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Active Citizenship Among Erasmus Students

Larissa Wood

Abstract

In a climate of economic crisis and a decline in social cohesion, the European Union stresses the importance of developing 'active European citizenship' to increase solidarity, promote integration and mobilise change. The aim of this article is to highlight the need and the value of supporting concrete practices of active citizenship specifically among Erasmus students. A pilot case study was conducted to measure active citizenship among a sample of Erasmus students in Krakow, Poland. Results suggest that the presence of behaviour indicating active citizenship in their host country during their Erasmus exchange was lower in comparison to their home country. This article discusses the possible explanation for such a situation in terms of barriers that may hinder the manifestation of active citizenship and sets the ground-work for more research and action in this area.

Keywords: Erasmus students, active citizenship, exchange

Introduction

Globalisation and economic crisis have put strains on the conditions of social cohesion in Europe. Consequently, the European Union (EU) stresses the importance of ‘active European citizenship’, which is substantiated by the key role it plays in increasing solidarity, promoting integration and mobilising change.¹ It is recognised that education plays a fundamental role in developing citizens with the ‘right’ skills, knowledge and attitudes they require in order to achieve these aims.² As compulsory education remains largely in the hands of nation states, for the EU higher education – which is becoming increasingly ‘Europeanised’ – has a greater potential role in this process.³ An integral part of European higher education is the flagship ERASMUS programme for student mobility which is generally regarded as highly successful. However, the nature and extent of the contribution rendered by the ERASMUS programme relating specifically to practice for active citizenship is largely unknown, let alone challenged. This raises several questions: How does the behaviour of Erasmus students relate to active citizenship? Is there a need and what are the added benefits of supporting practices of active citizenship among Erasmus students?

In addressing these questions, the first part of this article discusses the concept of active citizenship and the role of European education in the development of active citizens. The focus of the second part is to explore the behaviour of Erasmus students in relation to active citizenship during their exchange. Firstly some related studies, that have examined the lifestyle and integration of Erasmus student within the local community, are considered. Secondly, a pilot case study was conducted to directly measure active citizenship among a sample of Erasmus students in Krakow, Poland. Results are discussed in relation to the barriers that Erasmus students may face in the manifestation of active citizenship and how the Erasmus Student Network’s (ESN) “SocialErasmus” project,⁴ which helps international and exchange students to engage in society-beneficial activities⁵ in the local community, can help to overcome them. As the empirical research is based on a pilot case study, it is important to clarify from the outset that the findings are not intended to be generalised. The purpose of this article is to begin to explore the challenges and

¹ Council of the European Union, “Council Conclusions on the Role of Education and Training in the Implementation of the ‘Europe 2020’ Strategy,” *Official Journal of the European Union* (2011/C70/01), <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:070:0001:0003:EN:PDF> (accessed 3 May 2012).

² European Commission, “Supporting Growth and Jobs – An Agenda for the Modernisation of Europe’s Higher Education Systems,” COM(2011) 567 final, Brussels, 20 September, http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/com0911_en.pdf (accessed 15 May 2012).

³ Gert Biesta, “What Kind of Citizenship for European Higher Education? Beyond the Competent Active Citizen European Educational Research,” *European Research Journal* 8:2 (2009), www.wwords.eu/EERJ (accessed 14 April 2012).

⁴ Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is a student organisation founded for supporting and developing student exchange. It is currently present in 36 countries, through a network of 396 Higher Education Institutions (local sections), reaching out to at least three-quarters of Europe’s 200,000 Erasmus students. (www.esn.org) The SocialErasmus project (established in 2008 by ESN Poland and now present in most local sections) helps international students to engage with the local community in volunteer activities, to aid and enrich the local society. (www.socialerasmus.esn.org)

⁵ Activities are based on three areas – education, charity and environment – and correspond well to the concept of active citizenship. For example, in the area of education, the ‘Europe at School’ activity is where international students give a “European lesson” in local schools. Students (and pupils) talk about their countries, cultures and experiences of studying abroad in order to overcome stereotypes, set a good example, and give pupils direct contact with other cultures. For charity, international students visit orphanages and care homes. In the area of environment the “Erasmus Forest” project involves students planting thousands of trees in their local area. (www.socialerasmus.esn.org/content/actions)

benefits relating to practices of active citizenship among Erasmus students and to set the ground work for more research and action in this area.

I. Active Citizenship

The notion of citizenship is an important topic and one that has changed in meaning over time. Discourse initially focused on citizens' rights, see in particular the influential work of T. H. Marshall,⁶ and it was commonly experienced on the level of the nation state. Citizenship is considered significant for the legitimacy of democratic governance, as this depends on the extent to which democratic structures and functions are rationalised and supported by citizens, and for the generation of social order.⁷ In light of this, developing a 'European citizenship' has proven both crucial and problematic for the EU since the concept was first introduced in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. A significant question that has been brought up is what kind of citizenship the EU should promote.

Since the concept of citizenship first arose, the world has become a different place. Globalisation has transformed societies into a complex melting pot of people and practices, interactions have been extended through travel and technology, and the consciousness of people has changed. This phenomenon, and the current economic crisis, have augmented insecurity and intolerance about immigration and the rise of multicultural societies, putting increased strains on the condition of social cohesion and creating circumstances of anxiety about a decline in civic participation, social trust and respect for the common cause.⁸ According to Jansen, Chioncel and Dekkers, these changes in the "sociological condition" of people and the diversification of the public sphere, have affected the conditions for citizenship and how it is practiced.⁹ A growing number of authors, including Jansen et al., believe that 'active citizenship' harmonises these changes and assumes a central position in securing social cohesion and integration. One of the biggest proponents of this idea is the European Union.

Active citizenship is defined in a number of ways but it is generally accepted, and central to EU policy development, that participation is the key element. But participation in what? A definition used by the EU and commonly found in the literature, defines it as "participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy".¹⁰ Jens Haahr's description adds that, "participation is inherently characterised by social inclusion; that is, a feeling of belonging to different communities".¹¹ Hoskins et al. describe in more detail the broader meaning of the concept:

⁶ Thomas Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950).

⁷ Manuel Castells. *The Power of Identity* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1997).

⁸ T Jansen, N Chioncel, and H Dekkers, "Social Cohesion and Integration: Learning Active Citizenship," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27:2 (2006): 193.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁰ Bryony Hoskins, Jochen Jesinghaus, Massimiliano Mascherini et al., "Measuring Active Citizenship in Europe." CRELL Research Paper 4, EUR 22530 EN. Ispra: European Commission Institute for the Protection and Security of the Citizens (2006), http://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/Document/EUR%2022530%20EN_Active_Citizenship.pdf, (accessed 18 April 2012).

¹¹ Jens Haahr, "Nordic Area citizenship Study," Final Report, Copenhagen (1997), <http://ec.europa.eu/education/archive/citizen/copenhagen.pdf> (accessed 18 April 2012).

“Active citizenship is explicitly not restricted to the political dimensions. Rather, it ranges from cultural and political to environmental activities, on local, regional, national, European and international levels [and] includes less conventional forms of active citizenship, such as one-off issue politics and responsible consumption, as well as the more traditional forms of voting and membership in parties and NGOs [non-governmental organisations].”¹²

Based on the interpretation of the EU,¹³ the three main elements of active citizenship, which are accepted for the measurement and understanding of the concept in this research, are participation in ‘civil society’, ‘social and community activities’ and ‘political life’.

II. European Education for Active Citizenship

Active citizenship first appeared in EU policy in the Lisbon strategy in 2000,¹⁴ which focused on motivating citizens to make Europe the most competitive, knowledge-based economy. With the latest EU strategy, *Europe 2020* centring upon enhanced social cohesion and a smart, sustainable growth, the concept is ascribed increasing importance – particularly since the participation in practices of active citizenship is expected to foster the aspired solidarity, tolerance and integration.¹⁵ The EU disseminates the fundamental role that education plays in this process by promoting development of the skills needed not only for the labour market but also for active citizenship and social cohesion. As a result, in 2001 ‘Learning for active citizenship’ was designated one of the three major pillars in the creation of a *European Area of Lifelong Learning*.¹⁶ In 2006, the *European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* was formulated.¹⁷ One of the eight key competences was *social and civic* competence, defined as the “knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to enable individuals to become active citizens”.¹⁸ Citizenship education

¹² Bryony Hoskins et al., “Measuring Active Citizenship in Europe.”

¹³ Marga De Weerd, Mireille Gemmeke, Josine Rigter and Coen van Rij, “Indicators and Options for Monitoring Active Citizenship and Citizenship Education: Executive Summary,” Research Report for the European Commission/DG, Amsterdam (2005), http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc280_en.pdf (accessed 5 May 2012).

¹⁴ European Parliament, “Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000 – Presidency Conclusions,” http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm (accessed 17 May 2012).

¹⁵ The Active Citizenship Foundation and DARE Network, “A Europe of Active Citizens: Assessment, Policy Responses and Recommendations on Active Citizenship Education,” Summary Report, International conference Budapest, 11 November 2010, http://www.darenetwork.eu/downloads/budapest_Documentation/A_Europe_of_Active_Citizens_conference_Summary_Report.pdf (accessed 11 May 2012).

¹⁶ Commission of the European Communities, “Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality,” COM(2001) 678 final, 21 November Brussels, <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0678:FIN:EN:PDF> (accessed 28 April 2012).

¹⁷ European Council, “Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning,” *Official Journal of the European Union*, L394, 10-18, 30 December 2006, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:EN:PDF> (accessed 28 April 2012).

¹⁸ Bryony Hoskins, Ernesto Villalba, Daniel van Nijlen, and Carolyn Barber. “Measuring Civic Competence in Europe: a composite indicator based on IEA Civic Education Study 1999 for 14 years old in school,” JRC Scientific and Technical Reports, 23210 EN, Ispra: IPSC (2008),

programmes are growing in number across many parts of Europe and universities are increasingly recognising their role in the community and in mobilising civil engagement¹⁹.

Developing the ‘right’ skills and competences for active citizenship, through a variety of methods of teaching and learning, is evidently important. However, according to Hoskins et al., *social and civic* competence does not always transform into active citizenship as there may be “barriers that prevent young people who have the capacity for active citizens [hip] from participating”.²⁰ Similarly, Jansen, Chioncel, and Dekkers claim that the manifestation of active citizenship is effected by “sociological condition” – most significantly, one’s participation in, and identification with, social practices in a diverse public sphere – and that these are related to four dimensions of active citizenship practice.²¹ Jansen et al. developed a model to explain their theory in which the four dimensions each represent an issue with which citizens are implicitly or consciously struggling, and these affect how and whether active citizenship is practiced.²² The four dimensions considered by them are:

- *Context*: The setting or environment of citizens, impacts the feasibility and prospect of collective action and engagement;
- *Capacity*: Citizens actions depend on knowing how to participate, to exercise rights and meet obligations;
- *Connections*: Citizens relations and identification with others effect pursuit of a common cause;
- *Challenge*: The self-positioning of citizens, dependant on the compatibility between one’s own life and self-interests and the appeal of the common cause.

Thus, what is crucial is linking the knowledge and skills gained, through both formal and non-formal education, to concrete practices of active citizenship.²³ The ERASMUS programme provides a tangible experience, however; does the programme provide concrete practice for ‘active’ European citizenship in particular? Is it a good time to practice and if so, why?

A number of reasons have been identified for why it might be beneficial for the EU to support and encourage active citizenship specifically among Erasmus students. Erasmus students can be regarded as ‘ambassadors of Europe’ as they are participating in a European exchange programme and come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, their engagement in civil society automatically adds a ‘European dimension’ to active citizenship. The manifestation of active citizenship, for example through projects such as SocialErasmus, has the potential of broadening the ERASMUS programme’s contribution to the promotion of European integration and identity, as it provides a positive intercultural experience to those who are not in ‘the world of’ higher education. This is very valuable as currently only one third of European citizens access higher education, and of these only 2% of students study abroad.²⁴ Furthermore, active citizenship supplements

http://crell.jrc.ec.europa.eu/Publications/CRELL%20Research%20Papers/BryonyCCI_JRC42904_final.pdf (accessed 6 May 2012).

¹⁹ Lorraine McIlrath and Iain MacLabhainn, *Higher Education and Civic Engagement: International Perspectives* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007).

²⁰ Bryony Hoskins et al., “Measuring Civic Competence in Europe: a composite indicator based on IEA Civic Education Study 1999 for 14 years old in school.”

²¹ T Jansen et al., “Social Cohesion and Integration: Learning Active Citizenship,” 197.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Eurostat, “Tertiary Education Statistics,” European Commission, Statistics Explained (2011), http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Tertiary_education_statistics (accessed 10 May 2012).

the ERASMUS programme with a ‘social dimension’ as it strengthens and expresses solidarity beyond the nation state, to a diverse range of people, in particular to those who are vulnerable in society, and it may therefore contribute to greater social cohesion.

III. Active Citizenship Among Erasmus Students

Active citizenship has been analysed in a variety of situations and populations. To date, no studies have directly measured active citizenship among Erasmus students during their time spent studying abroad. However, many studies have questioned the integration of exchange students and their identification with the local community – two factors that, according to Jansen et al.,²⁵ effect practices of active citizenship – and may therefore shed light on the issue at hand.

Teichler’s research, investigating the “Life of ERASMUS students”, revealed that 66% of Erasmus students felt they were well integrated in the social life of the host country and 50% were satisfied regarding contacts with host country national.²⁶ However, 18% of students considered it as a serious problem that they had too much contact with people of their own country. Thomson found that 51% of former exchange students agreed that there was a ‘positive connection’ between their exchange experience and the development of ‘social competences’; 28% with regard to ‘cultural identity’ and 59 % with their ‘relationship to the host country’.²⁷

Since 2005, ESN has surveyed an average of 8000 exchange students each year.²⁸ When rating satisfaction with their exchange experience, ‘contact with local people’ and ‘integration in host country’ was repeatedly rated very low, and students defined their identity least with the local community, in comparison to national, European, global or individual identity²⁹. Results from the 2009 survey showed that exchange students rarely do volunteer work in the host country (only 7.2%), however, 64.4% look for possibilities of doing volunteer work after having studied abroad³⁰.

Generally speaking, these studies indicate that in many cases Erasmus and other exchange students are dissatisfied with the level of contact they had with the local community. On the other hand, it may be that these students are not motivated to get involved with the local community as other studies claim that the ‘Erasmus lifestyle’ is a

²⁵ T Jansen et al., “Social Cohesion and Integration: Learning Active Citizenship,” 197.

²⁶ Ulrich Teichler., “Temporary Study Abroad: the life of ERASMUS students,” *European Journal of Education* 38:4 (2005), 404.

²⁷ Alexander Thomas, “Which are the Long-Term Personality Effects of Participating in International Youth Exchange?” (2005), http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Forum21/Issue_No7-8/N7_8_effects_participating_en.pdf (accessed 5 May 2012).

²⁸ Erasmus Student Network. ”What is ESN?” <http://www.esn.org/content/what-esn> (accessed 5 April 2012).

²⁹ Seweryn Krupnik and Ewa Krzaklewska, “Exchange Students – Results of ESNSurvey 2006,” Brussels: ESN, http://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/ESNSurvey_2006_report.pdf (accessed 12 April 2012). Boomans, V., Krupnik, S., Krzaklewska, E., & Lanzilotta, S., “Generation Mobility – Results of ESNSurvey 2007,” Brussels: ESN, www.esn.org/survey (accessed 12 April 2012).

³⁰ Emanuel Alfranseder, Ewa Krzaklewska and Marge Taivere, “Provision and Equality – Results of ESNSurvey 2009,” Brussels: ESN, <http://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/ESNSurvey2009.pdf> (accessed 12 April 2012).

time in which travelling and attending parties is highly prioritised³¹. It could be argued that participation in Erasmus can be considered active European citizenship in itself. However, as the ‘type’ of participation is crucial to the concept, merely living and studying in a different country, or even partying, travelling and making friends with other international students, does not automatically determine someone an ‘active European citizen’. Central to the concept is mobilising positive change, being locally engaged and globally aware, with the effect of benefiting society as a whole. Thus, better insight into the behaviour of Erasmus students relating more directly to practices of active citizenship during their exchange is needed.

IV. Methodology

A pilot case study was conducted, for which a short survey was developed to measure active citizenship among a sample of Erasmus students in Krakow, Poland. The questions measured students’ behaviour during their Erasmus semester and in their home country, and in accordance with three main elements of active citizenship: civil society, social and community activities and political life (as previously stated). Participants were recruited using non-probability opportunity sampling, and the survey was administered face-to-face due to limited amount of time available. The final sample consisted of 51 students from 16 European countries, 23 males and 28 females. The average age was 23 years, with 26 students being in their second exchange semester in Poland and 25 in their first one. 31 did not speak any Polish, 16 could communicate a little bit and 4 spoke Polish fluently.

Analysis of ESN’s SocialErasmus project was conducted using a mixed methods approach: content analysis of websites³², an expert interview with Katja Krohn (ESN International Vice President and at the same time coordinator of the project)³³, and a participant observation of the “Erasmus Forest” activity organised by SocialErasmus in Krakow.³⁴

V. Results and Discussion

The aim of the case study was to measure behaviour relating to active citizenship among a sample of Erasmus students in Krakow. Premised on previous related studies, it was hypothesised that the identification and engagement of students in the local community,

³¹ Magal Ballatore, “The Erasmus programme: toward more cooperation or more competition between Higher Education institutions?” Fifth International EUREDOS Conference Modernising European higher education: priorities, ideas and challenges. 23 May 2008. CIPES – Center for Research on Higher Education Policies, http://www.fup.pt/old/cipes/docs/eventos/pdf_docs/Magali%20Ballatore.pdf (accessed 21 April 2012). Ioannis Tsoukalas, “The Double Life of Erasmus Students,” in *Student, Staff and Academic Mobility in Higher Education*, edited by Mike Byram and Fred Dervin (UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008) 134.

³² www.esn.org (ESN International), www.socialerasmus.esn.org (SocialErasmus).

³³ Expert interview conducted 17 April 2012, duration 40 minutes.

³⁴ 12 exchange students and 10 Polish students participated in planting trees near Krakow on 20 April 2012.

and the presence of behaviour indicating active citizenship, would be low in general and in comparison to their home county.

The analysis of responses shows that, during their exchange in Poland, of the 51 students, 5 had done volunteering (indicator for civil element), 4 were member of a society or club (indicator for social element) and 6 had followed an issue in Polish politics (indicator for political element). In comparison, frequencies were higher with regard to the same behaviours in their home country: 18 had done volunteering, 26 were members of a society or club and 17 had followed an issue in national politics. Looking at the trend in the data, in this case the majority of Erasmus students were not participating in the civil, political or social activities that would indicate active citizenship. These results confirmed the hypothesis, which predicted that the identification and engagement of students in the local community, and the presence of behaviour indicating active citizenship, would be low in general and in comparison to their home county. To take into consideration a broader definition of the concept of active citizenship³⁵ the behaviour indicating participation in 'environmental protection' and 'cultural activities' was measured. With regard to these elements there is only negligible difference in the behaviour of respondents when on exchange in Poland compared to their home country.³⁶ Thus, one of the main limitations of the survey is that only a few behaviours, or in other words 'types of participation', and a few elements of active citizenship were measured. In addition, although the findings were not intended to be generalised, the sample size was small and limited to Erasmus students in Krakow only. Outcomes may differ for example in countries where language is less of a barrier, as in the present case only 4 students spoke fluent Polish.

Due to the limited scope of the pilot case study, it was not possible to attempt to question the cause and effect of the findings. Nevertheless, it is important to consider why Erasmus students might not be active citizens during their exchange, how they can be supported and the added value of doing so. The trend in the results indicates that, in comparison to Poland, participants are more active in their home countries. Thus, it might be applicable that exchange student face superfluous 'barriers' in the manifestation of active citizenship as a result of the new situation in which they find themselves. The present findings are discussed in relation to the four previously outlined dimensions which, according to Jansen et al.,³⁷ can affect practices of active citizenships; namely 'Context', 'Connections', 'Capacity' and 'Challenge'. The analysis of ESN's SocialErasmus project provided examples of how, with support and provision of concrete practices, the project can help students overcome these barriers.

According to Tsoukalas' in-depth research, namely "The double-life of ERASMUS students", exchange students find themselves in a new and extraordinary 'Context' which nurtures identity formation in a clear-cut and exclusive social group.³⁸ Factors such as being labelled all together as 'Erasmus', not speaking the local language well, and knowing that their stay is temporary, are likely to contribute to this phenomenon.³⁹ Katja Krohn also described this in the expert interview: *"In our experience, many exchange students want to be more involved but they face extra obstacles such as language barriers [...] The ESN surveys show that, after going back home, many Erasmus students regret not having integrated more."*

The process of going through many similar emotional experiences means that Erasmus students have strong 'Connections' and solidarity within the Erasmus group and it

³⁵ Bryony Hoskins, Jochen Jesinghaus, Massimiliano Mascherini et al., "Measuring Active Citizenship in Europe."

³⁶ On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (all the time), on average participants took less care to save energy in Poland (5.4) than in their home country (6.9). Similarly, they attended less cultural events during their Erasmus semester (3.2 events) in comparison to an average semester in their home country (3.6 events).

³⁷ T Jansen et al., "Social Cohesion and Integration: Learning Active Citizenship," 197.

³⁸ Ioannis Tsoukalas, "The Double Life of Erasmus Students," 136.

³⁹ Ibid.

is therefore understandable that they do not reach out, identify or integrate themselves into the surrounding population.⁴⁰ “*Erasmus students often stick to their own kind [...] they don’t have that much contact to local students and the local community...*” thus, as Katja Krohn also illustrated, they befriend people who experience similar things. This is in line with the results of the present case study in which students were asked in the survey how strongly they identify with different levels of society.⁴¹ The analysis showed that, of the 51 participants, the highest proportion identify (i.e. either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’) with their *nation* (44), followed by the *Erasmus community* (38), the *European community* (31), with being a *world citizen* (22), as an *autonomous individual* (10) and with *the local community* (8). Furthermore, on average participants have proportionally fewer *local/Polish friends* (28%) but also *home country friends* (29%), than they have *international friends* (43%), which fits with their strong identification to the *Erasmus community*. SocialErasmus bridges this barrier in their ‘Connections’ as it allows students to stay in their more familiar Erasmus group while, at the same time, participating in the local community and broadening their experiences.

Faced with a language barrier and a lack of local connections, it is probable that Erasmus students often do not have the ‘Capacity’ (i.e. know-how) to participate in local actions, especially at the beginning of their stay: “*I did not think it would be possible for me to do volunteering as I do not speak Polish, but ESN made it really easy [...] they sent me an e-mail about the event, they organised the transport and I felt really happy about coming even though I am on my own.*” (Author’s field notes from participant observation).

Studies show that Erasmus is often regarded as a time dedicated to ‘have fun’ and enjoy oneself⁴², and self-interests are therefore likely to be stronger in the ‘Challenge’ against the appeal of the common cause. Katja Krohn explained that, “*In some cases Erasmus students have gained somewhat of a negative reputation [...] that they come, take what they want, party a lot and then leave. ESN believe it is important that [Erasmus students] get to know about what is going on in the local community, and that they have a lot to offer in return.*” SocialErasmus helps to balance out this ‘Challenge’ by making it easy, fun and rewarding for the students to get involved in society-beneficial activities, as a student participating in the *Erasmus Forest* activity explained: “*At home I don’t have time to do volunteering [...] Planting trees is something that I have never done before but it was really fun and it feels good to do something for the environment, as in Poland it is not possible to recycle [waste].*” (Author’s field notes from participant observation).

Conclusion

The aim of this article is to explore how the behaviour of Erasmus students relates to active citizenship, in order to set the ground work for further research and action in this area. The pilot case study based on a sample of Erasmus students in Krakow, highlighted that the majority of respondents did not participate in the civil, political or social in activities in the host country – a circumstance that would indicate active citizenship. This can be understood in terms of the ‘barriers’ that exchange students face as a result of their new and extraordinary situation. This article demonstrates the necessity to provide exchange students with additional support and concrete practices, to help them integrate and participate in local community initiatives. These conclusions suggest that the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 139.

⁴¹ On a 4-point Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree.

⁴² Ioannis Tsoukalas, “The Double Life of Erasmus Students,” 138.

ERASMUS programme may not be contributing to its full potential to fundamental EU aims such as integration, solidarity and social cohesion, and that ESN's SocialErasmus project is a good example of how the ERASMUS programme could be enriched.

Findings have implications for the European Commission's proposal for the new 2014–2020 *Erasmus for All* programme. Although the draft regulation (proposed by the Commission on the 23 December 2011) states that it intends to build more “connections” with outside partners such as civic organisations and NGOs, it is not concrete about how this will be realised.⁴³ In March 2012, official improvements of the proposal were put forward by a coalition of 30 European stakeholders, and these suggestions match the conclusions of the present study.⁴⁴ When referring explicitly to changes in learning mobility, the stakeholders proposed that “more emphasis should be given to social inclusion and active citizenship”. Furthermore, they believe that these adjustments need to be made to “ensure a greater impact” and the “European added value” of the ERASMUS programme.⁴⁵ In light of these suggested improvements and the findings from this paper, *Erasmus for All* should build structures to support concrete practices of active citizenship during exchange. For example: by providing recognition through ECTS credits for volunteering and civil engagement which was recommended by Erasmus Student Network Reaction to the Green Paper and is something that has already been successfully initiated at several universities.⁴⁶ Furthermore, as this article attests, by supporting civil engagement projects such as SocialErasmus.

This article has set the groundwork for further research concerning active citizenship and the social dimension of ERASMUS programme. It would be interesting to develop on these initial findings by using a more in-depth and reliable survey, with a larger and more representative sample, in order to measure active citizenship among exchange students and to scrutinise the cause and effect of outcomes.

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Ballatore, Magal. “The Erasmus programme: toward more cooperation or more competition between Higher Education institutions?” Fifth International

⁴³ European Commission, “Erasmus for All: The EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport,” COM(2011) 787 final, Brussels, 23 September 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all/doc/com_en.pdf (accessed 15 May 2012).

⁴⁴ EUCIS-LLL, “The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning – 30 Stakeholders’ Proposals to Improve the Draft Regulation of ‘Erasmus for All,’” http://www.eucis-lll.eu/pages/images/stories/LLP/position-coalition-erasmusforall_march2012.pdf (accessed 8 May 2012)

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Erasmus Student Network, “Reaction to the Green Paper” (2009), http://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/ESN_contribution_green_paper.pdf (accessed 13 May 2012).

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b) politics of memory and citizenship