where they are introduced to aspects of cultural tourism including research methods, cities, niche cultural

tourism, policy and marketing, giving insights into cultural products and different cultural practices. The third semester may be at [Lund University], where students are introduced to tourism as an industry, encountering professional tourism and product development through courses on sustainability in service organisations, value creation and innovation, and destination development. Or it may be spent at [University Institute of Lisbon] where students can study event management, urban tourism, e-tourism, hospitality business design, wine and shopping tourism. All these add to their experience of industry products and issues. The fourth semester allows the student to write a dissertation at one of the universities, concentrating on a chosen topic of their interest. " (European Commission, 2018b).

Undeniably, since the Bologna declaration, higher education establishments have been seen and handled as strategic institutions for relaunching European economic growth and employment. The training of highly qualified individuals is now thought of as a network of establishments by the EC, which intends to define "good teaching" and the "good university" and "good science' in a network" (Croché, 2009). According to Hardouin's paper (2020) Erasmus Mundus aims to promote the European Union worldwide as a centre of excellence for education and training, by supporting European master's courses and by granting scholarships to third-country nationals who follow such postgraduate studies as well as to Union citizens studying in third countries. It therefore supports high-quality European masters and increases the attractiveness and visibility of European higher education in third countries (Hardouin, 2020, p.674). As per the author, third-country nationals students' desire to undertake a doctoral Erasmus Mundus programme is driven by three motivations. Although my research is about Erasmus Mundus master's programmes, Hardouin's work is an important contribution to the academic literature and can be used as a crucial reference.

The first motivation coming out of Hardouin's research is the will for the students to leave their home country. This motivation has developed two sub-motivations. The first one concerns students who cannot undertake such studies in the home country, firstly because their home university could not provide them with material and equipment "such as microscope or simple pipettes" (p.676). Moreover, students pushed by the motivation seem to want to emancipate, especially from an "oppressive family environment" (p. 676). The second motivation to undertake an Erasmus Mundus doctoral programme is to "enter on the European continent" (p.676). Study has shown that some students are "attracted by

Europe's good academic reputation", mostly "France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and Northern European countries" (p. 676). For other students, a European diploma is an "entry door to European labour market" (p.676). Lastly, the third motivation highlighted in this study brings together students wanting to undertake specifically an Erasmus Mundus doctorate, sort of a "guaranteed training of international excellence through the Erasmus Mundus label" (p.676). Students motivated by this mark of quality are also interested in the Erasmus Mundus scholarship, described as a "small fortune" (p 676). An Erasmus Mundus doctorate programme is seen as a strong alternative to an American university. Nonetheless, it is important to specify that this motivation is mostly driven by students having a "good [previous] level [of education]" (p.676).

In the existing literature, Erasmus Mundus students are usually excluded from general studies about international degree mobility. This could be explained by the fact that Erasmus Mundus, as explained previously, allows students from every nationality to take part in the programme. In this way, statistics are numerous, and research has been lacking on this topic. Taking into account that Erasmus Mundus students are considered as "super-mobile students" (Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021), it could easily be said that Erasmus Mundus is the greatest example of student mobility, as it combines internationalisation of higher education institutions, student super-mobility and studentification of urban areas, as we will see in the next sections.

2.2. Theoretical Approach

2.2.1. European Identity

Among the diverse challenges of European construction, the Erasmus program represented the "humanist component" as pointed out by Anquetil (2006). Beyond the processes of economic integration, the social and cultural objectives of the European project also aimed at the development of professional and interpersonal relational skills promoting employability and a form of large-scale social cohesion. These goals were set into place through opening borders and markets, including education, the networking opportunities offered by mobility and openness to otherness. Feyen and Krzaklewska showed that participation in an Erasmus+ program creates or stresses the existence of a European identity. One of the aims of this program is to make an Erasmus student a spokesperson of the European Union, spreading its values (Feyen and Krzaklewska, 2013). Golubeva, Gómez Parra and Espejo Mohedano (2018) have underlined one of the Erasmus' programme main objectives "to reinforce the spirit of European identity" (European Union, 1987). They also underlined the presence of denominations such as "'civic

engagement', 'civic commitment', 'civic skills', 'active (European) citizenship', 'European citizenship and identity'" (European Commission, 2015b). In the "Erasmus+ Programme Guide", also established by the European Commission, one of the aims and challenge of Erasmus+ is to enhance "young people's *active citizenship" (*Golubeva, Gómez Parra and Espejo Mohedano, 2018) which has been defined as '[p]articipation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy' (Hoskins, 2006, as cited in Hoskins, Campbell and D'hombres, 2008, p. 389).

Thus, Erasmus is supposed to contribute to the emergence of "a generation of Europeans" and be its vector of identity. As per Bonnet (2012, p. 32): "through the cultural enrichment to which the stay abroad is emphasised, the Erasmus program and in particular student mobility, has become a symbol of Europe and a European identity". For the scholar, the outcomes of previous research should, nonetheless, lead to consider the link between student mobility and the development of a common European identity with caution and nuance. Anquetil (2006) considers that if it was Erasmus' responsibility to be the driving force of an "active European citizenship", it is complex to consider that the mission was fulfilled after almost 20 years of implementation. However, Cairns et al. (2021) mentions that even though Erasmus is promoting inclusion and diversity, it targets an "extremely narrow socio-demographic range of students including those who may already be in possession of a broad range of inter-cultural capacities, high levels of social and economic capital and a form of European-mindedness" (p. 73). Consistent with Bourdieu (1986), Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye's (2004) and Murphy-Lejeune (2002), Cairns et al, (2021) demonstrates here that Erasmus is targeting a certain type of students, that could lead to the reinforcement of inequalities and social divide.

A study conducted by Close (2011) in French-speaking Belgium involving thirteen former students highlighted that the confrontation with cultural differences and the encounter with otherness in a foreign environment could lead to changes in identity. For the author, those changes primarily affect the perception of a sharpened self, plural and not necessarily exclusive feelings of belonging. According to the typology used by Risse (2004), Close implied that the students' experiences could lead to different identity configurations: that of "cross-cutting identities" (separate but intersecting sets of national identities: the subjects would belong to an "Erasmus group" or a group of European students); that of "nested identities" (identities are superimposed on each other in concentric circles, the European identity is added by extension to national identities); and that of "marble cake identities" (enrichment of individual personality by a diversity of combined elements; multiplication of personal identity aspects). As per Close (2011, p. 20), Erasmus would contribute to the awareness of a shared feeling of belonging to the same group, though the members would keep their distinct characteristics and would belong to other groups. In

this case, Erasmus could have a real impact on the student's identity: the inclination to interaction increases when the student finds themselves in a situation of being a "stranger" (p. 22). Close specifies that these dispositions result from interpersonal exchanges and confrontation with otherness, the latter of which occurs "within the Erasmus community or in contact with locals".

2.2.2.   Why do students undertake Erasmus?

A great amount of literature has been published on tourism motivations namely, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), Dann's Theory of Push and Pull Motivations (1977) and Pearce's Travel Career Ladder (TCL) (1988) being some of the most studied theories mentioned. Understanding why tourists travel can explain consumer needs, with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs remaining one of the most broadly accepted theories by researchers in understanding human behaviour (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
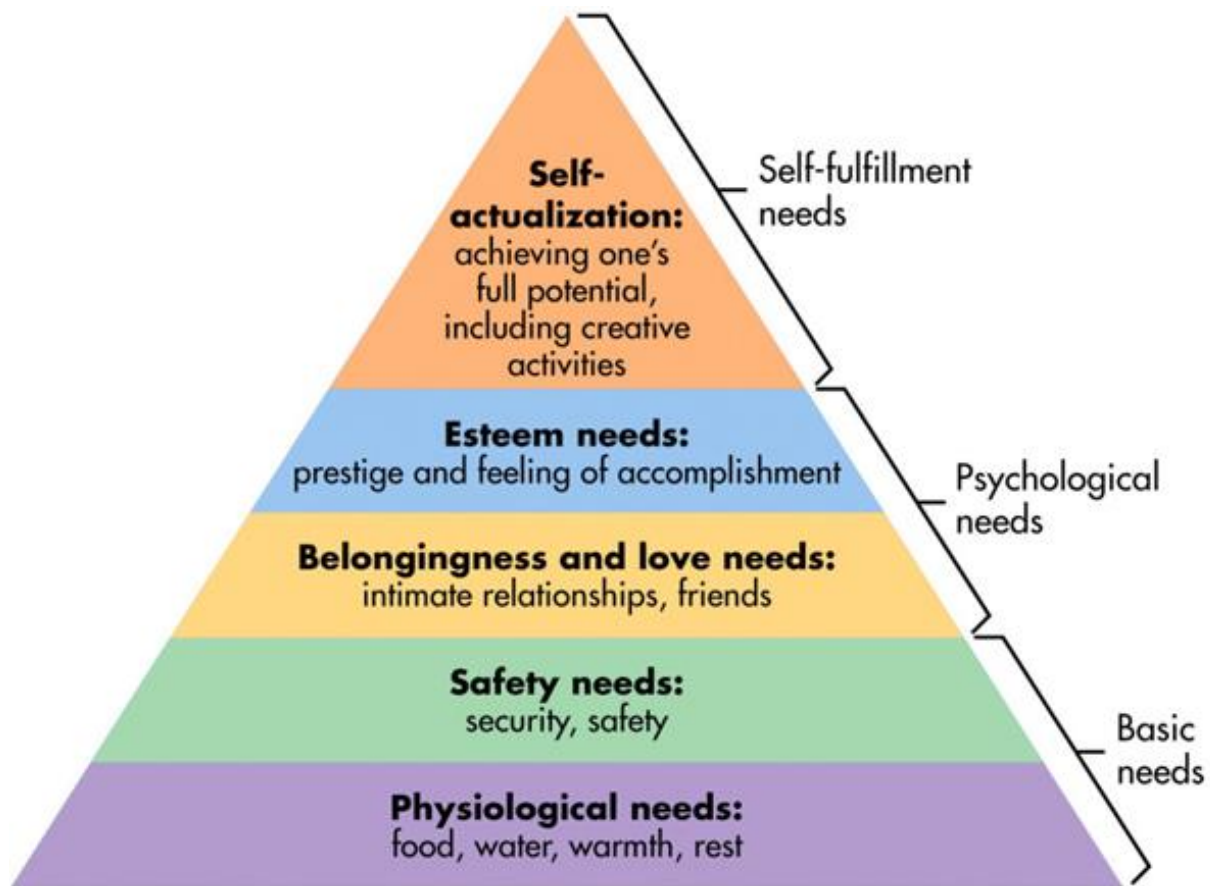
Source: Maslow (1943)

Maslow discusses 'self-actualisation' needs, such as 'education' to feel more proficient or recognised in society; in this case, an important factor that contributes to motivating students to undertake a study-abroad opportunity, is the ability to gain new knowledge. Education and learning can be extremely motivational for many people, with the significance of the learning experience in Erasmus being valued across the world. Academic mobility is often perceived as a gain on a personal level. The studies carried out on this topic agree that generally, the participants gain in maturity and resourcefulness (Anquetil, 2008, p. 233). Mobility would make it possible to acquire new skills in terms of flexibility, adaptability or even "linguistic renegotiation, cultural openness and decentration" (Gohard-Radenkovic, 2008, p. 245). Mobility is therefore seen as added value for a student. Some of the main motivations for a student to undertake an Erasmus may be categorised in the following paragraph.

Several studies underline that the decision to undergo student mobility often originates from situations where the home country does not have quality universities that could guarantee the student a competitive place in the international job market (Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014). The home country's economic situation cannot be detached from this decision-making process, as Van Mol and Timmerman (2013, p. 476) states, "student's motivations seem to be influenced by the macroeconomic situation of their country in comparison with eventual destination countries, even as their future perspectives". As a result, "mobility can constitute a strategy to cope with the uncertainties that young people might have to face". According to Said (1985), 'imaginative geographies' can be defined as the preconceptions that people have of a destination, in this case a potential study destination. This preconception arises from an unbalanced relationship between the home country and the future study destination, the latter usually representing dominance. Based on their social relationships online and off-line, students create these 'imaginaries' whilst in a shared collective. Most of the research agrees that the gap in the quality of education between a foreign diploma and a diploma obtained in the student's home country is one of the main motivations to go abroad (Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014, p. 9). The authors mention "if educational attainment of a foreign student exceeds the average education level in the home country or if the return to education in the home country is higher, the student is less likely to stay (in the United States)" (Bratsberg, 1995, as cited in Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014). Naturally, this theory also applies outside the United States. Many scholars agree that universities' ranking, and reputation are usually decisive in the choice of mobility (Choudaha and De Wit, 2014; Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014).

Moreover, the background and social environment of a student will have its weight on the decision. The results of Brook and Waters' study (2011) show the importance of the experience of peers in decision-making. They show in particular that the family context is strongly linked to decision-making. Indeed, if the student grew up in a family valuing mobility and in addition can financially support study

abroad stays, it is likely that they will be pushed to study abroad (Brook & Waters, 2011, p. 153). Thirdly, a shared history between two or more countries, often a common language, appears as a motivation for travel as there would be a greater ease of access as well as pre-existing links, which would allow for an ease of access to information concerning the destination (Garneau and Mazzella, 2013). Beine, Noël, & Ragot (2014) even suggests that there is a promotion of student migration from the former colonies to the former metropolis due to the familiarity of cultures (Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014, p. 2).

It emerges from the majority of European Commission studies and statistics that certain destinations are widely favoured over others in the context of mobility (studies or internships). According to Delespierre (2019), there are three factors which seem to be the primary influences and push factors. First, the geographical proximity as students often travel to neighbouring or even bordering countries; secondly, the linguistic accessibility is another key factor as it appears that students frequently choose to stay within the same linguistic community; finally, the English language. The paper shows that students prefer places where lessons are given in English (Delespierre, 2019). The most popular destinations are the countries whose language is one of the most spoken in the world, followed by economically "strong" countries. As an example, between 2014 and 2017, the first destination of outgoing French students was to the United Kingdom, followed by Spain and Germany, then Italy and Ireland (Delespierre, 2019). According to Choudaha and De Wit (2014, p. 28) a growing number of universities around the world have switched to teaching in English, rather than in the language of the country, in order to attract more international students.

2.2.3. Culture and cultural adaptation

A recurring concept that I feel important to define, is culture. Despite the multitude of definitions, I have decided to introduce this concept with the definition of Tylor (1871), describing culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1871). Within this definition, it is clear that traveling for purposes of culture can increase a person's awareness and understanding of new cultures to broaden one's perspective, often presented as a more positive rather than negative experience. While referring to the previous point, I feel is important to mention the definition of culture from the United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), where culture is defined as "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (UNESCO, 2001).

Adjusting to a new culture is a lengthy and often complicated process. The creation of interpersonal relationships and participation in communities is central to the integration of newcomers into a new social environment (Ishii, 2017, p. 5). This can be useful: According to Anquetil (2006), an Erasmus student does not manage to go beyond the surface vision of the foreign culture, although he lives there between three and twelve months. As per the author: "he stays long enough to familiarize himself with a new environment but does not touch the country in depth: he passes as a more or less assisted guest in an institution to which he remains fundamentally a stranger" (p. 75). It is as if the student was crossing the country, without really stopping there for a long period of time, like a tourist on vacation. Moving from a familiar environment to new a new one can be challenging, on an emotional, psychological, social, physical and economical level. Academic research in this field began with the term "culture shock" introduced by Oberg (1960) which, according to the author's definition, can be a source of anxiety. This anxiety results from the loss of familiar signs and symbols of social relations and their substitution by other unknown signs and symbols (Oberg, 1960, p. 177). Brown (2008) has shown that this anxiety often leads to various symptoms. The relocated person may feel homesick, lonely, isolated, lost, rejected, shy and confused. Furthermore, they can blame the locals for everything and idealise their home environment, questioning their decision to move and being overwhelmed by minor problems (Brown, 2008, p.5).

Cultural shock as a term has been implicated in recent studies because the process of adaptation does not always mean such a dramatic change. However, cultural shock is no longer seen as a problem but rather as a natural and necessary step in the adaptation process. There are many models and theories describing adaptation and related emotions, such as U-curve model (Lysgaard, 1955) and W-curve model (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1960), an adaptation of Lysgaand's model, adding a return phase. The "U-curve" is the most popular model representing the cultural adjustments an individual will feel when being in contact with another culture (as seen in Figure 2 below). The curve is set on a horizontal axis representing the period of time and a vertical axis indicating the feelings (negative or positive) of a person. In this model, cultural shock ends when one adapts to the new culture (also called acculturation; see Winkelman, 1994), or as per Dahlén (1997): "confirm and adapt to the foreign culture, while affirming one's own cultural identity" (p.12).

Figure 2: The W curve
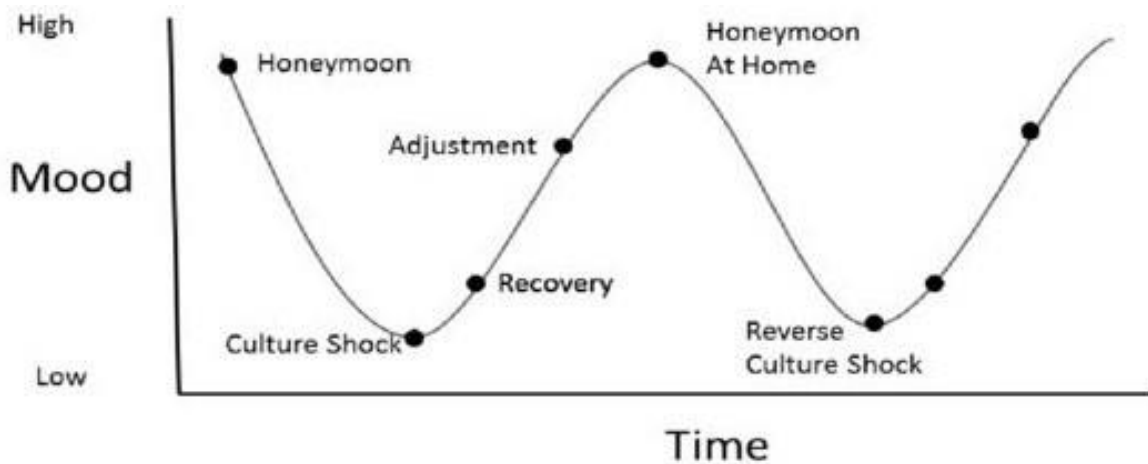
Source: Based on the U-curve (Lysgaand, 1955) and extended to the W-curve (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1960), retrieved from Hommadova (2017).

Although these models are commonly used, they have been criticised by many scholars, such as Thomas and Harrell (1994) and Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune in her book "The New Stranger" of whom does not totally agree with this model, nonetheless she does not deny it's value. Instead of describing the phenomenon with one or two curves representing the "ups" and the "downs" (positive feelings versus negative feelings), Murphy-Lejeune theorises a cultural shock with diverse smaller curves, during shorter amounts of time. She adds to this theory the influence of past experiences, notably travels, previous mobility, which can amend the original curve. In his paper, Tsoukalas states that "experienced people just go through a trial phase and a constructive phase" (2005, p. 315). The range of cultural adaptation and cultural shock varies from person to person depending on the amount of mobility capital possessed by them.

2.2.4. Mobility as a capital

In "Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste", Bourdieu (1979) has shown to what extent human capital is a determining factor regarding the access to education, in which the capital possessed by an individual indicates them a place in the social structure. In the case of this research, as it focuses on international students, it comes to show how the decision to study abroad is made, among other

determinants. A student deciding to complete their study abroad is part of a migratory movement, taking place in a context where the student will have to make choices as to the country of destination or the course they want to follow. This section will demonstrate the diverse factors inducing the decision to migrate and the choice of the place of migration in connection with the available capital.

The term capital was originally used purely in financial and economic definitions. However, Bourdieu (1986) extended this term to include other notions such as cultural capital, social capital, and even symbolic capital; these capitals make it possible to comprehend how social dynamics are structured by the different forms of capital (Chauviré and Fontaine, 2003, p. 12). This entirety of capital could be seen as resources that an individual could carry, part of which can be inherited but also hold the capacity of development. These resources would thus determine to which part of society they belong to and to what their possibilities are. Similarly, the individual could call upon these resources when they need them to counter some difficulties. All these forms of capital can accumulate to produce benefits, benefits of which can also multiply. The available capital ascertains the position of an individual in society, as explained by Bourdieu: "the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 46).

The notion of capital is fundamental when dealing with mobility, as the latter can be both social and spatial (Kaufmann, Bergman, & Joye, 2004). Therefore, it will be a crucial element to analyse. Indeed, by looking at the motivations of international students choosing the Erasmus Mundus Master Tourism Development and Culture as a postgraduate course, the question of the capital in their possession is undeniably linked to their choice since capital governs social dynamics (Kaufmann, Bergman, & Joye, 2004). This concept can also highlight how individuals are not equal in opportunities or possibilities (Kaufmann, Bergman, & Joye, 2004) and can furthermore reveal how decisions (that could be seen as personal choices) may be influenced by different capitals owned by an individual and their desire to acquire more capital.

To go further, scholars Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye (2004) have introduced the concept of motility. Thus, motility is defined as the ability of an entity (goods, information, or people) to be mobile in a social and geographical space and how entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility depending on the circumstances (p. 745). As per the authors, "motility incorporates structural and cultural dimensions of movement and action in that the actual or potential capacity for spatio-social

mobility may be realized differently or have different consequences across varying socio-cultural contexts" (p. 750). The authors present three elements described as interdependent:

- Accessibility: This accessibility, in this model, is constrained by the options (transportation, communication, services and accessible equipment) and conditions (accessibility - in terms of cost, logistics and other constraints specific to a location).

- Competencies: namely the skills, capacities, and abilities, directly or indirectly related to accessibility and appropriation. These skills are of three kinds: physical capacity, rules and movement regulations, organisational capacities, planning, and information acquisition.

- Appropriation: which defines how individuals interpret or act on perceived or real accessibility and skills.

These three elements of the model proposed by Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye (2004) are fundamentally linked to the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions in which mobility is integrated and adopted. For the authors, the systemic approach to mobility makes it possible to acknowledge that movements can take several forms. Firstly, these different forms of movement are substitutable and secondly, these movements can be expressed as a form of mobility capital (p. 752).

The concept of motility also extends to understanding the relationship between social mobility and spatial mobility. The authors theorise social mobility as "a transformation in the distribution of resources or the social position of an individual, family or group in a given social structure or network". This mobility can be intergenerational (changes in the degree of inheritance from parents to children) or intragenerational (changes in an individual's social position over a given period of time) (Kaufmann, Bergman, & Joye, 2004, p. 747). Thus, this concept would fill a gap in the literature, as most research focuses on movement in time and space rather than on the interactions between actors, structures, and specific contexts (p. 749).

Consonant with Bourdieu and Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye's (2004) theory on social and cultural capital, the concept of mobility capital developed by Murphy-Lejeune (2002) makes it possible to question the notion of mobility. According to the author, "mobility capital is a subcomponent of human capital, enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad" (p. 51). Murphy-Lejeune (2002) argues that this capital originates from four sources: family and personal history, prior mobility experiences, personality traits, and a previous experience of a new environment's adaptation; more precisely, an introduction to how a culture shock is positively overcome. International students thus have the particularity of coming to seek, for a limited

period, a linguistic or disciplinary complement in a foreign country, but also an existential experience conducive to developing their employability through the acquisition of intercultural and personal skills (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Carlson's (2012) research shows that students undertaking a degree mobility have, for most of them, "prior encounters with other countries or cultures" (p. 171). Even though this study abroad period is primarily undertaken for academic purposes, it also involves experiential components (such as finding an apartment and creating a new social circle). The latter is more or less facilitated by the conditions in which the student is welcomed for the duration of their mobility.

3. Methodology

After a critical review of the literature, some gaps have been identified and in conclusion to this, a research question to address this has been established. The initial idea for this research question evolved after reading some literature on student mobility, I found the topic interesting, but it was too broad; therefore, I decided to link it with the experiences that myself and my colleagues have been through as students of EMJMD TourDC, by interviewing them using a qualitative, case-study approach, as I will detail next. In line with a qualitative approach, this methodology will conduct an exploratory discussion and study from a variety of perspectives. This section will analyse and justify why the chosen method has been conducted and will outline the setting and data of the participants throughout the interview process. It will also address the limitations for this study. Finally, the researchers background will be addressed and the potential bias from this.

3.1. A qualitative case study approach

The philosophical paradigm utilised for this paper is that of a case study with a relativist approach, as the reality of this dissertation is that the participants, coming from different cultures, have particular conceptual systems, which can result in different data. As the purpose of this research is to analyse the perceptions of higher education in Europe and student mobility, the selection of a single degree selection as a case study can help provide depth and a richness of data. In this paper, the case study offers a yet under-explored and under-utilised potential as a bridge to measure consumer destination perceptions, in comparison to traditional research paradigms. This will enable the researcher to utilise breadth and depth to gain an understanding of the perceptions students hold on such forms of higher education associated with the EMJMD TourDC program. The case study paradigm, when used as a research approach is both the process and end product of research. It provides a direct boundary for inquiry, and a structural process

within which any methods appropriate to investigating a research area can be applied. Thus, this study will conduct and empirical, inductive-oriented approach (Fox et al., 2014). The nature of qualitative research allows for meanings to be drawn; a relativist approach is represented through the eyes of participants which dependant to our external beliefs, are represented in reality (Steinmetz, 1998). It should also be noted that the researcher will adopt some interpretivist approaches, as there are multiple ways of interpreting such data, with other researchers perhaps drawing different conclusions (Fox et al., 2014). To mitigate this as much as possible, the researchers coding and notes will be overseen by the dissertation supervisor and included in the appendix, to ensure reliability of the data analysis process.

A case study approach seemed the most logical method for this research. Using a case study example helped narrow my research topic and guide the structure of this research paper. Applying EMJMD TourDC as the case study for this paper, provided a relatable and personal response from participants that added to the value of this research question. Background knowledge of this program provided the research topic with context and a fundamental understanding. This allowed for the topic to be fully explored as the participants have all undergone similar experiences before undertaking this degree and throughout the duration of the degree.

3.2. Interviews and Data collection

A significant part of the research in field of student mobility has primarily been conducted using a qualitative method, as it is often associated with the social sciences. Being part of the second cohort of the EMJMD TourDC, I wanted to understand what ideas were behind my colleagues' minds in terms of motivations to undertake such a degree and to assess their experience. The discussions constantly intrigued me and therefore, I decided to research the perceptions, adaptation, and general experiences of EMJMD TourDC students and alumni over the entire master's, during their mobilities which I felt could only be properly analysed through using qualitative data. I decided to conduct qualitative research, as I trust it is the best way to extract the most information and analyse the phenomenon of being an international student. This type of research allows checking hypotheses and theories (Miller, 2019) and attentively collects personal statements from the respondents. In contrast to the questionnaire, the researcher (usually the interviewer) prepares a structured questions scheme but directs the interview. In this case, the researcher has to be familiar with the topic and the respondents in order to ask relevant questions to test the hypotheses sought (Riley & Love, 2000; Richtie et. al, 2013).

Regarding the data collection, I have conducted semi-structured interviews for this research, fourteen in total, with a sample of alumni or students currently completing the EMJMD TourDC. The

interviews were carried out between February and June 2022 and conducted in English, in order to facilitate the transcription process. I chose to contact the participants directly through Facebook, Zoom and Otter of which two are messaging and video platforms, and the latter allows for automatic transcription. The semi-structured interview has been non-directive. Following Miller's approach (2019), I have been listening and collecting data, allowing the respondent the opportunity to detail, comment or elaborate their answers as they felt. It is important to mention that I aimed to simply guide the interviewees if the topic strayed too far from the initial question and not guide their answers. With my interviewing technique, I aimed to be as consistent as possible throughout the course of the interviews. To protect the identity of the respondent, as they are dealing with their personal opinions on their programme of studies that some are still undertaking, the participants' names and nationalities are not disclosed in this work.

The respondents are international students or alumni belonging to cohort 1 (2019-2021) and cohort 2 (2020-2022) and aged between 23 and 31 years old. They come from 13 different countries (6 EU citizens and 8 non-EU citizens) and there is an unequal distribution between the scholarship holders and the self-funded students (9 scholarship holders and 5 self-funded students). Nonetheless, the research is an accurate reflection of the gender bias that EMJMD and this specific course represented. Out of fourteen respondents, eleven of them were females, and three were male and this was reflected in the gender bias of the interviews (see figure X below). Moreover, only a few respondents never underwent an experience abroad prior to the EMJMD TourDC (11 respondents went abroad for study or volunteering purposes and 3 did not, see Figure 3). I aimed to get a varied selection of participants for this study in the hope to create findings that were fairer and less biased.

Figure 3: List of respondents

IDENTIFICATION	APPROX. LENTH OF THE INTERVIEW	DATE OF THE INTERVIEW	AGE	ACADEMIC BACKGROUND	SCHOLARSHIP	GENDER	NATIONALITY
Participant 1	62 min.	28/02/2022	24	Languages	YES	FEMALE	EU
Participant 2	48 min.	10/06/2022	27	Tourism Management	NO	FEMALE	EU
Participant 3	32 min.	11/06/2022	25	Tourism and Event Management	YES	MALE	NON-EU
Participant 4	63 min.	12/06/2022	26	Tourism Management	YES	FEMALE	EU
Participant 5	36 min.	13/06/2022	24	International Relations	YES	FEMALE	NON-EU
Participant 6	31 min.	13/06/2022	31	Theatre and History	NO	MALE	NON-EU
Participant 7	31 min.	18/06/2022	23	Tourism Management	YES	FEMALE	NON-EU
Participant 8	59 min.	16/06/2022	25	Global Development Studies	NO	FEMALE	NON-EU
Participant 9	36 min.	28/06/2022	27	Tourism Management	YES	FEMALE	NON-EU
Participant 10	44 min.	26/06/2022	28	Buisiness Informatics	YES	FEMALE	NON-EU
Participant 11	31 min.	20/06/2022	26	Archeology	NO	FEMALE	EU
Participant 12	31 min.	22/06/2022	25	Tourism Management	YES	FEMALE	EU
Participant 13	30 min.	27/06/2022	25	Development Studies	YES	MALE	NON-EU
Participant 14	24 min.	28/06/2022	27	Tourism and Event Management	NO	FEMALE	EU

Source: author (2022)

3.3. Ethnography and Ethical considerations

As the main (and only) researcher, I'm 24 years old, female and from the EU. As student of the EMJMD program myself I'm involved in the context of study and aware of the difficulties and bias that my position entails for the present study. To overcome this difficulty, I'm following the empirical principles and orientation of ethnographical studies made in familiar settings, where researchers were also participating as members of the studied society (de Jong et al., 2013; Gelir, 2021). This may have encouraged most of the participants to feel comfortable and discard the interviewer effect (Burawoy, 1998). Although in empirical research there is a risk of bias, in this case, I have chosen to interview participants from a variety of different age groups, careers status, gender and nationality, so that the evidence collected will provide a variety of perspectives. During the interviews, I only asked for the participants opinions on the topics mentioned and will not express my own thoughts. Although this cannot limit every bias, it has allowed participants to express their thoughts freely.

The interviews were undertaken respecting ISCTE's ethical guidelines. Before the beginning of each interview, participants were explained the interview's reasons, motivations and objectives and consented to be recorded, on video and on audio. Participants agreed to be part of this research on their own free will. During the content analysis of the interviews, I made sure that anonymity was respected.

4. Findings

Following the analysis of the conducted interviews, some themes have emerged. I have split those themes in three sections, the first one being related to the perceptions and pre-conceptions of student mobility, the second being related to the adaptation and identity and the last one investigating the cultural experience of Erasmus Mundus. This structure also follows the same chronological structure than the interview: pre-mobility, during the mobility and post-mobility.

4.1. Motivations: Travel and Education

Crompton (1979) states that the two main motivations for traveling abroad are novelty and educations. Through analysing the data collected, it is evident that these are key motivations for the TourDC students too; however, dependent on a variety of factors, some are 'pulled' to the course primarily for education and others 'pulled' to the course primarily for the mobility element involved (Dann, 1977). A majority (nine to be precise) of the participants chose to undertake the course primarily for the multiple mobilities involved, with participant Six even stating that "I thought it was nice to be in three different locations in one master without having to like organise the different university parts by myself". This could imply that the attractiveness of the degree was not only for the mobilities but potentially for the security and safety that traveling with a university can give to many students. Participant Ten stated that "it's like a onetime opportunity where your basically paid to travel and study and everything […] and sounds really amazing". Having the course pre-organised was a motivating factor for students because it reassured them that by enrolling on the course, they then in turn were given the opportunity to live and study in multiple destinations.

The accessibility of the degree was also an appealing factor as it made the idea of traveling while studying an option. The possibility of a scholarship has been an important, even a crucial determinant for some participants, who perhaps didn't think it possible to do this before they saw the TourDC degree. As previously mentioned, nine out of fourteen of the participants undertook the degree whilst on the scholarship and received "a contribution to [the] participation costs (including tuition fees, full insurance

coverage and any other mandatory costs related to [the] participation in the EMJMD study programme), a contribution to [the] travel and installation costs [and] a monthly subsistence allowance for the entire duration of the EMJMD study programme" (University of Glasgow, 2022). Participant One said that this master "allowed [me] to go abroad and to travel a lot" and that "this is the main motivation". The scholarship provided many students with the opportunity that they potentially wouldn't have had before and essentially gave them the funds to live, travel and study aboard for the duration of the degree. However, whilst not all the students had the scholarship, those of whom were self-funded also held the same motivation for traveling. For example, Participant Six is self-funded and stated that they "chose to take it because the idea of living in three different countries and traveling with the same cohort to those three different countries was really exciting", the element of traveling it seems made it worth the tuition and travel fees.

The second key motivation for undertaking the TourDC degree was for the educational element, both in terms of receiving a foreign master's degree and for the university's reputation. Kinnell (1989) highlighted that the popular motivation for choosing a destination based on its reputation on an educational level, often presented by ranking, underline the "higher quality of study abroad", compared to a study period in one's home country (Choudaha and De Wit, 2014; Beine, Noël & Ragot, 2014). Participant Nine mentioned that the "prestigious background of the Erasmus fellowship" and high ranking of the University of Glasgow and the University of Lund (with both universities having repeatedly being ranked in the world's top 150th universities by the Academic Ranking of World Universities; Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2022) was a large motivating factor. Beine, Noël, & Ragot (2014) underline that Shanghai ranking uses some sort of criteria to create this ranking which could be criticised. Nonetheless, authors mention the popularity of this ranking among mobile students, being the reference.

Similarly, Participant Eleven mentioned "the first reason I chose it is that it [this course] was the University of Glasgow, because of the university it will have a specific reputation, the class and everything". Findlay et al., (2018) said that "imaginaries around the cultural and symbolic capital to be gained by enrolling in so-called world-class universities", with many of the participants demonstrated the importance of having an international degree from some of the universities within this program and how this could benefit them for their future career. Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) even refer to the "perception that an overseas course of study is better than a local one", implying that the act of moving abroad to study adds to the value of the course, regardless of its nature. This could suggest that this program, as a course that is 'super-mobile', automatically has more value because of its multiple mobilities (Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021).

Beech (2014) argues that "European nations were perceived as being powerful and articulate", alongside with Said's (1985) definition of 'imaginaries', the respondents have this "fantasy that Europe is great" and this image that "the universities here [Europe] are very valued". These elements can relate to Hardouin's paper (2020) on Erasmus Mundus students' motivations to study in Europe. Moreover, the career prospects obtained from to a European degree seems to be an important criteria for non-EU students (as presented before in the motivations). Notably, Participant Five mentioned "coming to Europe, it opens more professional doors"; similar with Participant Seven describing this experience as a "push for me as a student as probably like as a person and as a personal career development, so it makes me go faster" in terms of progression in a certain career. Non-EU students had the opportunity to learn more about the continent and for Participant Nine it has been an "eye-opening experience about the European culture", with Hardouin (2020) stating that a European diploma is an "entry door to European labour market" (p.676).

Both these motivations of travel and education were the primary recurring themes found within this data, however, there were also other motivations that I feel important to acknowledge. Some students were looking to experience other communities in Europe in order to develop on a personal level, explore new passions or to be more independent; these elements influenced the students on which destinations to study for the duration of their degree. For example, Participant Three wanted "LGBTQ+ open communities like open countries for that. So that was also one of my main directions in choosing the country that I want to be"; similarly, Participant 5 said "I wanted to try different things such as living alone and cleaning". Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) mentioned that the more information a student has a on a country (in this situation the university's country), "the more likely they will select it as a study destination", this implies that the preconceptions of a destination also helped motivate and influence students' decisions regarding their choices as to where they studied.

4.2.   Expectations vs Reality

It has appeared that most participants had clichés, pre-conceptions and stereotypes about what the destinations would be like. Whilst most of the students already had a largely accurate expectation of what Europe would be like, as many were born with the EU, most had little experience traveling to the destinations of the mobilities in the TourDC program. In particular, the non-EU students had quite specific ideas about what Europe would be like as they had little experience traveling there. Imaginations and perceptions are some of the key motivations that influence tourists to a destination (Beech, 2014). Whether through media, advertisements or word-of-mouth, the students had access to multiple mediums of which

formed alternative perceptions of a place; Beech (2014) describes this as 'imaginative geography'. For example, many of the students had expectations that Scotland "has lots of nature", is known for its "pub culture", "bad cold weather" and having the "kilts like men wearing skirts" as their cultural dress. Most of the respondents were disappointed when they learnt the course was not taking place in Glasgow on the main campus and was rather taking place in Dumfries. Some participants were not aware until later in the application process that they would not be studying in Glasgow, with Participant twelve mentioning that they were "a little bit afraid of the Dumfries, I was not happy […] I felt like the experience will be way poor, just because we are not staying at the main campus". When asked if and what their expectations were of Dumfries, many participants responded similarly to Participant's Six statement of "I think boring, that it was going to be the most boring portion of the program". It is fair to say that the expectations of Dumfries were poor due to the lack of knowledge about the city, especially in comparison to Glasgow where the main university is well-renowned. In comparison to these expectations of Scotland, the reality was relatively similar to the expectations. Many respondents felt that the course was very well executed and was "easy" in the sense that their expectations of challenging modules (from the UK's high academic reputation) were not met however, this did create a nice work-life "balance". Participant Nine said that the light workload enabled them to "travel around and take in the culture of the place" and was "very balanced for a student". Mostly everyone mentioned the "friendliness of locals" and focused more on the lifestyle that Dumfries allowed them to have. In terms of the respondents' views of the city of Dumfries, everyone interviewed mentioned the word "nice"; Participant Six even said, "the actual city was cuter [..] than I thought it would be". There was mostly positive feedback regarding this mobility and therefore students had created higher expectations for the rest of their degree.

The mobility in Sweden instigated incredibly high expectations regarding the academic excellence and rating of the university. Out of all the participants interviewed, all chose to undertake this mobility with Lund purely for its academic reputation, as economically it woul d have been cheaper to study in Lisbon, but this is something that students were willing to sacrifice. Participant twelve said "I had extremely high expectations due to very high ranking which is 80th place worldwide", reiterating the value of a HEI. Out of seven people interviewed who participated in the mobility in Sweden, four mentioned the term "high expectation". Other key words that were recurring were "perfect", "serious" and "quality". The majority of respondents were surprised by the fact that Sweden was "very intense" and "demanding" while referring to the academic pressure and 42% of the respondents mentioned that the teachers wanted the students to "reach some sort of excellence". Although most of the respondents were expecting their masters to be challenging and demanding, they felt like it was normal to have this much pressure, with Participant Eight saying "that's what I was hoping for my masters to learn a lot". It

appears that most of the student's expectations of the university in Sweden were met while referring to the content and demanding academic pressure that this semester would have, however, many participants also mentioned being disappointed with the execution of the course. Students seemed to be "surprised" about the difference from the previous mobilities in terms of the demand for reading and independent study, with Participant Eight saying that in Malta and Scotland most classes were articulated through "lecture-based" content, while in Sweden everything was based on "constant reading, constant material, a lot of dense information all at once". Some students deplore the fact that they could not choose their topics, as one respondent felt like one course was "useless", "hectic" and too generalised. Indeed, classes were grouping students from different backgrounds, and therefore offering a more tourism-appropriate course would have been appreciated. The role of the university has also been criticised, as a participant mentioned that the "organisation was a nightmare", which is not a quality any of the participants had expected prior to starting the mobility. Due to the intensiveness of the course and the limited time students had available, some mentioned how they didn't have much time to travel and relax which are expectations and qualities that most had experienced in the other mobilities.

It seems that students' expectations regarding cooler countries matched with the idea of 'quality education', while hotter destinations were viewed as 'colourful' and 'vibrant. The mobilities in this course with a hotter climate had similar expectations with respondents expecting attributes of a Mediterranean lifestyle. As a well-known destination by many students, Lisbon had more preconceptions than that of Malta. Students had expectations about Malta related to that of an island including "beaches", "green", "sun" and "sand". Participant Five declared that "Malta is not as famous around the world as Scotland", and therefore did not know what to expect. Even though many respondents didn't have expectations towards the academic elements of Malta, some still expressed that they were "disappointed", especially compared to their previous mobilities. Indeed, after a first semester in Scotland where generally the classes were "well organised", students were discouraged by the repetition of themes and by the lack of interaction between professors and students. Most students denounced the professors to spread "monologues" and classes to be "boring" and "repetitive". Participant Five "did not like the way that we were switching teachers on the courses all the time" and Participant Nine said "when the pandemic started [...] I think they use that as an excuse of why they were not able to handle us". Many of the participants commented on the teacher's "rudeness" and were disappointed by the level of education and the disorganisation of the semester. As per the culture of Malta, students were surprised by the architecture, language, and the history of the country which nearly all weren't aware of prior to visiting. Participant Thirteen gave an opinion about their experience and stated: "Malta is a party island, you have parties every day even under COVID we had a lot of fun activities, not with the university, unfortunately, but

with other people from the master's, with the flatmates and other people, so life was really chill and study was not that difficult", their opinion and positive experience of Malta seemed to be primarily focussed on the social elements of the mobility. Other respondents commented that, despite the poor support they received academically, the lifestyle and weather encouraged them to be social with others on their course and with the greater student community. Whilst even one participant referred to the country itself as physically "gorgeous", many commented saying the people were "racist", "conservative" and "shocking [socially]", in terms of how welcomed they felt in the city. Participant Five said "when you come to Europe, you expect everything to be very perfect and very organised, very clean, very polite […] like abortion being not being illegal but a crime, it's very insane to me […] so yeah, I had some cultural shocks there", whilst referring to the attitudes of the people and the traditions in Malta many participants seemed surprised of the reality of the country.

As Lisbon "as a well-known capital city" many respondents had expectations relating to that of a relaxed and social lifestyle. Whilst compared with Malta, many participants gave positive feedback towards the educational element and the student lifestyle in which they had. Four participants out of seven mentioned the practicality of the semester, thanks to "group projects" and "interactive classes" leading to Participant Four saying that it "was more professional. It had more inside the field rather than just articles and books". As per Malet Calvo (2018), Lisbon is welcoming a growing number of mobile students for the past ten years, its urban territory is changing and therefore offering more amenities and activities for students therefore providing a logical explanation for this enthusiasm regarding Lisbon (p. 2146). The participants also had a more social life and were undertaking more social activities in comparison to the previous mobilities. Participant Two stated that they "love the culture […] love the city of Lisbon"; furthermore, Participant Eleven highlighted that "the city's providing a lot of opportunities because of course it's a capital". Four students out of seven even described the mobility in Portugal as "the best part of the course". Overall, the results show that most respondents had a positive experience during their EMJMD with some describing it as a "dream come true", "a lifetime experience", and Participant Seven even stating that "I can't imagine my life without this experience". This shows that most participants are very grateful for this experience and see it as a major asset to their life professional and personal.

4.3.   Cultural effects on identity

4.3.1.   Social Background

As mentioned previously, students undertaking an international mobility or a degree abroad usually come from a more privileged background than students undertaking a degree in their home country

(Brooks & Waters, 2011; Van Mol, 2014; Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021). This also means that they hold more cultural capital, inherited from their parents (Bourdieu, 1986), which is the "form of capital that is most salient for educational success" (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021). The research from this dissertation has shown that out of fourteen students interviewed, thirteen have parents who graduated from a HEIs. To remain on the topic of capital, I would like now to mention mobility capital (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). One topic asked during the interviews was that of the beginning of the student's transnational journey with the findings showing that generally, most participants wanted to do a master's degree abroad for some time. Twelve participants out of fourteen have had an international experience prior to the EMJMD TourDC (see Figure 4 below). Most of them went abroad from their home country to undergo a language exchange or course, for English in the most general case, around the age of fourteen; illustrating Brooks and Waters's (2011) words when they mention that "mobile students tend to have travelled more in the past".

Figure 4: Have the respondents undergone an experience abroad prior to this EMJMD TourDC?
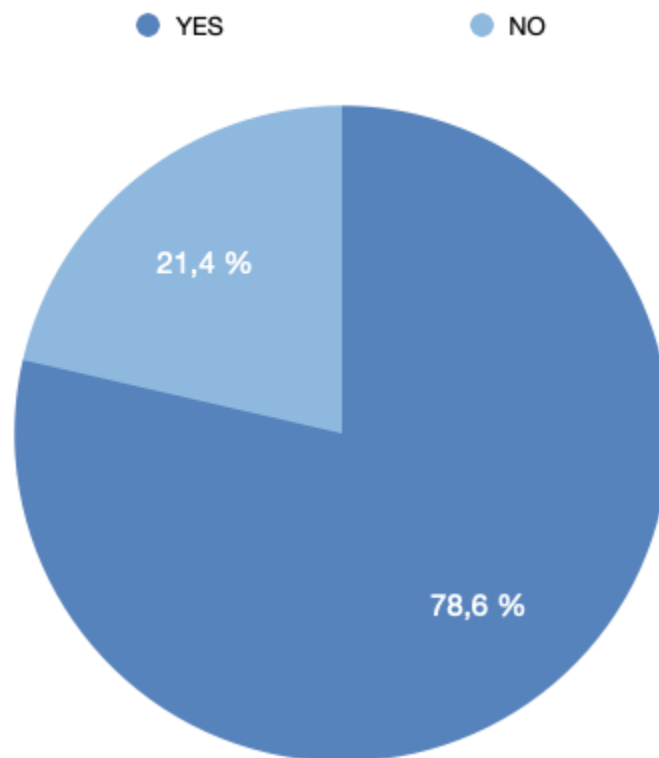
Source: author (2022)

Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen (2021) borrowed Murphy-Lejeune's idea that international mobility experiences are consecutive ("one mobility experience leads to another") and that this practice is usually "running in the family" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). The TourDC programme is an example of the respondent's enthusiasm for travel and exploration, with many saying this was one of the main motivations for undertaking this course.

4.3.2. Erasmus generation

The data collected in this study corresponds with Carlson's (2012) data and shows that 78,6% of the respondents who have participated in this degree have also undertaken a previous mobility experience abroad (mostly with Erasmus). Therefore, they are equipped with a high mobility capital and adaptation seemed quite easy. For example, whilst looking back to their experience, Participant Five said that "I adapt quite well to most of the countries that I lived in", similar to Participant Six who mentioned "I think for everyone if you've traveled before it's easier to adapt to a culture shock when you travel to another place". Participant Fourteen, as an EU student, stated that they did not have any difficulties to adapt as "European cultures are different in a way but never 'oh my god, shocking'". This probably made the mobilities even easier especially for the EU students. Out of eight non-EU respondents, none agreed or mentioned a sense of belonging to an Erasmus generation, regardless of taking part in a program. This can be put in contrast with the statement of Participant One who mentioned "European identities are felt more by people that are not European because they are not used to it because we are so used to it that we grant it", who believes that non-EU students perhaps might notice the differences and mobility of the EU more. However, the respondents who identified as European come from the EU and see themselves as being part of a "Erasmus community" (Close, 2011); 42.8% of respondents mentioned "feel[ing] European", "feel[ing] more European than German" and "I remember when people used to ask me where I'm from, just say Europe". It appears that a similarity of lifestyles brings people closer in relationships, but also in the feeling of belonging to the same group. There is a strong relationship between Erasmus students (and in this case, Erasmus Mundus students) and the sense of belonging to an 'Erasmus generation' which is often highlighted in institutional discourses (Ballatore, 2007). Participant One said that it is during a previous Erasmus mobility experience earlier in their studies that "a European closeness" appeared; they refer to an "closeness" rather than a sense of belonging. Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska (2021) refer to "self and group identification centred on being international but not Erasmus", suggesting a separation between nationalities but not for expatriates in a destination that's not their home country.

However, Participant Twelve mentioned they belong to Erasmus generation, but they pointed out that there "have been already a generation before me, so I would say maybe I am generation number two or number three" and that for Europeans this is not something new. While in many HEIs students who undertake a credit mobility represent the core of the international community, Erasmus Mundus students are more doubtful in their participation in what is commonly known as the "Erasmus Bubble" (Cairns et al. 2017; Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021).

4.3.3. Relationships with locals and other students

Meeting people from different nationalities has been a dominant theme expressed by the respondents throughout the interview process. Out of fourteen participants, all of them agreed that this is important and the "whole point of going abroad". This importance has been insisted in by five participants, especially by Participant Fourteen who said that by not meeting new nationalities during a mobility "you could just have saved yourself from the trouble and the money and stayed at home". Participants Three and Twelve agreed on the fact that being around different nationalities was good preparation for future career prospects, as students "aim for like managerial positions and as managers we need to be very sensitive, we need to be able to read people". Aside from "widen[ing] your horizons", "get[ting] inspired", "grow[ing] your own perspective", living abroad increases the students value of mobility and makes them more flexible, opened-minded, and adaptable (Gohard-Radenkovic, 2008, p. 245).

Therefore, for the respondents, this experience is made possible through meeting different nationalities. Even though many respondents have underlined the importance of making friends and meeting people from different nationalities, some same-nationality friendships have prevailed. Many participants shared with me their vision on the same-national friendships they participated in during the mobility: "basically Russian speaking people, so it's easy to connect, right?" (Participant Ten); "European bond with Europeans, Asians bond with Asians [...] I felt like this was the case" (Participant Twelve); "when you see fellow colleagues from Africa [...] I got much closer to them" (Participant Nine). Murphy-Lejeune (2002) explained this tendency as "relying on the ethnic group is first and foremost a method for the recreation of a primary relation around the native culture, a kind of 'home away from home" (p. 184). Although many felt they know the value of meeting international people, the comforts and simplicity of making friends with people from the same country as you, made the process of international life easier. Talking now about the relationships between the respondents and the local people, many commented on how it varied from mobility to mobility and was mostly inexistent. Indeed, as pointed out by Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska (2021), by being in an international 'bubble', it is 'harder to meet locals'

(p. 11). Participants did acknowledge that they "don't know if it's because of the Erasmus" that they felt like they didn't form deep relationships with locals, however many thought this a missed opportunity.

4.3.4. Future mobilities as influenced by the TourDC program

The future career prospect after any graduation is important to acknowledge. However, in relation for the Erasmus Mundus students, it seems that the mobility prospect seems more important in comparison to the career path. Out of fourteen respondents, six have returned to their home country or are planning to. One factor contributing to this can be related to Participant's Fourteen boredom of moving and her will to settle in the quote, "but I think for now, I'm all moved out". Participant One has a similar goal and would also like to "settle somewhere for a while", a possible side effect of the 'super mobile' after being 'rushed and constantly on the move' (Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021). However, more than half of the respondents are planning to stay abroad. By this, Participant Nine wishes to "take the mobility experience further", alongside Participant Seven's statement, "I hope that I will stay abroad and try to gain some international experience". These respondents explain that the Erasmus Mundus program offered them an opportunity, and this is something that they want to continue to experience, through future mobilities in Europe and pursue with a career abroad.

5. Discussion

This final chapter will link the literature found in chapter 1 with the findings found in chapter 4. It will highlight the theoretical framework surrounding student mobility and the Erasmus Mundus program with the findings of the study. The study limitations will be discussed, alongside the external factors influencing the results, future research opportunities and the final conclusion.

5.1. Summary of findings

This study found three primary themes which emerged that were significant to the positioning elements (Morrison, 2018). The most dominant theme was the motivations for undertaking the EMJMD TourDC. The second most dominant theme was associated with the reality of the course and if they met the participants' expectations prior to taking part. Finally, the last theme was the cultural effects on identity.

5.2. Interpreting the findings

For most students, realising that their mobility in Scotland (University of Glasgow) was not based in Glasgow seemed to be quite a surprise. Similar to Beech's (2014) research, many of the international students had preconceptions of studying in Glasgow, assuming it would be the same as other major cities in Scotland like Edinburgh or even major cities in England like London. Many of these stereotypes could have been created from the vast amounts of marketing that UK has done for tourists and the publicity that they have done for the UK as a tourism destination (Beech, 2014). It seems that students were surprised that Dumfries, a city in Scotland, was different to that of other cities in the same country and therefore their imaginative geographies (Beech, 2014) did not match their expectations. Although on the website it does mention that the course takes place in Dumfries, it appears that most students still were not aware of this. This could be a result of many students making the assumptions that the University of Glasgow only has one campus, of which would be in the city of Glasgow. Despite this, most of the students seemed to have enjoyed their experience during their mobility in Scotland.

The COVID-19 pandemic came to Europe from China in March 2020, and was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation on March 11[th,] 2020 (WHO, 2020). This correlated with the students' EMJMD; therefore, students did not receive in-person classes and completed their mobilities primarily online through the Zoom platform. Many of the students had no need to go to the campus as the lectures were online, therefore their physical experience with the university was limited. Many students mentioned this pandemic as a reason of not having their expectations met totally but also, they show their gratefulness of being able to participate to an EMJMD and to have been able to undertake the mobilities during the pandemic.

Lisbon, on the contrary to Scotland, provided the cohort 2 (2020-2022) students with more positive imaginaries. As the city is a capital, it suggested that there would be more opportunities in terms of academically and socially than Dumfries. Six out of the seven students that participated in this mobility labelled it as their favourite; part of the reason for this could be related to not only the destination and university but also the time in relation to COVID-19. The students who went to Lisbon went precisely one year after the pandemic started, at which in Lisbon protective measures were being reduced and the city started to reopen. Similarly, this was the first mobility that allowed in-person classes and group projects, this could have also contributed to the student's positive experience. Equally, the hospitality and leisure industries reopened which allowed for more social activities and other elements which contributed to having a "normal" student experience.

Furthermore, I would like to point out that my data was in opposition to Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska's (2021) statement, "yet the process is fraught with obstacles, particularly in dealing with feelings of anxiety, loneliness and the sheer exhaustion of relocating and maintaining ties in multiple loci, geographically and virtually, as well as dealing with the many institutional and formal barriers to mobility" as most students if not all felt comfortable traveling and adapting to new environments. This could have been because attending a degree mobility of two years students were usually expecting a cultural shock, or at least some cultural differences, and therefore were prepared and became more adaptable. As per Ballatore (2007), the predominant reasons for Erasmus friendships are related to the students' socioeconomic background and migratory history and the countries to which they belong. In this research, however, this situation does not seem to occur perhaps due to the cohort travelling together and therefore feeling like they belonged to a group as they had others with them during each mobility who were often in the same situation or because as we have seen, they mostly come from the same background.

Another point I would like to mention is the organisation of the course, mentioned by Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska (2021), the different types of models impact the programme and the experience. With the TourDC programme being a "fork model", all the students started with two mobilities in nations where English was the first language. This organisation could have indeed helped make the transition smoother, as the students were not too shocked by the language or culture, especially since the UK's reputation was familiar to many of the international students. These factors could be the reason why 35% of the respondent are choosing or have chosen to stay in the UK after their graduation using the possible graduate root visa that the UK offers.

The potential opportunities that participating in an EMJMD degree often are constraint to legal requirements (visa, residence permit...), especially for non-EU students wanting to prolong their stay in the European Union. As an EMJMD opportunity is limited to a time period of two years, the students in need of these legal formalities (non-EU students especially, when the EMJMD takes place in Europe) need to apply for a visa to stay in their chosen country if they wish to stay their once their mobility has ended. To receive a visa or residence permit, students usually need to find a job, of which students feel most of the time companies would not hire someone who does not possess a visa. In this situation, it happens that some respondents are constrained to go back home after if they don't have the visa requirements to find a permanent job. Some students expressed that regardless of receiving an international degree, they felt like this wouldn't alone help them in finding a job and ensuring their stay in Europe.

5.3. Study Limitations

It should be mentioned that there are some limitations to this study. The researcher aimed to not influence the conversation by avoiding emotive language and complicated jargon to make the participants feel more comfortable. Social science research can sometimes create bias as the data is dependent on the participants expressing their true opinions and thoughts on something which may be controversial (Bryman, 2004). In this research, participants came from thirteen different countries and were each interviewed online through Zoom. I aimed to remove as much human error as possible by asking participants to be in an environment alone and that is comfortable for them. In the case of this study, nationality may have impacted some of the answers due to different destination perceptions, however, this could be seen as a benefit as the degree is for anyone inside and outside of the EU.

With regards to the reliability and validity, interviews hold a limitation naturally as the data cannot be replicated, comparable to qualitative studies also as the data cannot be repeated and achieve the same results, therefore holds limited reliability (Partington, 2001; Bryman, 2004; Adams, et al., 2007; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2012).

5.4. Timelessness of the Study

In the existing literature, Erasmus Mundus students are usually excluded from general studies about international degree mobility. This could be explained by the fact that Erasmus Mundus, as explained previously, allows students from every nationality to take part in the programme. In this way, statistics are numerous, and research has been lacking on this topic. Taking into account that Erasmus Mundus students are considered as "super-mobile students" (Czerska-Shaw & Krzaklewska, 2021), it could easily be said that Erasmus Mundus is the greatest example of student mobility, as it combines internationalisation of higher education institutions, student super-mobility and studentification of urban areas, as outlined in the following sections.

5.5. Directions for future research

Regrettably, my research only takes into consideration two cohorts, over the period of 2019-2022. As this study took place during a global pandemic, I would recommend future researchers to collect data over a normal duration of study to get more accurate results. Furthermore, I recommend that further studies on Erasmus Mundus students' perceptions, motivations and preconceptions use a larger sample in terms of participants to have a larger pool of data. This research was centred around a relatively new programme,

which started in September 2019, perhaps if the programme was more established it would have achieved different results.

5.6.   Conclusion

This dissertation contributed to the existing literature on student mobility by analysing the cultural experience that students experience while undertaking the TourDC program. The aims were to understand the motivations, study the cultural acclimatisation and analyse if there were any social patterns among the students.

One of the most notable elements of this study was to observe that most students came from a similar social background in terms of their prior mobility experience and their parents' attendance in university. This research highlighted that the motivations to undertake the EMJMD TourDC programme were almost similar for all the respondents. Firstly, participants were interested in the potential to travel and study in multiple locations, and secondly to benefit from the prestigious reputation of the different universities involved and also an EMJMD programme. Most participants had experienced student mobility prior to participating in this degree program, however this was the first time that they had all decided to undertake a mobility for this length of time. This perhaps could be the reason that the students were able to adapt to each mobility with relative ease and felt less stressed as a result. The most general response regarding adaptation from the EU student's was that it is easier to adapt to the mobilities on the TourDC program as most EU countries are relatively similar and therefore students already felt comfortable. However, for non-EU students, the adaptation process did not seem to be difficult either, as prior to undertaking the course, the students were mentally prepared to adapt and therefore the shock factor was limited.

Generally, the students' expectations were met as most participants describe their experience with a positive lexical field. There were many external factors that caused this particular duration of study to adapt, namely the COVID-19 pandemic. Students who participated in the TourDC program within this time period were still content to undertake a master's degree during the pandemic, as it saved them from seeking employment during the pandemic whilst still giving them the ability to travel and learn. At the end of the interviews, I asked each participant what their future plans were regarding their mobilities. The answers varied as some students are planning on returning home to settle down for some time or to gain experience in their home country, while others are willing to stay abroad to pursue their mobility further. This shows that even though the students were provided with this rich experience in terms of academic and personal gains, the results remain similar to a "normal" master's degree in their home country, where the career opportunities after graduating are not guaranteed and alumni can still be facing obstacles and

difficulties. Regardless, there are still some obvious advantages that are gained through this master's that could perhaps elevate the TourDC alumni over other students through their soft and hard skills gained over the duration of this programme.

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