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Rethinking the “Erasmus Effect” on European Identity

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Abstract

The Erasmus program for university student exchange was developed, in part, to foster European identity among its participants, who complete a short-term sojourn studying in another European country. However, two previous panel studies of the impact of Erasmus participation on European identity find no significant “Erasmus effect.” This paper analyses new survey data – a novel panel study of 1729 students from 28 universities in six countries – and finds the opposite. Participation in an Erasmus exchange is significantly and positively related to changes in both identification as European and identification with Europe. Furthermore, the data underscore the significance of cross-border interaction and cognitive mobilization for explaining identity change: Transnational contact during the exchange is positively related to change in both dimensions of European identity, and increased knowledge of Europe and attention to European news over the course of the exchange is associated with enhanced identification with Europe.

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The Erasmus programme for university student exchange is based, in part, on the idea that bringing together students from across Europe will create or enhance a sense of European identity among participants (EU, 1987a; 1987b). The proposition that transnational interaction will result in the emergence of European identity also has a relatively long lineage in social science literature (Deutsch et al., 1957; Lijphart, 1964; Fligstein, 2008). However, empirical studies of the effect of university study abroad on European identity have provided conflicting evidence. Some conclude that Erasmus indeed strengthens European identity (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Van Mol, 2011), others that it does not (Sigalas, 2010; Wilson, 2011) and still others that it depends where the students come from (Van Mol, 2013).

This article presents the findings of a novel panel survey of Erasmus students designed specifically to investigate whether Erasmus participation promotes European identity change. The study targets students from 28 universities in six countries (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom). The large, multinational sample (n = 1,729) improves on existing studies that, lacking longitudinal data, cannot show how identity changes over time (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Van Mol, 2011; 2013) or extrapolate about the impact of Erasmus based on data predominantly from British students or students studying abroad in Britain (Sigalas, 2010; Wilson, 2011). The longitudinal design allows for an examination of identity change over time, while the inclusion of a sedentary control group allows for a comparison of mobile and non-mobile students.

Responding to calls for more sophisticated empirical measures of European identity (Cram, 2012; Kaina, 2013), this study employs a two-dimensional conceptualization that

takes into account both self-identification as European and the extent to which respondents identify with Europe (that is, feel an affective bond with the idea of ‘Europe’ and the community of Europeans it represents). The data indicate that Erasmus participation is associated with positive change in both dimensions. The mobile and non-mobile groups did not differ on either measure at the start of the study. But after six months – during which time the Erasmus students participated in a foreign exchange and the non-mobile students remained at their home university – both dimensions of European identity had been significantly enhanced in the Erasmus group but not in the sedentary group. In line with transactionalist predictions (Deutsch et al., 1957), transnational contact during the exchange is associated with enhancements in both dimensions of European identity. Additionally, increased knowledge of, and attention to, Europe over the course of the exchange is related to enhanced identification with Europe, supporting the notion that a higher level of ‘cognitive mobilization’ is associated with a greater ability to conceive of an abstract ‘supranational political community’ (Inglehart, 1970).

The article proceeds as follows. Section one reviews existing literature on concepts of European identity and the mechanisms of European identity formation. It also summarizes the findings of previous research on Erasmus and European identity change. Section two explains the methodology of the present study, including variable operationalization and the design of the survey. Section three presents the empirical findings and discusses the results. The conclusion examines how these findings compare with previous work and suggests some of their broader implications.

1. European identity and identity formation

European identity: A multidimensional phenomenon

Tajfel (1981) argues that collective identities are multidimensional, with a cognitive, an evaluative and an affective component. In the European context, this suggests that individuals not only recognize that they are members of a group of ‘Europeans’ (cognition), but they also assign meaning (evaluation) and emotional value (affect) to that group membership (Herrmann and Brewer, 2004; Cram, 2012). Recognizing the multidimensional nature of collective identities, in recent years scholars have argued that better measures of European identity must be developed. At a minimum, we must distinguish between two dimensions of European identity (Kaina, 2013; Cram, 2012). The first dimension is self-categorization as a group member: Does the individual identify as a European? This relates to the cognitive element of Tajfel’s definition of collective identity. The second dimension relates to the affective element: To what extent does the individual feel a sense of connection with the group and with other members of the group? Kaina (2013) calls this ‘a sense of belonging together’ and Cram (2012) refers to it as identification with Europe. Identification as European and identification with Europe are conceptually distinct and need not necessarily correspond. One can identify as European without identifying with Europe, or vice versa (Cram, 2012).

Yet even as the multidimensional nature of European identity has increasingly been recognized in principle, empirical research largely continues to operationalize European identity unidimensionally in practice. The problem, as Cram (2012, p. 72) sums it up, is that ‘empirical research on EU identity has been driven largely by the available data’.

Most of the data come from the Eurobarometer, which routinely interrogates respondents’

identification as European. In particular, the so-called ‘Moreno question’, which has been used by the Eurobarometer for more than a decade, has become the standard measure of European self-identification (Citrin and Sides, 2004; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Fligstein, 2008; Risse, 2010; Wilson, 2011; Kuhn, 2012). It asks whether, in the near future, respondents see themselves as their nationality only, their nationality and European, European and their nationality, or European only. One problem with using the Moreno question to measure European identity is that it only taps into identification as European, and therefore tells us nothing about the affective dimension of European identity – whether, or the extent to which, respondents identify with Europe. But even as a measure of self-identification as European, it is problematic. It implies a (false) sense of hierarchy between national and European identities and, by asking respondents how they see themselves in the future, ‘creat[es] a huge ambiguity between identity and prediction’ (Bruter, 2003, p. 1154). Despite these shortcomings, the Moreno question remains the predominant means of interrogating European identity empirically.² However, recognizing that identification as European and identification with Europe may not always vary together, and in fact may be impacted differently by Erasmus participation, I analyze the two dimensions separately.

European identity formation

Existing literature highlights two factors that are likely to impact European identity formation. Inglehart (1970) argued that ‘cognitive mobilization’ is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the emergence of European identity. He used the term to refer to

² There have been some efforts to pursue alternative strategies, however, such as constructing alternative data sets (Bruter, 2005), or using other methods such as ethnography (Favel, 2008) or focus groups (Duchesne *et al.*, 2013).

an individual’s ability to relate, in the abstract, to a supranational European community, one that – compared with one’s nation or state – operates at a further remove from ordinary citizens. For Inglehart, cognitive mobilization is closely linked to higher levels of education, which provides individuals with the ‘political skills necessary to cope with a remote political community’ (Inglehart, 1970, p. 47). The relationship between education and identification as European has subsequently been borne out in a number of empirical studies (Duchesne and Frogner, 1995; Citrin and Sides, 2004; Fligstein, 2008). While Inglehart’s argument is based on general educational attainment, others – building on his work – argue that greater knowledge of the EU in particular plays an important role in shaping attitudes about the EU (Karp et al., 2003; Hobolt, 2012). Given the already-high levels of educational attainment achieved by university students, for the sample studied here, this can be taken as a constant. However, changes in individuals’ knowledge of Europe and attention to European issues are likely to vary and may be substantially impacted by a student’s decision to study abroad. If awareness of Europe beyond one’s own country is a prerequisite for European identity, then as this knowledge and attention increases, European identity may be enhanced.

A second factor that may impact European identity formation is transnational contact among individuals. Transactionalist theory posits that personal contact among group members is the key to collective identity formation, both within the nation-state (Deutsch, 1953) and within transnational ‘security communities’ (Deutsch et al., 1957). Deutsch and his colleagues noted the collective identity and trust engendered in national communities by the social, political and economic ‘transactions’ that link citizens, and they suggested that increasing transnational contact would, in a similar manner,

build trust and, ultimately, a sense of transnational collective identity. A half-century later, Fligstein (2008, p. 249) returned to the transactionalists’ argument to explain the uneven emergence of European identity, writing that ‘the most “European” people [are] those who have the most opportunities to interact with people from other European countries’.

Student mobility and European identity

Mobile students – those who complete some or all of their studies in another country – are undoubtedly among those who have the greatest ‘opportunity to interact’ with other Europeans. Influenced by transactionalism, a number of scholars have suggested that by bringing together students from across Europe, student exchange will foster European identity (Lijphart, 1964; Rubio et al., 2002; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Fligstein, 2008; Van Mol, 2011). In the last decade, several studies have investigated the impact of university student mobility on European identity. However, they differ significantly in their findings. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) found that students who spent a year studying in continental Europe held a more European identity than students who did not study abroad. More recently, Van Mol (2011) surveyed mobile students, ‘future mobile students’ (who definitely want to study abroad), ‘potential mobile students’ (who may want to study abroad) and non-mobile students from across Europe (n = 2,886) and found that identification as European was positively related to student mobility. In a previous study (Mitchell, 2012), I surveyed Erasmus students and nonmobile students in five countries (n = 2,011) and also found a positive relationship between Erasmus participation and identification as European. Most recently, Van Mol (2013) drew on a five-country subset of his earlier survey research (n = 1,440), and

augmented the quantitative analysis with interviews and focus groups in five cities. The study concludes that there is a substantial amount of regional variation: a foreign exchange is associated with identity change for students from some countries (Belgium, Italy), but not others (Austria, Norway, Poland).

In the absence of longitudinal data, however, it is impossible for these studies to establish whether Erasmus students’ European identity changed over the course of their sojourn or not. In that sense, the panel studies of Sigalas (2010) and Wilson (2011) represent a significant improvement. To assess the impact of mobility on European support and identity, students were asked the same questions before and after their Erasmus sojourn and their responses were compared with those of a non-mobile control group. Sigalas surveyed 161 British students who studied in continental Europe, 241 continental Europeans who studied in Britain and 60 non-mobile British students. Wilson surveyed 99 Erasmus students (mostly British students studying in France and French students studying in the United Kingdom) and 145 control students (mostly British students studying in the United Kingdom). Both studies concluded that Erasmus participation did not enhance European identity. In response to the Sigalas and Wilson findings, Kuhn (2012, p. 995) suggests that transnational contact is indeed likely to foster European identity, but ‘due to a ceiling effect, [Erasmus students’] exchange with fellow Europeans can hardly make a difference’. In short, she argues, since university students are likely to already identify as European, studying abroad will have little further effect on their European identity.

However, it may be premature to dismiss the effect of Erasmus participation on European identity. Both the Kuhn and Wilson studies rely exclusively on the problematic Moreno question to operationalize European identity. Furthermore, the primary emphasis of both the Sigalas and Wilson studies is on British students and students studying in the United Kingdom. This is potentially problematic, not only because of the lack of representativeness of the sample, but more importantly because British attitudes towards Europe are often well outside the norm (Spiering, 2004; Risse, 2002). To more conclusively establish whether Erasmus impacts the European identity of university students requires a more sophisticated measure of European identity and more multinational panel study.

The present study was designed specifically to rectify shortcomings in previous research. Like the studies of Sigalas and Wilson, it employs a longitudinal survey of Erasmus students, whose responses are compared against those of a non-mobile control group. By surveying students in six countries (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom) it avoids the potential bias that comes from a primary emphasis on British students and students studying in the United Kingdom, even if it cannot fully capture variation in European identification patterns across (and beyond) the 28 Member States of the EU (Van Mol, 2013). By distinguishing between identification as European and identification with Europe, it analyzes whether Erasmus participation has a differential effect on the two dimensions of European identity.

Hypotheses

I test three hypotheses about the impact of Erasmus exchange on European identity. The first is that participation in an Erasmus exchange fosters European identity. Over the course of the study, I therefore expect to one or both dimensions of European identity to be enhanced in the Erasmus group, but not in the sedentary control group (H1). Additionally, I propose two further hypotheses about identity change in the Erasmus group.

Drawing on the cognitive mobilization literature, I expect greater awareness of Europe during the course of the academic exchange will enhance European identity. Therefore, I expect to find a positive relationship between increased knowledge of, and attention to, Europe and enhancements to one or both dimensions of European identity (H2). Drawing on transactionalism, I expect transnational contact during the Erasmus exchange to foster European identity. Thus, I expect to find that enhancements in one or both dimensions of European identity will be associated with socializing with host country students and with Europeans who have neither the respondents’ own nationality nor the nationality of the host country (I call these ‘other Europeans’ for short.) (H3).

II. Methods and Data

Survey Methodology

The data used to test these hypotheses come from a two-wave online survey of students at universities in France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. To maximize accessibility, the survey was offered in five languages (English, French, German, Italian and Spanish). With administrative assistance from 28 participating universities, the first wave of the survey was administered prior to the Erasmus students’ departure

(September or October 2012) and the second wave was administered approximately six months later (April 2013).

Each institution’s Erasmus programme co-ordinator (or international office) was asked to distribute a link to the survey to all incoming and outgoing Erasmus students. For the non-mobile students, some universities were able to solicit a randomly selected sample of all enrolled students, while others solicited participation via student organizations or a link on a widely accessed internal (and password-protected) web page. While all efforts were made to avoid any sampling technique that would bias the results, these methods cannot guarantee a representative student sample. Nevertheless, comparison of descriptive statistics for the sample and for EU students in tertiary education (Eurostat, 2010) provides reassurance: By gender and field of study, the group is representative of university students (see Appendix Table 1).

Not every university provided detailed records about the number of students invited to participate. Among those that did, the average response rate was around 40 per cent – a rate in line with what is commonly expected from electronic mass surveys (Sheehan, 2001). There were 3,328 respondents to the first wave of the survey and 1,877 to the second. This represents an attrition rate of 44 per cent from the first to the second wave of the survey, comparable to that of the Sigalas and Wilson studies.³ Following Wilson (2011), I evaluate potential non-response bias by splitting the respondents to the first survey into those who did and did not go on to complete the second. chi-squared tests on the two groups’ responses indicate that the initial views of those students who only completed the first

³ Sigalas (2010) reports ‘about 40 per cent’ attrition between waves 1 and 2; Wilson (2011) reports 53 per cent.

questionnaire do not differ significantly from those of students who completed both. Respondents who were not EU nationals studying in the EU were excluded, as were students in the control group who did not hold the nationality of the country where they studied. Since the Sigalas and Wilson studies both employed a research design where all Erasmus students had completed their sojourn at the time of the second survey, I tested whether there were any significant differences in the patterns of European identity and identity change reported by Erasmus students who had completed their exchange abroad and those who were still studying abroad. Since there were not, both groups were retained in the data set.⁴ The resulting sample contains 1,729 students (1,435 Erasmus students – of which 1,094 had completed their exchange and 341 were still studying abroad – and 294 sedentary). The distribution of this sample by nationality, mobility status and gender is summarized in Appendix Table 4. The gender imbalance in the sample (60 per cent women and 40 per cent men) is similar to that found in the studies by Sigalas (62 per cent women and 38 per cent men) and Wilson (59 per cent women and 41 per cent men).

Operationalization of the Variables

This section describes the operationalization of the dependent variable (European identity) and the various independent and control variables. Descriptive statistics for each identity variable are summarized in Table 1.

⁴ Tables 2 and 3 of the online appendix compare the European identification of the two groups of Erasmus students.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics (Erasmus students)

	Range	Mean	Std. dev.	n
<i>Dependent Variables</i>				
Identification as European (wave 1)	“often”: 44.2%; “sometimes”: 45.4%; “never”: 10.4%			1435
Identification as European (wave 2)	“often”: 46.9%; “sometimes”: 48.5%; “never”: 4.6%			1351
Change in identification as European	Start identifying: 7.4%; Stop identifying: 1.9% No change: 90.7%			1351
Identification with Europe (wave 1)	0 – 6	3.8	1.2	1432
Identification with Europe (wave 2)	0 – 6	3.9	1.2	1335
Change in identification with Europe	-3 – 3	0.1	0.9	1332
<i>Independent Variables</i>				
Change in knowledge of host country	-6 – 5	0.8	1.3	1338
Change in knowledge of Europe	-4 – 6	0.0	0.9	1369
Change in attention to host country news	-6 – 5	-0.5	1.6	1353
Change in attention to European news	-4 – 6	-0.1	1.3	1412
Socialised with host natives	0 – 3	1.7	0.9	1448
Socialised with “other Europeans”	0 – 3	2.3	0.8	1446
Socialised with co-nationals	0 – 3	1.4	1.0	1448
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Duration of exchange (months)	1 – 7	5.8	1.5	1456
Satisfaction with exchange	0 – 3	2.7	0.5	1455
Gender	Female: 63.0%, Male: 37.0%			1431
Left-right political placement	0 – 4	1.4	1.1	1334
Personal financial situation	0 – 4	1.9	0.9	1348
Country net benefit from integration	Benefited: 64.1%, Not benefited: 12.0, Don’t know: 23.9%			1433

Source: Author’s own calculations.

Given the multidimensionality of the dependent variable, ‘European identity’, it is increasingly recognized that operationalizing it by interrogating only self-identification is potentially problematic. Therefore, the survey not only asked whether respondents identify as European, but also about the extent to which they identify with Europe. Because of the problems associated with operationalizing identification as European using the Moreno question, I use a different item (also derived from the Eurobarometer). It asks respondents: ‘In addition to your nationality, do you ever think of yourself also as European? Does this occur often, sometimes, or never?’ As previous research indicates that the most significant difference in European self-categorization is between those who identify at all as European and those who hold an exclusive national identity, I follow the trend in the literature and dichotomize the variable (Citrin and Sides, 2004; Marks and Hooghe, 2005; Fligstein, 2008; Sigalas, 2010). Thus, the ‘often’

and ‘sometimes’ responses are combined, resulting in one group that ‘ever’ identifies as European and another that ‘never’ does. I then compare the wave 2 and wave 1 responses for this dichotomized variable. Those who consistently ‘ever’ identify as European or who consistently ‘never’ do are both coded 0, indicating no change. Respondents who stopped (that is, changed from ‘ever’ to ‘never’) identifying as European are coded -1. Those who began (that is, changed from ‘never’ to ‘ever’) identifying as European are coded 1.

To measure identification with Europe, I use three survey items. The items measure (on a scale from 0 to 6) the degree to which respondents feel attached to Europe, close to other Europeans and proud of being European. Principal component analysis (PCA) results in a single component solution (Appendix Table 5) and Cronbach’s alpha indicates satisfactory internal reliability (wave 1 $\alpha = 0.75$; wave 2 $\alpha = 0.79$). The three items are thus combined into a single additive scale of identification with Europe for each wave of the survey. By subtracting the wave 1 scores from the wave 2 scores, I calculate a measure of the extent and direction of change over the course of the study. Negative scores represent a decrease in the variable, while positive scores indicate an increase.

As possible explanations for variation in European identity change, the study includes two sets of independent variables related to the hypotheses described above, plus several control variables. Each set of variables is discussed in turn. To test the hypothesis that European identity is affected by increased awareness of Europe during the sojourn (H2), I include measures of the change in respondents’ knowledge of their host country and of Europe, and their attention to host country and European news. At each wave of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate their level of knowledge about their host

country, other European countries and other European people and cultures. In each case, the range of responses was from 0 to 6, with larger numbers representing greater (self-reported) knowledge. The single host country item is used to operationalize respondents’ knowledge of the host country. The two European items were combined into a single additive scale representing knowledge of Europe. PCA of the two items results in a single factor solution (Appendix Table 6) and Cronbach’s alpha indicates high scale reliability ($\alpha = 0.83$ for wave 1; 0.80 for wave 2). Similarly, at each wave of the survey, respondents reported the degree of attention they paid host country, European and EU current events. Again, the response range was 0 to 6. The single host country item is used to operationalize attention to host country news. PCA of the two European items results in a single component solution (Appendix Table 7) and Cronbach’s alpha indicates high scale reliability ($\alpha = 0.83$ for wave 1; 0.89 for wave 2). The two items were thus combined into an additive scale of attention to European news. A measure of change for each measure is obtained by subtracting the wave 1 scores from the wave 2 scores. A positive value represents an increase in knowledge or attention.

To test the hypothesis that transnational interaction during the Erasmus exchange increases European identity (H3), I include variables that measure how extensively students socialized during their exchange with people from their host country, with ‘other Europeans’ and with people from their home country. The survey wording for these items was ‘During the sojourn I socialized a lot with [each group]’ and respondents were given the following four response options: ‘true’, ‘somewhat true’, ‘somewhat false’ and ‘false’. These responses were recoded 0 to 3, where 0 indicates not much, if any, socializing with that group and 3 indicates a great deal of socializing.

Finally, in the regression analyses I include a number of control variables that may act as confounding factors when analyzing the relationship between cognitive mobilization, transnational contact and European identity change. Duration of the foreign exchange (measured in months) is included since it has been found that European identity is associated with the length of time intra-European movers spend outside of their own country (Rother and Nebe, 2009). Satisfaction with the Erasmus sojourn is measured on a four-point scale, where higher numbers represent greater satisfaction. I also include a dummy variable for being male. Because previous research indicates that European identity is related to political identification with the left (Citrin and Sides, 2004; Risse, 2010; although see Duchesne and Frogner, 1995) and the security of one’s personal financial situation (Kaina and Karolewski, 2009), I include five-point scales (measured at wave two) for left-right political orientation (0 = farthest left, 4 = farthest right) and perception of the individual’s financial status (0 = well below country average, 4 = well above country average). Because the net national economic costs and benefits of EU membership have been found to impact individuals’ attitudes about Europe (see Hooghe and Marks, 2005), I include a dummy variable indicating whether respondents feel their country has benefitted, on balance, from European integration.⁵

⁵ The survey item, included at wave 2, is a Eurobarometer question that asks: “Taking everything into account, would you say that [YOUR COUNTRY] has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?” Responses of ‘benefited’ were coded 1; all other answers were coded 0.

III. Analysis

Does Studying Abroad Affect European Identity?

If H1 is correct, we should expect one or both dimensions of the Erasmus group’s European identity to be enhanced over the course of the study, with no equivalent change in the non-mobile group. Table 2 summarizes the percentage of each group that reported ‘ever’ and ‘never’ thinking of themselves as European at each wave of the survey. I use a chi-squared test to evaluate the significance of changes in identification as European for the Erasmus and non-mobile groups over the course of the study. At wave 1, there is no significant difference between the responses of the two groups ($\chi^2 = 0.183$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.669$). In both groups, just over 10 per cent of respondents ‘never’ identify as European. Over the course of the study, there was no significant change in the distribution of responses given by the non-mobile group ($\chi^2 = 0.954$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.329$), but there was a substantial change in the distribution of Erasmus students’ responses ($\chi^2 = 33.373$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). By wave 2, 100 of the 149 Erasmus students who did not initially identify as European had started to do so. A chi-squared test of the wave 2 responses shows that the difference between the responses of the non-mobile students and Erasmus students is highly significant ($\chi^2 = 33.844$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$).⁶ I thus conclude that the Erasmus group experienced a significant enhancement in identification as European over the course of the study, while the non-mobile group did not.

Table 2: Identification as European (%)

	Wave 1		Wave 2	
	Erasmus	Non-mobile	Erasmus	Non-mobile
Ever	89.6	88.8	95.4	86.0
Never	10.4	11.2	4.6	14.0

⁶ The same result obtains when the self-categorization variable is not dichotomized.

This finding indicates that further consideration is needed of Kuhn’s (2012, p. 995) ‘ceiling effect’ hypothesis that, since university students are already likely to identify as European, an Erasmus exchange ‘can hardly make a difference’. While she is correct that most Erasmus students already identify as European, for the minority of university students who do not, Erasmus participation appears to make a real difference. Of those who ‘never’ thought of themselves as European at wave 1, three-quarters of Erasmus students started identifying as European. In other words, even among a group already prone to self-identify as European, Erasmus participation makes a real difference for the minority that does not think of themselves as European.

Next, I evaluate whether studying abroad is also associated with a change in identification with Europe. To do so, I use a paired sample t-test to compare the Erasmus and non-mobile groups’ mean score on the scale of identification with Europe at waves 1 and 2 (Table 3). Possible values for the scale range from 0 to 6, with higher numbers representing greater identification with Europe. While the two groups had almost identical mean scores at the start of the study, the mobile group experienced a small, but highly significant increase in identification with Europe between the first and second wave; the non-mobile group experienced a larger, and also highly significant, decrease over the same period. The value of Cohen’s *d* (0.67) suggests that mobility has a medium- to large-sized effect on identity change.⁷

⁷ Cohen (1988, pp. 25–7) suggests that *d* values of 0.2 represent a ‘small’ effect size; of 0.5, a ‘medium’ effect; and of 0.8, a ‘large’ effect.

Table 3: Paired sample t-tests of group means on identification with Europe scale

	Wave 1 mean (std. dev.)	Wave 2 mean (std. dev.)	Change	Sig. (2-tailed)	n
Mobile	3.79 (1.23)	3.91 (1.21)	+ .12	<.001	1332
Non-mobile	3.78 (1.29)	3.21 (1.18)	- .57	<.001	261

Notes: Standard deviation in parentheses.

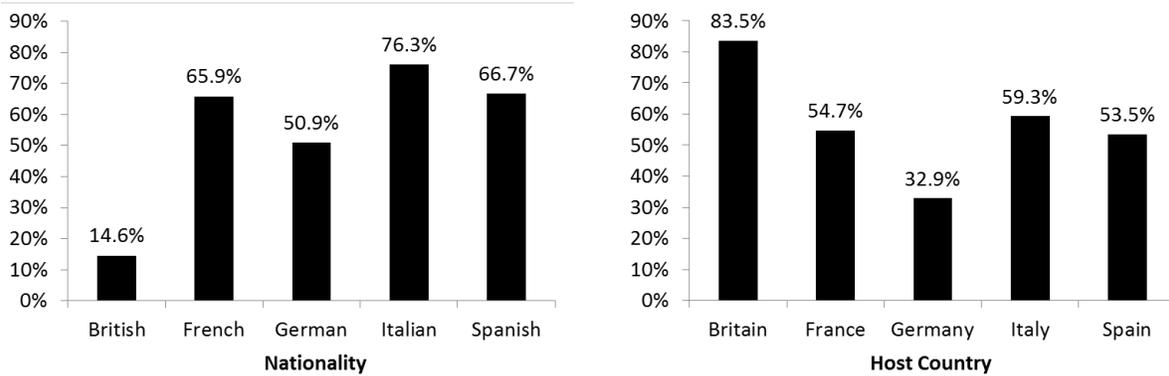
The foregoing analysis strongly supports H1: the data indicate that studying abroad is associated with enhancements in both dimensions of European identity. While the mobile and non-mobile groups began with nearly identical measures of identification as European and identification with Europe, over the course of their time abroad, the Erasmus group experienced a significant positive change in both dimensions of identity, while the nonmobile group experienced no significant change in identification as European and a significant decrease in identification with Europe.

As others have found (Van Mol, 2011; 2013; Mitchell, 2012), there is considerable variation across the Erasmus group when the sample is broken down by nationality and host country. Complete cross-national analysis, while desirable, is not possible due to space constraints. Therefore, the discussion is limited to the distinctive attributes of British students and students who study abroad in Britain,⁸ given the prominence of these groups in previous panel studies of Erasmus students. Explaining this distinctiveness is beyond the scope of the present study, but it may help to explain why the findings reported here differ from studies that focus on these groups.

⁸ British students are compared with the other four most-represented nationalities in the sample (French, German, Italian and Spanish), and students going to Britain for their exchange are compared against those going to the other four most-represented destination countries (France, Germany, Italy and Spain).

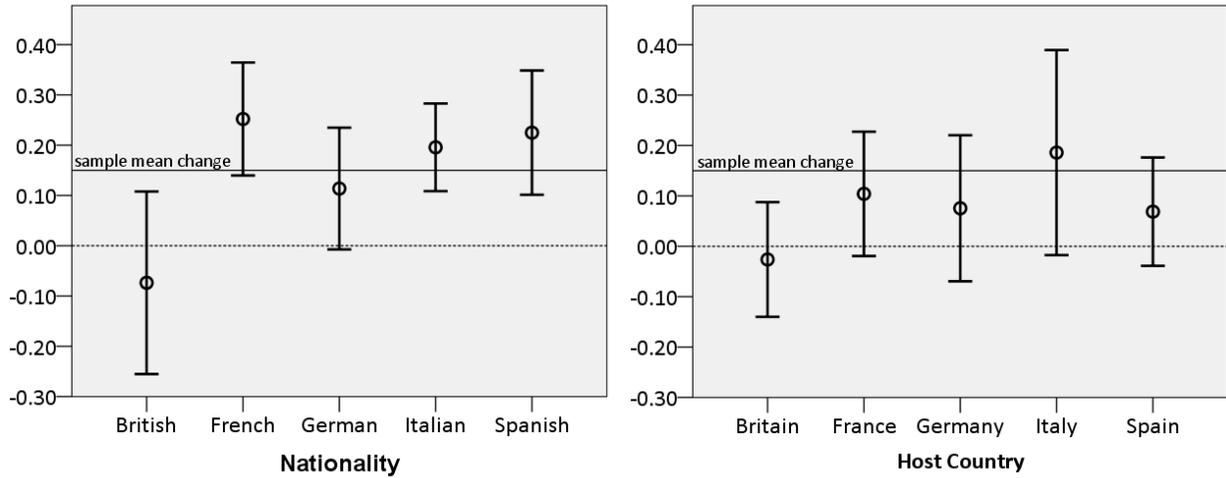
Exclusive national identity was a minority phenomenon for the Erasmus students surveyed (roughly 10 per cent at wave 1 and 5 per cent at wave 2). However, among this minority, nearly three-quarters of those who ‘never’ identified as European at wave 1 began to do so over the course of the study. Yet, as Figure 1 illustrates, there was considerable variation by nationality and host country in how substantially the percentage of exclusive national identification was reduced. Of particular note, British students were outliers when compared with other nationalities, as were students who studied abroad in Britain when compared with those who went to other host countries. Not only were British students nearly three times more likely than students of other nationalities to begin the study thinking of themselves in exclusively national terms, but there was only a 15 per cent reduction in this number over the course of the Erasmus exchange, compared with a 51 to 76 per cent reduction for other nationalities. The conclusion that studying abroad had only a minor effect on British students’ propensity to identify as European – in contrast with students of other nationalities – is confirmed by a chi-squared test of the distribution of responses for the identification as European item between wave 1 and wave 2 of the survey: there was no significant change for the British Erasmus students ($\chi^2 = 0.351$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.554$). On the other hand, studying abroad in Britain is associated with a greater reduction in the percentage of exclusive national identifiers than studying in another host country. There was a reduction of more than 80 per cent in exclusive national identification for those who studied abroad in Britain, compared with just over 50 per cent for those who went to France, Italy or Spain, and a reduction of around one-third for those who went to Germany.

Figure 1: Per cent reduction in exclusive national identification, by nationality and host country



As Figure 2 illustrates, British students were also less prone than French, German, Italian or Spanish students to report increased identification with Europe over the course of their exchange. Indeed, the British students were the only nationality to report a mean decrease in identification with Europe over the course of the exchange. Likewise, while students studying abroad in France, Germany, Italy and Spain reported a mean increase in identification with Europe, those who went to Britain reported a mean decrease. I used t-tests to compare the mean change in identification with Europe for students from Britain (compared with all other nationalities) and for students who went to Britain (compared with other European countries). The tests, significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively, indicate that being British or studying abroad in the United Kingdom is negatively associated with change in identification with Europe. Compared with a mean change for the entire sample of 0.15, the mean change for British students was -0.07 ; the mean change for students studying in Britain was -0.03 .

Figure 2: Mean change in identification with Europe, by nationality and host country



Notes: Error bars = 95% confidence interval

Cognitive Mobilization, Transnational Contact and European Identity

The previous section indicates that, British exceptionalism notwithstanding, Erasmus participation appears to enhance both identification as European and identification with Europe. I next examine whether the hypothesized explanatory factors – cognitive mobilization and transnational interaction during the exchange – are associated with the observed change in either dimension of the Erasmus group’s European identity. If H2 is correct, we would expect increased knowledge of the host country and Europe and increased attention to host country and European news to have a positive relationship with one or both dimensions of identity change. If H3 is correct, we would expect to find a positive association between one or both dimensions of identity change and socializing with host country nationals and ‘other Europeans’ while abroad. The bivariate relationships among the variables are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Bivariate correlations (Pearson’s r)

	Identify with Europe (Δ)	Knowledge of host country (Δ)	Knowledge of Europe (Δ)	Attention to host country news (Δ)	Attention to European news (Δ)	Socialised with host nationals	Socialized with “other Europeans”	Socialized with co-nationals
Identify as European (Δ)	.122 *** (n=1329)	.032 (n=1252)	.022 (1348)	.024 (n=1251)	.078 ** (1344)	.052 (1349)	.137 *** (1347)	-.018 (1349)
Identify with Europe (Δ)		.092 *** (n=1232)	.112 *** (1329)	.025 (n=1231)	.180 *** (1325)	.108 *** (1330)	.201 *** (1328)	-.162 *** (1330)
Knowledge of host country (Δ)			.138 *** (n=1269)	.201 *** (n=1307)	.151 *** (n=1309)	.030 (n=1314)	.016 (n=1312)	-.073 ** (n=1314)
Knowledge of Europe (Δ)				.042 (n=1266)	.123 *** (1362)	-.029 (1367)	.055 * (1365)	-.014 (1367)
Attention to host country news (Δ)					.220 *** (n=1306)	.022 (n=1309)	.031 (n=1307)	-.051 (n=1309)
Attention to Eur. news (Δ)						.046 (1410)	.082 ** (1408)	-.025 (1410)
Socialised with host nationals							-.176 *** (1422)	-.207 *** (1424)
Socialized with “other Europeans”								.050 (1422)

Note: Correlation significance (2-tailed): * 0.05 level; ** 0.01 level; *** 0.001 level.

To control for potentially confounding factors, I next run regressions of cognitive mobilization and transnational contact on each dimension of European identity. The first is a binomial logistic regression on change in identification as European. The second is an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression on change in identification with Europe (Table 5).⁹ For the logistic regression, the dependent variable is change in identification as European over the course of the Erasmus exchange, where the 100 respondents who started to identify as European (that is, changed from ‘never’ to ‘ever’ thinking of themselves as European) are compared against the ‘no change’ reference category.¹⁰ The hypothesized explanatory factors are increased knowledge of the host country and of Europe; increased attention to host country and European news; and socializing with host

⁹ As a robustness test, I also ran the analysis for only those Erasmus students who had completed their exchange, as the previous Sigalas and Wilson studies included only such students (Sigalas, 2010; Wilson, 2011). Excluding those who were still studying abroad did not affect the findings reported.

¹⁰ The reference category is the 1,226 Erasmus students who reported no change, along with the 25 (less than 2 per cent of the sample) who reported stopping identifying as European over the course of the study.

country nationals, ‘other European’ and co-nationals during the exchange.

While three of the four cognitive mobilization variables are in the expected direction, none is statistically significant, thus providing little support for H2. However, there is strong support for H3: contact with both host country nationals and with ‘other Europeans’ is related to starting to identify as European, while contact with co-nationals is not.

Table 5: Predictors of change in European identity

	DV: Δ identification as European (binary logistic regression)	DV: Δ identification w/ Europe (OLS regression)
<i>Cognitive mobilization</i> (change)		
Knowledge of host country	.031 (.089)	.031 (.019)
Knowledge of Europe	.047 (.125)	.074 (.028) **
Attention to host country news	-.005 (.073)	-.017 (.016)
Attention to European news	.141 (.085)	.071 (.017) ***
<i>Transnational contact during sojourn</i>		
Socialised with host nationals	.395 (.131) **	.099 (.028) ***
Socialised with “other Europeans”	.822 (.191) ***	.277 (.033) ***
Socialised with co-nationals	.044 (.116)	-.119 (.024) ***
<i>Controls</i>		
Length of sojourn	.052 (.077)	.055 (.016) ***
Satisfaction with Erasmus experience	-.020 (.222)	.101 (.046) *
Male	.041 (.232)	-.035 (.050)
Left-right political placement	.114 (.101)	-.039 (.021)
Personal financial situation	.176 (.118)	-.024 (.026)
Country net benefit from integration	-.559 (.228) *	.125 (.052) *
Constant	-5.697 (1.009) ***	-1.081 (.194) ***
	<i>n</i> 1211	<i>n</i> 1195
	pseudo r^2 .062	adjusted r^2 .132

Notes: Standard error in parentheses. Betas are unstandardised. * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

There is a statistically significant relationship between perceiving a country benefit from EU membership and change in identification as European, but the direction of the relationship is the opposite of what is expected. (Perceiving no national benefit is associated with starting to identify as European.) The pseudo R2 value indicates that the model explains about 6 per cent of the variation in the sample.

To analyze the effect of the hypothesized predictors on change in identification with Europe, I regress the cognitive mobilization, transnational contact and control variables on change in identification with Europe. The range of the dependent variable is -3 to 3 , where negative numbers indicate a decrease in identification with Europe over the course of the study and positive numbers indicate an increase. Among the cognitive mobilization variables, changed awareness of the host country is insignificant. However, increased knowledge of Europe and attention to European news both have a highly significant positive relationship with change in identification with Europe. This provides strong, if qualified, support for H2: greater awareness of the host country is not associated with change in identification with Europe, but greater awareness of Europe is. Increased identification with Europe is also positively, and highly significantly, related to socializing with host country nationals and with ‘other Europeans’, thus providing strong support for H3. Socializing with co-nationals has a highly significant negative relationship with change in identification with Europe.

The model also indicates that identification with Europe is enhanced by a longer sojourn, by greater satisfaction with the exchange and by a positive evaluation of individuals’ country net benefit from integration. Neither left-right political orientation nor perception of personal financial status is significant. The adjusted R² value indicates that the model explains about 13 per cent of the variation in the sample.

Identification as versus Identification with

In response to calls for a differentiation between identification as European and identification with Europe, they have been analyzed as two separate variables. The analysis

suggests that they are indeed distinct – at least for this sample. For one thing, there is very little longitudinal variation in identification as European. Undoubtedly this is at least partly because university students overwhelmingly already identified as European at the start of the study (Kuhn, 2012). Among those who began the study ‘never’ self-identifying as European, transnational contact helps to explain why Erasmus students have a greater tendency than non-mobile students to start identifying as European. The second dimension of European identity – identification as European – is characterized not only by a greater degree of initial variation, but also by more change over time. Furthermore, the two dimensions are affected slightly differently by the explanatory variables. Greater awareness of Europe appears to enhance identification with Europe, but not identification as European. And while socializing with ‘other Europeans’ appears to positively affect both dimensions, socializing with host country nationals seems only to affect identification with Europe.

Conclusions

The Erasmus programme has long been touted by the Commission (and by some academic observers) as a means of fostering European identity. This is consonant with transactionalist theory, which posits that cross-border interactions promote collective identity (Deutsch et al., 1957; Lijphart, 1964; Fligstein 2008) and with literature on cognitive mobilization (Inglehart, 1970; Karp et al., 2003; Hobolt, 2012), which suggests that there is a relationship between knowledge and attitudes about the EU. However, the most recent studies of the ‘Erasmus effect’ on identity raise doubts that the exchange programme does, in fact, achieve the objective of enhancing European identity (Sigalas, 2010; Wilson, 2011). In contrast, the present analysis – which is based on a larger, more

multinational data set – indicates that Erasmus students’ identities actually do change over the course of their sojourn, and that this is at least partly explained by increased knowledge of Europe and transnational interaction.

While there may be traits that distinguish students who choose to study abroad from those who do not, European identity – as conceptualized here – is not one of them. Indeed, prior to studying abroad, the mobile and non-mobile groups are indistinguishable on the basis of their identification as European and their identification with Europe. It is only once the Erasmus group has gone abroad that significant differences develop between the two groups. Furthermore, there are no significant differences in the European identification of Erasmus students who are still abroad and those who have completed their sojourn, suggesting that while identity change occurs during the sojourn, it persists even after the exchange has ended.

These findings suggest that we must rethink the conclusions of earlier work investigating the ‘Erasmus effect’ on European identity. Two previous panel studies, based predominantly on students from, and studying abroad in, the United Kingdom, concluded that Erasmus participation does not enhance European identity (Sigalas, 2010; Wilson, 2011). Indeed, my analysis indicates that this is true for British students. However, for the other five nationalities analyzed here, there is a clear relationship between Erasmus participation and enhanced European identity, suggesting the limitations of extrapolating from UK-centric data to draw conclusions about the ‘Erasmus effect’. Furthermore, while Kuhn (2012) is probably correct that transnational contact will have a greater impact on the European identity of individuals who have a lower baseline level of identification than

most university students have, the evidence suggests that university students nevertheless are still susceptible to identity transformation. Indeed, while Erikson (1968) emphasizes adolescence as the most crucial period of identity formation, the data indicate that, even among young adults, identities remain malleable enough that, over the course of a half-year, there is a marked change in European identity after studying abroad.

These findings have some practical implications for our assessment of the Erasmus programme. For one thing, they resuscitate the notion that the programme has what some have called a ‘civic’ effect (Papatsiba, 2006): it fosters European identity in addition to promoting employability and developing human capital. The findings also highlight some policy prescriptions related to the design of Erasmus exchanges that should be taken into consideration if the civic objective of the programme is to be maximized. The first is that identity appears to emerge from multiple types of transnational contact. Existing evidence suggests that Erasmus students are more likely to socialize with other Erasmus students than with students from the host country (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Mitchell, 2012). Whatever the detriments may be of such a dynamic, from an identity-change perspective it is not necessarily problematic. The highly significant relationship between socializing with ‘other Europeans’ (neither host country nationals nor co-nationals) and change in both dimensions of identity suggests that integration of Erasmus students into the host society is not necessary for enhancing European identity. However, socializing with co-nationals during the exchange has a negative impact on identification with Europe, so discouraging cultural isolationism is important from an identity change perspective. Furthermore, the extent to which exchange participants learn more about Europe during their sojourn is also critical for European identity change, while

learning about the host country apparently is not. To the extent that this European (rather than bilateral) dimension of the exchange is highlighted, there is likely to be a greater impact for European identity. Additionally, longer and more satisfying sojourns are associated with a greater increase in European identity, meaning that adequate institutional support for such exchanges should be considered.

While Erasmus participation has increased substantially over the 25 years of the programme’s existence, only a tiny proportion of Europeans – or even of university students – ever participates in such a programme. The designation of educational exchange as a high priority for the EU therefore has important ramifications for the potential spread of European identity. Currently, less than 5 per cent of university students participate in a foreign exchange, but as part of the Bologna Process, education ministers have called for an increase in student mobility to the point where at least 20 per cent of graduates will experience a foreign study or training sojourn (EU, 2009, Section 18). Student mobility has also been enshrined in the ‘Youth on the Move’ initiative of the Europe 2020 growth strategy (European Commission, 2010, p. 11). These programmes are framed and promoted in terms of economic benefits, but the present research suggests that identity change may result as well.

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