

STUDENTS' INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE AS A FACTOR OF A TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY**

Abstract. *The social constructivist theory of European integration processes leads to expectations that taking part in an Erasmus exchange adds to students' European identity and positive attitudes regarding the EU. Testing this hypothesis on data gathered among Slovenian and visiting students at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana in 2018 and 2019 shows that students' actual Erasmus experience tends to bring a mix of positive, yet more realistic views on the EU. Students' general European identity does not correlate with their Erasmus experiences but does correlate with an EU identity.*

Keywords: *identity, EU, Europe, Erasmus, social constructivism*

Introduction

Various studies have hitherto pointed to findings showing that European academic mobility is a factor in the making of European identity (Ifversen, 2000; Bagnoli, 2009; Powell and Finger, 2013; Genov, 2014; Golob, 2017; Lesjak and Anussornnitisarn, 2017). However, it remains unclear whether the research findings refer to a European identity generally or a European Union identity in particular.

Further, international academic mobility *per se* has proven difficult to isolate as a factor of transnational identity-making. Researchers stress the importance of various factors that partly shape students' decisions on international academic mobility in the first place. The question is thus whether the expectations are correct that it is exactly the international academic mobility (Erasmus mobility) that is crucial for the formation of such students' transnational identity.

In this article, we investigate whether European academic mobility is a factor in the making of European identity in circumstances when other

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factors are also taken into account. Accordingly, our first hypothesis (H1) is that students who have experienced studying abroad are more likely to identify with the European Union. We also test whether EU identity and European identity actually amount to the same thing. To accomplish this, we not only take account of data regarding students' directly expressed identities but also their views on scenarios of future EU dynamics.

In line with the social constructivist theory of European integration processes, we expect that taking part in an Erasmus exchange contributes to students' positive attitudes regarding Europe generally, in particular the EU. Our second hypothesis (H2) is thus that students with experience studying abroad are more likely to support more integration of all EU member states in all areas than are students who have no such experience.

We test these hypotheses using data gathered at the Faculty of Social Sciences in 2018 and 2019 from: 1) Slovenian students without experience of studying abroad and no intention of studying abroad; 2) Slovenian students without experience but with plans to study abroad; and 3) Slovenian and foreign students with experience of studying abroad.

Theoretical framework

The literature on the factors impacting students' engagement in international academic mobility is fragmented. The fragmentation comes from particular academic disciplines being focused on their given fields (e.g. the development of personality, social mobility, social identity, employment, culture, public policies etc.). Still, the disciplinary focus is not the sole cause of this fragmentation. It also arises from simplified approaches to studying both the factors of students' academic mobility and how academic mobility impacts students.

Indeed, the literature offers many partial studies of international academic mobility, primarily looking at either the development of students' personalities or other aspects of students' lives and social statuses both before and after students complete an academic stay abroad.

As students are young people whose personality is still developing on the way from adolescence to adulthood, researchers of these processes list several factors that shape this development (Arnett, 2004; Thomson and Taylor, 2005; Barry, 2010; Golob, 2017). Costa (2018), for example, argues that personal developments have been the most notable achievements of students arising from going abroad, evidently experiencing autonomy in decision-making or even taking leadership positions. Further, students with international academic experience appear more willing to work in an international environment and to work abroad than students without international academic experience. However, as a study of Turkish students shows,

international experience may not only be positive (Erenler and Yazici, 2020). The mentioned study reveals the problematic experiences of Turkish Erasmus students' as well as tough situations in cultural environments quite different from home. Still, it appears to be particularly challenging to clearly identify differences in the developing of personal, educational and cultural conceptions between Erasmus and non-Erasmus Turkish students. Moreover, some research questions the impact of studying abroad on the creation of a European identity as contact with host-country students may remain limited or have an adverse effect on it, although statistical analysis of data may show that increased socialising with Europeans has a positive, albeit modest, impact on European identity (Sigalas, 2010).

However, the development of personality is not the sole factor (co) determining young people's decisions on international academic mobility. Understandably, cultural factors such as language barriers and social semantic differences are believed to make a difference in students' international mobility (Golob, 2017). Obvious factors include individual- and family-determined socio-economic circumstances (Lehmann, 2004; Kogan and Unt, 2006; Kelly, McGuinness, O'Connell, 2012). Nevertheless, Ballatore and Ferede (2013) show that Erasmus students are not only engaged in more academic but also in leisurely travel and that they can afford to do so because they possess a higher socio-economic status. This led the authors to stress that an Erasmus year may actually be used to signal distinction and privilege. Given Ballatore and Ferede's findings, it is no surprise that Erasmus participants are also more open to international opportunities, which increase their employment chances and further reinforce their advantages. Indeed, inequalities in HE are produced and reproduced (Bilecen and Van Mol, 2017).

Gender stands out as a factor on its own. It appears that gender as a socially-constructed phenomenon may be malleable under the influence of international academic mobility – notably in pushing the boundaries of female students' personal freedom (Böttcher et al., 2016). Yet, the gender factor does not work in just one direction. De Benedictis and Leoni (2020) find gender bias in the Erasmus network of universities in favour of female students while gender asymmetry may also appear differently with regard to subject, consistent with the distribution of gender ratios among subject areas (Böttcher et al., 2016).

Research shows the persistent importance of socio-economic barriers to the take-up of the Erasmus programme as access has only been seen to be moderately widening (Souto-Otero, 2008). This raises the question of whether and to what extent it is at all possible to determine the importance of student-level barriers and motivations as explanations for participation/non-participation in an Erasmus exchange. What does the finding by Beerkens et al. (2016) that home ties and lack of interest are the most robust

predictors for non-participation actually mean? Is this finding from the statistical analysis of survey data from seven countries at all able to explain the considerable differences found among countries?

To some extent, research has considered broader external factors impacting international student mobility, such as better information and communication and stressing the benefits of Erasmus mobility (Souto-Otero et al., 2013), but remains quite limited.

More recently, research has looked into international academic exchange in relation to employment. Here research points out the domestic education opportunities (Van Bouwel and Veugelers, 2013) and domestic employment opportunities (Bauer and Kreuz, 2015) as factors impacting students' acceptance of academic international exchange opportunities. Still, studies of former Erasmus students underscore that these students (except for students from Central and Eastern European countries) do not believe that they excel in income and social status early on in their career and that the distinct professional value of temporary study in another country declines over time (Teichler and Janson, 2007). While the impact is declining, study abroad may remain an important experience for one's professional career (Engel, 2010).

Researchers have also looked at other expected outcomes of Erasmus mobility, such as Erasmus students' perceptions, values, beliefs and attitudes, including their understanding of active citizenship. Surveys of Erasmus students reveal that Erasmus students' understanding of 'active citizenship' echoes with the definition of the concept provided in the research literature (Golubevaa et al., 2018), yet other potential factors impacting these students' conceptions of active citizenship have been overlooked.

The literature shows it remains unclear whether European identity or EU identity motivates students' decisions to participate in international academic mobility and/or whether European identity/EU identity is a result of students' taking part in international academic mobility. Research into Erasmus students in comparison to non-Erasmus students has also neglected the heterogeneity of students as well as heterogeneity of Erasmus students. This must be appreciated more while studying students' academic mobility, like in the case of the study of broader societies, with one example being the study *The Future of Europe – Comparing Public and Elite Attitudes* (Raines et al., 2017).

Data and method

The aim of the empirical study was to include as many Slovenian students and students as possible on an international academic exchange (Erasmus) at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana. Data were gathered by an on-line survey conducted in 2018 and 2019.

The survey included Slovenian and foreign students of the undergraduate and graduate levels of study. The questionnaire was at least partly completed by 208 Slovenian students (11% of all Slovenian students enrolled in the undergraduate and graduate studies) and 61 students from abroad (45% of all students on an exchange at the same faculty at the time).

The questionnaire was available for students in both the Slovenian and English languages. While the questionnaire includes several sets of questions, here we focus on those related to our research questions and demographic questions – as presented in the section below.

We tested two hypotheses:

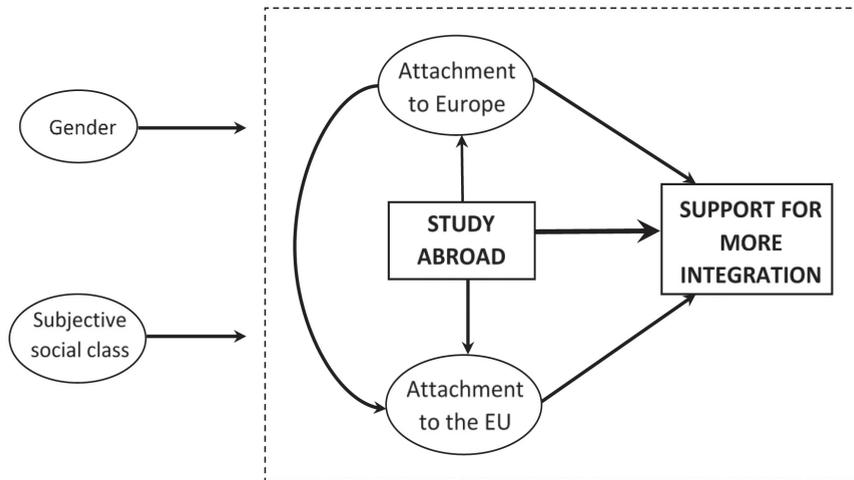
H1: *Students with experience studying abroad are more likely to identify with the European Union.*

H2: *Students with experience studying abroad are more likely to support more integration of all EU member states in all areas than students without experience are.*

The hypotheses make the assumption that by studying at universities in other European countries students gain a stronger sense of belonging to Europe generally and the European Union in particular. Therefore, we expect that the experience of studying abroad has not only a direct effect on supporting stronger integration among EU members, but this effect is also indirect through the two mentioned feelings of belonging.

We created an analytical model (Figure 1) based on the literature review (presented above) and a preliminary bivariate data analysis. Thus, our key independent variable in the model is the experience of studying abroad, which hypothetically affects both identity variables (Europe identity and EU identity) (H1) and (non)support for stronger integration of the EU member states (H2). Due to methodological limitations (relatively small number of cases), only two control variables were included in the model: gender and subjective class as an indicator of socio-economic status. We especially highlight the hypothetical expectations regarding the impact of socio-economic status: we expect that among students from wealthier families are more of those who have already studied abroad or who are planning to do so. The analytical model includes the following hypothetical relations: Study abroad impacts the attachment to the EU and the attachment to Europe. Attachment to Europe and attachment to the EU affect support for more EU integration. Gender and subjective social class affect all four other variables.

Figure 1: ANALYTICAL MODEL OF FACTORS EXPLAINING SUPPORT FOR FURTHER INTEGRATION INTO THE EU



Source: Authors.

We measured the dependent variable (“support for more integration”) with the following question:

Which direction of the EU's development do you support?

1. *Remains unchanged*
2. *Integration based on the single market*
3. *More integration for those member states that so desire*
4. *Integration that would focus on a few policies/areas, but there more effectively*
5. *More integration of all members in all areas*

(Fink-Hafner et al., 2019: 32).

For further analysis, we dichotomised this variable by combining the first four categories and keeping the fifth category as one to represent full support for EU integration. We thereby obtained the following distribution of answers: 47.5% (of valid cases) support more integration of all members in all areas and 52.5% support other strategies.

We measured the experience of studying abroad with the following question:

<i>Have you done part of your study abroad?</i>	Valid %
1. <i>Yes</i>	43.4
2. <i>Not yet, but I am planning to</i>	34.7
3. <i>No, neither I have planned nor intend to</i>	21.9

(Fink-Hafner et al., 2019: 34).

We measured the feeling of attachment to the European Union and Europe (as indicators for EU and Europe identity) on a 4-point ordinal scale – from “not at all attached” (1) to “very attached” (4) (see Table 1). The correlation between the two attachments is quite strong (Spearman’s rho = 0.570), but still low enough to allow us to talk about two different variables.

The question below was used to measure self-perceived social class:

Do you see yourself and your household as belonging to...?

1. *The working class of society*
2. *The lower-middle class of society*
3. *The middle class of society*
4. *The upper-middle class of society*
5. *The higher class of society*

(Fink-Hafner et al., 2019: 41).

For the purposes of the analysis, we combined the first and last two categories and thus obtained a classification entailing classes: lower, middle and upper.

On the bivariate level, relationships between the variables were tested using contingency table analysis. On the multivariate level, we used a binary logistic regression where the outcome (dependent variable) was “support for greater integration of EU members in all areas”. All other variables were included in the model as factors (independent variables): study abroad, attachment to the EU, attachment to Europe, subjective class, and gender.

Results¹

We first briefly show what the data tell us about the relationship between European identity and EU identity. Then, on the level of bivariate analysis, we present the factors of EU identity (attachment to the EU) with an emphasis on the connection between the experience of studying abroad and attachment to the EU. The factors of support for more EU integration are then presented, where both bivariate and multivariate analysis are used.

¹ *Since the analyses are based on survey data among all students of two generations of studies at the FSS, we will not rely on data on the significance of statistical parameters (we are not making a statistical inference from a probability sample to a population) while assessing the significance of the results. Above all, we will rely on the parameter values themselves. The results are valid only for the mentioned two generations of students. However, they might represent a good hypothetical starting point for research on wider student populations.*

European and EU identity

As shown in Table 1, those surveyed did not identify equally with Europe and with the EU. Based on the frequencies of their answers, one can say that more of those surveyed identified with Europe (65.8% feel fairly or very attached to Europe) than with the EU (51.1% feel fairly or very attached to the EU).

Table 1: ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION Please tell how attached you feel to...

	Not at all attached	Not very attached	Fairly attached	Very attached	N
a) Your city, town, village	3.4	23.0	39.6	34.0	356
b) Your country	6.7	20.2	52.0	21.1	356
c) The European Union	13.0	35.8	40.6	10.7	355
d) Europe	5.6	28.7	47.8	18.0	356

Source: own calculations based on data from the survey by Fink-Hafner et al. (2019).

As identities are not necessarily exclusive and even tend to accumulate, the quite strong positive correlation (Spearman's rho = 0.570) between the EU and European identity is not surprising. However, further analysis revealed some exceptions from this positive correlation. In addition to the (expected) dominant group of respondents who express attachment ("fairly attached" + "very attached") to both the EU and Europe (44.5%), we can also find those who feel attached only to the EU (6.8%) or only to Europe (21.1%) (Table 2). Especially interesting is the combination in which the feeling of attachment to the EU occurs simultaneously with non-attachment to Europe.

*Table 2: COMBINATION OF FEELING OF ATTACHMENT TO THE EU AND TO EUROPE**

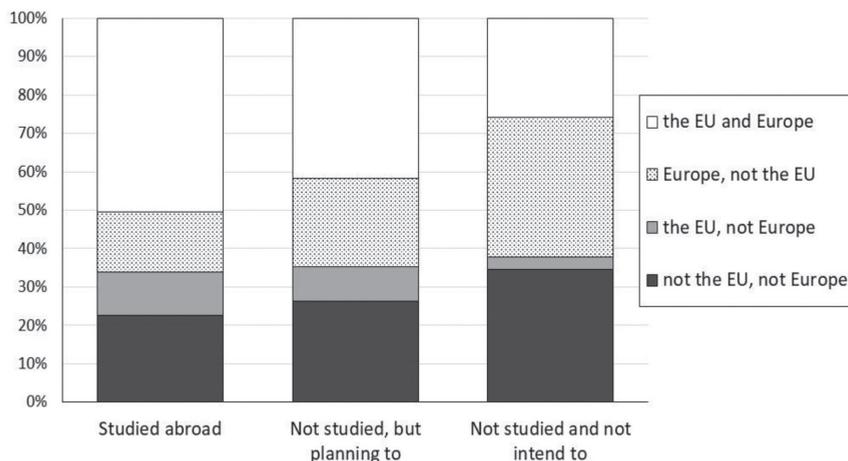
	Freq.	Percent
- neither the EU, nor Europe	98	27.6
- the EU, not Europe	24	6.8
- Europe, not the EU	75	21.1
- the EU and Europe	158	44.5
Total	355	100.0

*Combination of feelings of attachment to the European Union and attachment to Europe (see lines c and d in Table 1)

Source: own calculations based on data from the survey by Fink-Hafner et al. (2019).

We established that these combinations of attachments (identities) differ significantly among students who studied abroad, students who had not studied abroad but were planning to and students who had not studied abroad and had no intention to do so (Figure 2).

Figure 2: COMBINATION OF ATTACHMENTS TO THE EU AND TO EUROPE – RELATING TO THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDYING ABROAD



Source: own calculations based on data from the survey by Fink-Hafner et al. (2019).

The results show we can talk about the connection between the experience of studying abroad (Erasmus exchange) and European identity. Students with a study experience abroad express a European identity more than those without this experience do. However, a more detailed analysis reveals no statistically significant differences among students regarding their feeling of attachment to Europe in general. These differences are evident when we look at *feeling of attachment to the European Union*. In the group of surveyed students who had studied abroad, over 60% feel attached to the EU, and among those who had not studied abroad (and did not plan to do so), less than 30% feel attached to the EU (Table 3). This result is in line with our first hypothesis.

Table 3: THE FEELING OF ATTACHMENT TO THE EU IN RELATION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDYING ABROAD (IN %)

<i>Attachment to the EU:</i>	<i>Have you done part of your study abroad?</i>		
	Yes	Not yet, but I'm planning to	No, and I have no plans to
- not attached at all	9.6	8.8	22.4
- not very attached	28.7	40.7	48.3
- fairly attached	50.4	48.4	22.4
- very attached	11.3	2.2	6.9
	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2 = 24.516$ sig. < 0.0005 Cramer's V = 0.215			

Source: own calculations based on data from the survey by Fink-Hafner et al. (2019).

Factors of support for more integration between all EU member states

We now look at the factors that influence support for more EU integration. We first examined the association of support for strong EU integration with all other variables from the analytical model in Figure 1. We then conducted a multivariate analysis to test the direct effects of the independent variables on supporting strong EU integration. Specifically, we used a binary logistic regression.

Results of the bivariate analysis (Table 4) show a very weak association between attitude towards the future development of the EU and five independent variables from the model presented in Figure 1. The strongest effect on supporting more integration of all members is seen for the feeling of attachment to the EU (Cramer's V=0.195). We also observe that the association with the experience of studying abroad is even weaker (0.102). In general, we can say that a stronger feeling of attachment to the EU or to Europe in general leads to support for more integration into the EU. Yet, this association is not clearly linear: among those who do not feel any attachment, the share of support for more integration is indeed the lowest, yet it is not true that it is the highest among those who feel the most attached to the EU or Europe. In the case of attachment to the EU, this share is the highest for those who feel 'only' fairly attached.

If we now consider the relationship in the focus of our interest, we can confirm our second hypothesis. In the group of students who had studied abroad, *the share of those who support more integration of all EU members in all areas is the highest* (52.6%), while among those who did not have this experience (and no plan to study abroad) this share is the lowest (39.7%) (Table 1). Yet, *the differences are not large*, as indicated by the already mentioned low value of the coefficient of association.

Table 4: FACTORS OF ATTITUDE TO THE EU'S FUTURE DEVELOPMENT
 ("SUPPORT FOR MORE INTEGRATION OF ALL MEMBERS IN ALL
 AREAS") – BIVARIATE ANALYSIS (CROSS-TABULATION)

	Support for more integration of all members in all areas (%)	χ^2 (sig.)	Coefficient of association (Cramer's V)
<i>Attachment to the EU</i>	(N = 299)	11.413 (0.010)	0.195
- not attached at all	24.3		
- not very attached	46.9		
- fairly attached	55.6		
- very attached	43.5		
<i>Attachment to Europe</i>	(N = 300)	3.534 (0.316)	0.109
- not attached at all	33.3		
- not very attached	53.5		
- fairly attached	48.3		
- very attached	41.2		
<i>Study abroad</i>	(N = 264)	2.760 (0.252)	0.102
- no, and no intention to	39.7		
- not yet, but planning to	45.7		
- yes	52.6		
<i>Gender</i>	(N = 248)	3.107 (0.078)	0.112
- male	39.7		
- female	52.0		
<i>Subjective class</i>	(N = 243)	1.903 (0.386)	0.088
- lower	42.5		
- middle	46.2		
- upper	54.7		

Source: own calculations based on data from the survey by Fink-Hafner et al. (2019).

As part of the multivariate analysis, we examined the direct effects of the independent variables on supporting strong EU integration, meaning that the effect of each individual independent variable is controlled for the effects of all other independent variables in the model. Specifically, we prepared three binary logistic regression models: a) model with all five independent variables (both 'attachment' variables, studying abroad, gender, and subjective class) (Model 3); b) a model without subjective class (Model 2); and c) a model without any demographic (control) variables (Model 1). Overall, all three models hold weak explanatory power (pseudo R^2 ranges between 0.074 and 0.091) (Table 5). Since the subjective class contributes very little to the model's explanatory power (also in bivariate analyses we find the weakest correlation between the variables "support for integration" and "subjective class"), Model 2 seems to make the most sense.

Other results at least partly support the findings from the bivariate analyses. First, in Model 2 (like in the other two models), *attachment to the EU has the strongest (direct) effect*. The odds for supporting further integration of the EU among students fairly attached to the EU are more than four times higher than among not-at-all-attached students (Exp (B) = 4.332), while among those very attached to the EU the odds are slightly lower (Exp (B) = 3.600). Similar to the bivariate analysis, we also found a *very weak direct effect of the experience of studying abroad*. However, we noticed a slightly changed pattern of the association: a) the lowest odds for supporting further integration are not among those without any experience and no

Table 5: FACTORS OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU'S FUTURE DEVELOPMENT ("SUPPORT FOR MORE INTEGRATION OF ALL MEMBERS IN ALL AREAS"). RESULTS OF BINARY LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSES

Factors:	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	p	Exp (B)	B	p	Exp (B)	B	p	Exp (B)
<i>Attachment to the EU</i>		0.031			0.061			0.097	
- not attached at all (ref.)	0.000			0.000			0.000		
- not very attached	1.007	0.044	2.738	0.891	0.088	2.437	0.956	0.076	2.602
- fairly attached	1.546	0.004	4.692	1.466	0.009	4.332	1.416	0.014	4.248
- very attached	1.406	0.050	4.079	1.281	0.086	3.600	1.373	0.073	3.949
<i>Attachment to Europe</i>		0.326			0.258			0.240	
- not attached at all (ref.)	0.000			0.000			0.000		
- not very attached	0.065	0.916	1.068	0.185	0.767	1.203	0.359	0.581	1.433
- fairly attached	-0.395	0.532	0.647	-0.355	0.582	0.702	-0.210	0.754	0.811
- very attached	-0.702	0.319	0.496	-0.702	0.334	0.496	-0.558	0.463	0.573
<i>Study abroad</i>		0.484			0.461			0.543	
- no (ref.)	0.000			0.000			0.000		
- not yet, but planning to	0.008	0.981	1.008	-0.164	0.667	0.849	-0.186	0.632	0.830
- yes	0.321	0.357	1.379	0.216	0.550	1.241	0.160	0.667	1.173
<i>Gender (female) (binary)</i>				0.440	0.145	1.553	0.460	0.135	1.584
<i>Subjective class</i>								0.638	
- lower (ref.)							0.000		
- middle							0.161	0.617	1.175
- upper							0.374	0.343	1.453
<i>Constant</i>	-1.128	0.063	0.324	-1.274	0.046	0.280	-1.626	0.021	0.197
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)	0.074			0.087			0.091		
Model fit (H & L test)	Chi-square = 3.142 df =7 Sig. = 0.872			Chi-square = 8.657 df =8 Sig. = 0.372			Chi-square = 10.258 df =8 Sig. = 0.247		
Cases in the analysis	263			246			240		
B: Logistic regression coefficients. Exp (B): e ^B , odds ratio for the outcome 1 ("more integration of all members in all areas")									

Source: own calculations based on data from the survey by Fink-Hafner et al. (2019).

intention to study abroad, but among those without experience but planning to study abroad (Exp (B) = 0.849); b) while the odds are the highest, as expected, among those having the experience of studying abroad (Exp (B) = 1.241). The direct effect of the variable “attachment to Europe” also shows a changed pattern compared to the findings of the bivariate analysis. In this case, a negative connection is indicated, as the odds for supporting further integration are less than half among students with a strong attachment to Europe (Exp (B) = 0.496) than among those who are not attached to Europe at all (Table 5). The results also confirm the direct effect of gender, as already indicated by the bivariate analysis – women are more likely to support the further integration of all EU members in all areas (Exp (B) = 1.553).

The results show that among the factors included in the model, the strongest direct impact on supporting further comprehensive integration between EU members is held by a sense of attachment to the EU. *The weakest direct impact* is shown by the factor of interest to us here: *the experience of studying abroad*. Therefore, we conclude that studying abroad does not necessarily mean a positive attitude with respect to further EU integration. However, given the positive association found between studying abroad and a feeling of attachment to the EU (see Table 3), we may expect an indirect (positive) impact of this experience through attachment to the EU. The analyses quite clearly demonstrate that studying abroad has a positive effect on the feeling of attachment to the EU. In the group of surveyed students who had studied abroad, over 60% felt attached to the EU, and among those who had not studied abroad (and had no plans to do so), less than 30% feel attached to the EU (Table 3). Still, we did not find a significant association between the experience of studying abroad and the feeling of attachment to Europe in general.

Both the bivariate and multivariate analyses show that we can hardly speak about the direct impact of students’ socio-economic status (measured by “subjective class”) on their attitude towards future integration into the EU. Yet, we may conclude that this influence is ‘mostly’ indirect – by way of the experience of studying abroad and the feeling of attachment to the EU (Table 6). A significantly higher proportion of upper-class students (52.8%) had studied abroad than lower-class students (37.5%) (Table 6). There is an even bigger difference in terms of the feeling of attachment to the EU: in the upper class, 69.8% felt attached to the EU, but in the lower class only 36.1% (Table 6).

Table 6: ASSOCIATION OF "SUBJECTIVE CLASS" WITH "THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDYING ABROAD" AND WITH "THE FEELING OF ATTACHMENT TO THE EU" (BIVARIATE ANALYSIS)

<i>Subjective class:</i>	<i>Having an experience of studying abroad</i>	<i>Feeling attached to the EU (fairly attached + very attached)</i>
lower	37.5%	36.1%
middle	44.4%	53.0%
upper	52.8%	69.8%
Valid N	242	242
χ^2 (sig.)	5.559 (0.235)	19.485 (0.003)
Cramer's V	0.107	0.201

Source: own calculations based on data from the survey by Fink-Hafner et al. (2019).

Conclusion

There are several main empirical findings. First, there is no correlation between a feeling of belonging to Europe and students' actual studying abroad. Yet, the analyses show quite clearly that studying abroad brings a positive effect for the feeling of attachment to the EU. Second, a stronger feeling of attachment to the EU or to Europe in general leads to support for more integration into the EU. However, this association is not linear: among those who do not feel any attachment, the share of support for more integration is indeed the lowest, but it is also not the highest among those who feel the most attached to the EU or Europe. In the case of attachment to the EU, the highest share of support for more integration is among those who feel 'only' fairly attached to the EU. Third, both the planned Erasmus and the actual Erasmus experience contribute to positive attitudes to the EU. Nevertheless, the actual Erasmus experience does not seem to support the most positive attitudes regarding the EU. Instead, the actual Erasmus experience adds to positive but at the same time also realistic attitudes to the EU. Studying abroad also does not automatically mean a positive attitude to further EU integration, although we can expect an indirect (positive) impact of this experience through attachment to the EU. Third, we can hardly speak about students' socio-economic status (as measured by "subjective class") as having a direct impact on their attitude to future integration into the EU. This influence is instead 'mostly' indirect by way of the experience of studying abroad and the feeling of attachment to the EU.

These findings must be understood in a broader context. First, they are findings concerning the population of Slovenian students at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana (both non-mobile and mobile in the Erasmus programme framework) and foreign Erasmus students at the same faculty in 2018 and 2019. In general, Slovenian citizens are pro-EU-oriented

a little above the average compared to the EU-28 as expressed in having trust in the EU, in holding a positive image of the EU, and three-quarters of citizens feeling that they are citizens of the EU (Standard Eurobarometer 92, 2019; Europeans in 2019, 2019). Further, in 2017 young people in Slovenia agreed at a below-average level (64%) that European programmes and initiatives such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps lead to feeling more European while 35% totally disagreed with this notion (European Youth, 2017).

Taking all EU comparative survey data into account, which point to the finding that only a little over half of the EU member states have achieved a level of student mobility (students with some study-related experiences abroad) at close to the targeted 20% of the student population (Slovenia included) while in quite a few EU members (including Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Croatia, Portugal, Albania) the shares of non-mobile students are above 85% (DZHW, ed., 2018: 222–223). Still, the share of Erasmus students speaks in favour of the elitist thesis about this segment of students but also conceals the internal heterogeneity of Erasmus students.

Further, issues of European identity, EU identity – or the “level of Europeanness” as Rother and Nebe (2009) put it – may be very slippery. Questioning who ‘we’ are (Chopin, 2018) may add to challenges of the increasing identity politics within the EU and beyond rather than to peace and democratic processes.

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