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EFFECTIVENESS OF ERASMUS PROGRAMME IN PREJUDICE REDUCTION: CONTACT THEORY PERSPECTIVE

Abstract: *As an important contributor to higher education and tourism industry both inside and outside of the European Union, Erasmus programme provides the significant framework for many studies in academic literature. One of the important issues which Erasmus students encounter is the issue of prejudices and stereotypes between them and local students and residence. The aim of this research is to examine the successfulness of the Erasmus programme in reducing prejudice and stereotypes between Erasmus and Turkish students/residents from the perspective of contemporary knowledge on contact theory. Accordingly, the qualitative research*

on Erasmus students who took their course at Akdeniz University Tourism Faculty in Antalya Turkey was conducted. The three main categories were derived after the content analysis of obtained data: Erasmus students' initiative, positive as well as the negative aspects of Erasmus process. The results of this study provide new perspective on how the prejudice reduction is being examined and in which direction should individual parties in Erasmus programme work in order to improve the overall success of the same.

Keywords: *Contact Theory, prejudice, Erasmus programme, tourism faculty*

Introduction

The Erasmus programme is one of the most popular and most important programmes in the fields of education, training, youth and sport with an aim to secure major contribution to the assistance in dealing with socio-economic challenges that Europe and the rest of the world are facing (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2016 p. 7). The goal is to build more cohesive and inclusive societies through this programme where violent radicalization will be prevented by promoting common European values, fostering social integration, enhancing intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging to a community.

Considering the importance Erasmus programme has as a contributor to both higher education and tourism industry, both inside and outside of the European Union, it has become an extensively researched topic in academic literature. The process of Erasmus programme and its participants were in the focus of many studies in terms of examining the motives for Erasmus students to participate in this exchange program and destination choice (García- Rodríguez and Jiménez, 2015; Lesjak et al., 2015), impacts of Erasmus programme (Jacobone and Moro, 2015), formation of social networks and interaction patterns among Erasmus students (Van Mol and Michielsen, 2015) and the similar, with the referred studies providing



detailed insight into previous literature on Erasmus programme and its connection to the related research field. When looking at the research where the Erasmus programme was in the scope, evaluations, in terms of credit mobility, competence development and personal growth were emphasized while Erasmus students emphasized benefits of cultural enrichment, personal development and language proficiency (Jacobone and Moro, 2015).

One of the important issues which Erasmus students encounter before and upon arrival at a destination of exchange programme is the issue of prejudices and stereotypes between them and local students and residents. Prejudice may be defined as mainly negative attitude towards people in a distinguishable group based solely on their membership in that group (Aronson et al., 2013). Stereotypes are representing the cognitive side of prejudices and they are based on unfolding of information. In order to reduce the prejudice and stereotypes between members of different group we may assume that by providing correct information about these groups we will automatically reduce the stereotypes and prejudices towards representatives of the out-groups. However, through history we may encounter various example of how different mass media tools can be used to actually do the opposite. Nowadays, we know that mass media like TV, Internet with social media give us opportunity to reach thousands of information and, while some of them might help in reducing the prejudices and stereotypes, the others may do the opposite by justifying the presence of negative attitudes in the first place. Therefore, the question of how to effectively reduce the prejudices in intergroup contact was one of the most prominent in the social psychology research. The answer may be in successful use of Contact Theory first proposed by Gordon Allport in 1954. According to this theory, in order to reduce the prejudice between members of different

groups, they need to establish contact and interact in the same environment (Allport, 1954).

The aim of this research is to examine how successful is the Erasmus programme in reducing prejudice and stereotypes between Erasmus students and Turkish students/residents from the perspective of contemporary knowledge on the Contact Theory. For this research, Erasmus students who took their course at Akdeniz University Tourism Faculty in Antalya Turkey were chosen as a research group for two reasons: the Tourism Faculty is one of the most popular choices of Erasmus students and it is the nature of tourism to work for the reduction of prejudice in intergroup relationships. Since the researchers decided to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context the case study research design (Yin, 2003) and qualitative research method were found appropriate to the aim of the research.

In the first part of the study, a brief literature review on the Contact Theory as the main tool in reducing the prejudice among different groups is provided. In the second part, research method and data collection process were described followed by the representation of results in the third part. In the same section, the discussion about the result and analytical generalization was performed. This paper finishes with the conclusion and recommendations regarding the possibilities of improving certain aspects of the Erasmus programme by following the propositions of the Contact Theory.

Literature review

Prejudice is essentially an attitude and according to the three component model, every attitude has emotional, cognitive and behavioral component (Aronson et al., 2013). Prejudice may be used to describe the entire attitude structure, and pervasively, the emotional element of it. In this

context, a prejudice is a hostile or negative attitude towards people in a distinguishable group, based solely on their membership in that group (Aronson et al., 2013). Similar to other attitudes, prejudices are also formed through socialization process and based on beliefs, values and attitudes of friends and peer groups (Jones, 1997). Prejudices have a cognitive element which is known as stereotype and can influence behavior in the form of discrimination (behavioral component). Stereotypes show remarkable similarity among the members of a certain culture. Although a lot of things have changed in the legal framework as to respecting human rights and the changes societies worldwide are facing in terms of accepting differences among different group member in terms of race, nationality, gender or sexual orientation, humankind is still facing stereotypes and prejudices as well as problems they bring in people's lives (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1998, 1990). According to Dovidio and Gaertner (1999) the basis of contemporary prejudice expressed in negative feelings and beliefs may be an individual process (cognitive, motivational and socialization biases) or intergroup processes (based on conflict between groups or categorization of people into in-groups and out-groups).

Some methods for reducing traditional stereotypes and prejudices are enhancing knowledge about members of other groups, emphasizing that the prejudices are wrong as well as changing people's attitudes directly by using different persuasion strategies through mass media or indirectly, by using techniques where people will become aware of the inconsistency in their attitude and behaviour (Stephan and Stephan, 1984). If we consider that stereotypes are negative attitudes from the cognitive side and are based on the unfolding of information, then we may assume that by providing correct information, stereotypes and prejudices towards representatives of the outer groups will automatically be reduced. In addition to one's being informed in

a correct way, researchers Webber and Crocker (1983) proposed that repeated contact with the member of out-group can modify stereotypes and prejudice.

It is understandable that merely a contact would not be enough, but a certain type of contact in order to reduce the stereotypes and prejudices should be introduced. Among the first studies on the nature of the intergroup contact in order to reduce prejudice was done by Gordon Allport in 1954. In his work, he introduced the Contact hypothesis which will be shaped in the future studies into one of the most widely used theories for reduction of prejudices among different groups – Contact Theory. Allport's first assumption for using the Contact hypothesis was that if the prejudice is not deeply rooted in the character of an individual, the specific type of contact which includes common goals as well as the equal status between majority and minority groups and it is institutionally supported within the frame of social norm that will lead that contact (Allport, 1954, p. 281), will be a powerful weapon in reducing the prejudice between different groups. In the first period of framing the Contact Hypothesis, in Allport's research scope were racial prejudices in United States. But after decades of research through experiments and surveys, it has been proven that it can be used among different types of in and out-groups (Pettigrew, 1998). Pettigrew and Trop (2006) performed a meta-analytic test of the Contact Theory between groups where results showed that the intergroup contact reduced the intergroup prejudice and it can be reflected in a broad range of out-group targets and contact settings. By using the cross-wave analyses, Herek and Capitanio (1996) found a reciprocal relationship between intergroup contact and heterosexuals' attitude towards groups of different sexual orientation.

Results of Pettigrew and Trop's study (2006) are proving that the conditions that were regarded as optimal contact conditions



in the Allport study give better results when used together. However, according to the findings of their meta-analysis (Pettigrew and Trop's, 2006), these conditions are not essential for prejudice reduction and researchers recommended a further research on negative factors that prevent intergroup contact from diminishing prejudice and towards development of a more comprehensive intergroup Contact Theory. This necessity to enrich the initial Allport's Contact Hypothesis was noticed long before when Sherif et al. (1961) showed that some other conditions must be brought to the current situation, so it may result in prejudice decrease. As a result of their famous experiments in social psychology, the robber's cave experiment, Sherif and his colleagues showed that negative feelings and hostile situation between two groups can be decreased by introducing two important factors: mutual interdependence and a common goal. The literature on decreasing prejudice and stereotypes has also shown that friendly and informal atmosphere may contribute in a great sense (Brewer and Miller, 1984; Wilder, 1986). Wilder (1984) has also contributed to the shaping of the Contact Hypothesis by stating that meeting multiple members of the out-group is necessary, because otherwise, there is a threat of keeping the prejudice by labeling the whole out-group based on its one member. In the same study (1984), Wilder supported the Allport's statement that prejudice will be reduced if the intergroup contact occurs in a situation where social norms that promote and support equality among groups are present. Aronson and his colleagues (Aronson et al., 2013) summarized all these findings and proposed a framework of six conditions in which contact theory may lead to prejudice reduction: 1) Mutual Interdependence, 2) Common Goal, 3) Equal Status, 4) Friendly, Informal Setting, 5) Contact with Multiple Members of the Out-group Present and 6) Social Norms that promote and support equality among groups.

Research method and data collection

Based on interviews with Erasmus students coming from different European countries, focus group meeting and observation made by teachers of the Erasmus students' courses, researchers of this study were examining how successful the Erasmus Programme is in reducing prejudice and stereotypes between Erasmus students on the one hand and Turkish students and residents on the other, from the perspective of contemporary knowledge on the Contact Theory.

In the scope of the research were Erasmus students who attended courses at Akdeniz University Tourism Faculty in the fall semester 2015/2016. According to the data provided by International Relations Office of Akdeniz University in the period from 2003/2004 until 2015/2016, the total number of incoming Erasmus students reached the number of 749 including both graduate and postgraduate studies. Out of this number, 228 Erasmus students were students enrolled at the Akdeniz University Tourism Faculty and 194 out of them were at graduate, whereas 34 were attending postgraduate studies. The selection of participants was performed based on the students' country of origin so that diversity of data can be reached. There were seven interviews with nine participants in total, whereas one focus group meeting consisted of three participants (Table 1). In two cases, instead of the one-on-one interview, researchers decided to speak with two participants coming from the same country at the same time. It should also be kept in mind that the researchers were at the same time teachers at some of the Erasmus students' courses, so they had an opportunity to observe the students and interact with them. During the whole course, it was noticed that participants coded as P 4, 5 and P 7, 8 were coming from the same country and the same university, they were close friends in their home country and they continued to

share the same experience during their Erasmus Programme. Therefore, it was considered suitable for them to participate in the interviews in pairs as they were experiencing their Erasmus Programme mutually and it was thought that more valuable information will be obtained in the case of interview in pairs. After completion of data collection (interviews, focus group and observation), researchers transcribed every audio record of the interviews and focus group meeting and continued with the content analysis as a suitable method for systematically describing the meaning of the qualitative data (Schreier, 2012). In order to increase the reliability of the results from the content analysis, it is recommended to pay a special attention to a couple of issues (Punch, 2005). One of these is necessity to describe the analysis process in detail. At the beginning of the content analysis, coding categories were defined and named. At this level, one Serbian and two Turkish researchers read the provided transcripts a couple of times and, with the support of the related texts, created the coding scheme. With the guidance of the created scheme transcripts were again analyzed. These processes were done by each

researcher independently after which the results were compared and discussed. At the end of the conceptual abstraction process categories and sub-categories were derived. The second indicator of reliability was the fact that the coding was done by each researcher and that the derived categories and sub-categories were results of discussion and consensus obtained among the researchers. Additional method used to increase the reliability of the research was usage of direct quotations from the analyzed texts in order to provide connection between data and results. Direct quotations from the participants in the research were presented in the result section of this paper.

Results & discussion

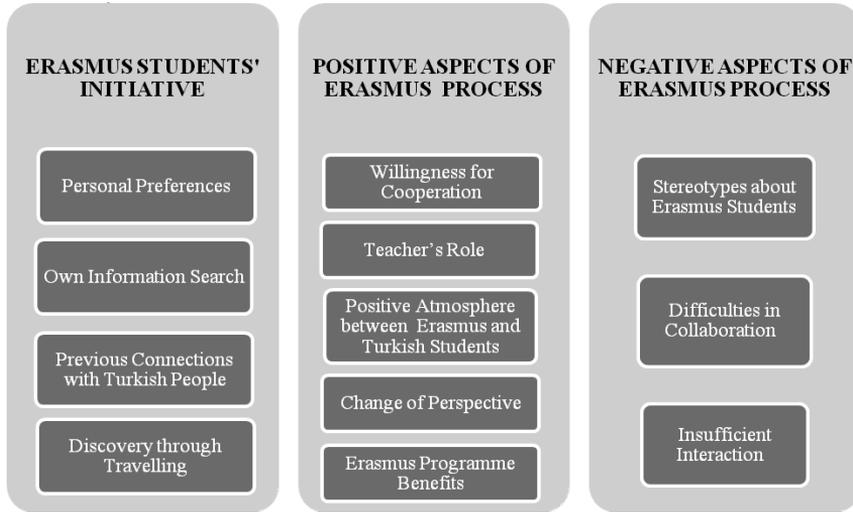
As a result of the content analysis, the three main categories and ensuing sub-categories were derived. The three main categories are the following: the Erasmus students' initiative, positive aspects of Erasmus process and negative aspects of Erasmus process. The detailed list of all categories and sub-categories is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

Codes	Country	Length of participation Erasmus +	Type of Data Collection
P1	Portugal	one semester	one-on-one interview
P2	France	one semester	one-on-one interview
P3	Poland	one semester	one-on-one interview
P 4, 5	Finland	one semester	interview with two participants
P 6	Estonia	one semester	one-on-one interview
P 7, 8	Latvia	one year	interview with two participants
P 9	Belarus	one semester	one-on-one interview
FG	Estonia, Poland, Slovakia	one semester	focus group



Table 2. Main Categories to Understanding how Contact Theory May Work in Reducing Prejudices with Erasmus Students



Erasmus students' initiative

Under this category the researchers collected all the codes that were summarizing the characteristics of Erasmus students, their actions before coming to Turkey and Antalya and how these characteristics and actions reflected during their stay. Although a certain level of stereotypes that were associated with Turkey could be noticed from the interview, these were not enough to stop Erasmus students from coming to Antalya and continue their academic education here. Under this theme, sub-categories such as personal preferences, characteristics of visiting country, their own information search, previous connections with Turkish people and discovery through travelling are going to be explained in more detail in the continuation of this paper.

Personal Preferences

As students expressed in their interviews, regardless of the bad image Turkey might have in their media and due to insuf-

ficient knowledge about Turkey and Turkish people, it may be concluded that personal preferences and willingness to meet a new country and culture as well as the interaction with the people one-on-one are prevailing among Erasmus students.

Well my opinion in the first place was bad because of the news that were in Portugal, always makes seem like Turkey is a dangerous country, but then I made my own research and then I decided to come here and experience life in another culture... P1

When I decided to come here a lot of people told me why you go there, it can be difficult in terms of religion, situation with Syria and everything.... And for me, I just want to know a new country, new religion, new culture... P2

... for me everything that is different is interesting and not that "Oh it's different I don't like it"...If you go on an Erasmus you have already made a big step, you want to know the world, see the different countries, so it is this

curiosity of Erasmus students, I like to think of them as open minded. FG

As it may be seen from the quotations above Erasmus students are above all very eager to use their studying period to go abroad and visit a new country, meet new people and culture and that this curiosity and eagerness might become a valuable lifetime experience for them.

Searching Information on Their Own

Going abroad for a half or an entire year period can be very stressful and life-changing experience for both Erasmus students and their families. That is why they are trying to minimize potential risks of encountering the unexpected in a new country by doing their own search for information. This search is usually done online by using some of the world's well known web browsers and forums related to the Erasmus programmes and places they are visiting.

There are many forums and Erasmus programmes, I saw it, Google it, and then I thought it's a good place to be... P1

I did some research on Google, to see pictures because every time a person asks me 'why are you going there?' I was sending them pictures from Google... P2

After the initial phases of information search and networking with the people that were or are still related to the Erasmus Programme, they are ready to come with more confidence and knowing what to expect in the country they are visiting.

Connecting with Turkish People

Due to the Erasmus Programme, a lot of students from different countries have opportunity to spend a certain period dur-

ing their graduate and postgraduate studies in one of the EU and non-EU partner countries. As Turkey is also in the part of the Erasmus exchange programme, a lot of Turkish students are taking part in it and they are spending the half-year course in one of partner countries. This programme is a chance for young members from European countries to meet and find out more about Turkey directly from Turkish students. The examples of these may be found in the following quotes:

I met them because they were in my class in Portugal and then of course we started to talk and I told them I wanted to go to Turkey and then they told me about it... PLY

I have met some Turkish people aboard in a voluntary project in China where we were teaching English. These Turkish people were very open, friendly, outgoing, had their own opinion... at least some of them. And they were not afraid to express it. UP

In this way, the Turkish students who are participating in the Erasmus exchange program are in a certain way informal ambassadors of their own country, representing the behavioral patterns, knowledge, culture and language of their home country in a foreign country. In this way, chances of reducing the stereotypes are on a significant level.

Discovering through Travelling

As there was a chance for these young people to participate in this programme related to the fact that the participants of this research were tourism students, travelling was one of the most prominent and most exciting activities during their whole stay. These trips, whether they were organized independently or by the responsible Erasmus coordination center, were one of the best ways to interact more with the locals, to immerse more into the culture and everyday



life of Turkey and find out more about the different parts of the country. A great part of the interview made with the two girls from Latvia was emphasizing the aspect of travelling which may be best illustrated by the following quotations:

We were travelling a lot in June. In more than 10 days we went to Alanya, Konya, Ankara and Istanbul by hitch hiking all the way. It was kind of interesting. We travelled a lot in the previous semester. That is how we went to Marmaris and Fethiye as well. I think for ERAMSUS people, it is very popular... P 7, 8

Apart from the fact that they were students of tourism, they had the opportunity to hear a lot about travelling as a part of the exchange experience from the former Erasmus students, which is why they tried to spend the time during the exchange to discover as much as possible through travelling.

As the Erasmus students' initiative category clearly shows, the source of prejudice they had towards Turkey was not rooted in their personality characteristics (due to their willingness to search for information on their own, travel around country and connect with Turkish people). This fact is in line with the Allport's assumption that unless the prejudice is deeply rooted in the character structure of individual, we may use the knowledge of the Contact Theory to reduce prejudice and stereotypes that occur between Erasmus students and Turkish students/residents (which participants reported to exist, due to the negative image of Turkey as a country in foreign media and stereotypes regarding different culture and religion).

Positive aspects of erasmus process

In one-on-one/pair interviews and after focus group data collection, positive aspects of the Erasmus process both inside and

outside of the University were described in several directions. According to the participants, the Erasmus Programme helped them in experiencing a new culture and system which may be collected within the following categories: willingness to cooperate, teacher's role, positive atmosphere between Erasmus and Turkish students and the change of perspective as well as Erasmus benefits.

Willingness to Cooperate

During the period of half or a whole year of the Erasmus Programme, students had the opportunity to find themselves in the same environment with local students which raised the desire to learn more about working system in Turkey and readiness to cooperate. Researchers found the proof for this classification in the following quotations:

It was interesting to compare how it's happening here and see how Turkish students are representing themselves, how they are listening or not listening, compare it and so... P 7, 8

I like it as you may see a different way of work... We were also talking about Turkey, their point of view, even discussing situation from different countries is very interesting. If you want to get used to culture, you have to speak with the locals and, to be in class with them, it is the best way to speak about that. P 2

Based on these quotations it may be concluded that the students were very eager to learn more about the working system in Turkey, the ways Turkish students learn and to compare all that with the corresponding system in their own country. They have recognized that the interaction with Turkish students will help them to find out more about the unknown country and culture, compare different opinions and immerse into life of locals for a better understanding of the real situation in the country they have visited.

Teacher's Role

It is impossible to imagine any academic process without teachers. However, during the Erasmus Programme, the teacher's role is even more emphasized as it may be seen from the following quotation:

...especially here when you don't speak Turkish they (teachers) are like guides, you can ask them questions which you can't ask other people because they don't understand...P2

Here the role of teachers as guides emphasizes their influence in facilitating communication and certain obstacles that may be found on the way during the period of the Erasmus Programme. It should be kept in mind that Erasmus students are mainly entering the country program for the first time and that the reason for visiting the country is not tourism, which is why there are many question marks over their heads. Here, the role of teachers, as mediators and facilitators, in the whole Erasmus academic process is of great importance.

The teachers surprised me, because I thought the teachers-it would be like the level of students, like lower. Now, I know that teachers are so good or better than in Portugal... P1

It may be noticed that Turkish teachers were also an object of stereotypes in one of the interviews. However, at the same time, there were one of the successful neutralizer of the negative opinions and generators of the opinion change towards the more positive attitudes. This was one of the positive surprises which classifies and shapes the positive aspects of the Erasmus process.

Positive Atmosphere between Erasmus and Turkish Students

One of the greatest values of the whole Erasmus Programme is the fact that it provides an environment where both Erasmus

and Turkish students are able to interact and learn more about each other's culture, language and habits. All this, created perfect prerequisites for building a positive atmosphere between these two groups which may be illustrated by the following quotations:

Of course they treated us differently as we are from different country but I think that they treated us better sometimes because they always try to help us...P7, 8

The above was an example of a positive attitude of Turkish students and the locals towards the Erasmus students. However, the "positive waves" were two-folded which may be concluded from the expressed opinions of Erasmus students towards Turkish students:

Turkish students were like a family, very welcoming class...Some of them wasn't so good in English, but they were trying to talk with us, to give us positive waves... P9

The descriptions under this sub-category are consistent with the findings in academic literature that friendly and informal atmosphere may contribute in a great sense to reduction of prejudice in the intergroup contact (Brewer and Miller, 1984; Wilder, 1986).

Change of Perspective

Not only did the Erasmus students change their opinion towards the country they were visiting, but they also changed their perspective towards the Erasmus students:

Now, when I am an Erasmus student, I want to interact more with the locals, but when I was in Poland, I was not thinking about Erasmus students. But now, this changed...P3

Erasmus program also changed my perspective. When I was in Estonia and trying to communicate with the Erasmus students, I was a bit afraid



if they would want to communicate with me or to be with Estonians, now it has changed my mind totally. I see here how much I want to know about the culture and people and get to know Turkish friends. Now I think that in Estonia Erasmus people may need me, so it has changed my perspective which is good. FG

Apart from the fact that they are informal ambassadors of their own country, the Erasmus students are also powerful advocates of all the benefits that the Erasmus Programme brings. Experiencing this exchange program increases the awareness of the problems, difficulties and desires which any Erasmus student might have. This will also shape the future behaviour of students that participated in the Programme, so as to encourage them to interact more with some of the future Erasmus participants that decided to come to their country and help them in reaching the full benefits of their Erasmus Programme. Therefore, the basis for creating a positive atmosphere for interaction is well established both institutionally and among students that participated in the Programme.

Erasmus+ Benefits

From the above mentioned quotations researchers derived positive aspects of the Erasmus experience. However, during the interviews participants put a strong emphasis on the benefits that the Erasmus Programme had on them, which is illustrated in the best manner from direct quotations provided below:

It is wonderful experience, one of the nicest in my life for sure. I hope to do it again. Maybe in Turkey again... P1

It was really great because Erasmus is the chance to feel as a part of an international family. It was nice and I think nobody had any problems. Ok, we are really different, different

cultures, religions, governments and opinion about governments and politics and everything...but, everything was totally OK. I also think it was useful because of English language. This is a really great opportunity to learn a language. P9

I really hope it (the Erasmus Programme) is going to grow, get bigger and develop because this is one of the important things. It is good for both sides: for a European to see a country with different religion and customs, so they can open their own mind. I really hope it expands. FG

This category shows how regardless of differences, the intergroup contact showed all the positive aspects of both groups and removed negative feelings and attitudes that existed prior to the intergroup contact. Positive results after interacting with more members of the out-groups in equal status showed the consistency with the previous research on the Contact Theory found in the literature (Wilder, 1984).

Negative aspects of erasmus process

Category names as negative aspects of Erasmus process were derived as a result of this study are worth emphasizing. Within this theme, the following categories emerged: stereotypes about Erasmus students, difficulties in collaboration and insufficient interaction. These will be further discussed in the continuation.

Stereotypes about Erasmus Students

While describing how they were treated by the people that surrounded them in their new environment, the Erasmus students mentioned also a certain stereotypes that are being dedicated to them and they may be represented by the following quotations:

Everyone say “Oh my God you are Erasmus so it does not matter if you are in school or not”. So everyone says it is easy for us... “Why you are going to classes, you don’t have to be in school” – students say. P 4, 5

As an Erasmus participant, I guess it’s always – this is also stereotype and I guess it’s a bit true- that Erasmus students for them it’s like a bit easier to study, not as hard as in the country... language... if I were a Turkish student it would be harder to study. It is not only Turkey – I think it is the same in Estonia or wherever you go. P6

This opinion generally accompanies the reputation of Erasmus students among other Turkish students and others who surround them. It is probably because Erasmus students are spending six months in the partnership country on average. So, during this six-month period, it is expected from them to get to know the culture and life habits of the local people, travel around to know better the other parts of the country, to get used to the educational systems as well as to get in contact with all the professors and students that are attending the same course. Due to the time constraint and the fact that they are after all the guest students at the University, a certain level of tolerance towards Erasmus students may be expected to be shown.

Difficulties in Collaboration

Among the negative sides of the Erasmus process and the biggest obstacle towards obtaining a larger cohesion and collaboration with local students was the English language barrier since, unfortunately, not so many Turkish students speak English at an appropriate level. These difficulties were explained below:

I think it was the opposite, because I remember one example, in English,

the teacher always says to Erasmus people ‘Oh please don’t talk I want to teach Turkish students now. I think it was bad for us and Turkish students as well... but the problem is that the Turkish students do not have English, the grades are not that good and it is kind of difficult to communicate...P1

Of course, I learnt more and got to know some Turkish people, but not as much as I wished or hoped. Language barrier is one of the things...P6

Insufficient Interaction

Due to the language barrier and lack of communication among Erasmus students and Turkish students, it is understandable that during their courses at the university level, the interaction between the two groups is sometimes insufficient. Therefore, the Erasmus students tried to keep the contact primarily with the other students from the Erasmus group and, depending on the courses they have chosen, had a limited interaction with Turkish students.

...once again, the language was the main difficulty... we kept together with Erasmus students... they tried to speak to us, but we see them (Turkish students) only once a week, so it is not enough... P2

I didn’t have any lessons with Turkish students, and this can be also one of the things that could have helped like interacting more with Turkish people and students, it would have been nice. P6

The second quotation shows that there are certain courses that are available solely to the Erasmus students where Turkish students are not participating at all. If we consider the perspective of P6 participant who didn’t have the chance to participate in the lessons, it is understandable why there was



the need and desire for more interaction with the local students.

Sub-categories and the description under this category are actually showing where the Erasmus Programme did not use all the prerequisites of the Contact Theory in order to reduce intergroup prejudices and stereotypes. Especially, the sense of mutual interdependence and common goals during the courses should be more emphasized. This may be done by increasing the interaction among wider groups of students and allow them to create their mutual working environment where solving problems together will lead to the fulfillment of their goals.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine successfulness of the Erasmus programme in reducing prejudice and stereotypes between Erasmus students and Turkish students/residents from the perspective of contemporary knowledge on the Contact Theory. After a qualitative analysis of data obtained from the Erasmus students who attended their course at the Tourism Faculty of the Akdeniz University, significant results were obtained in the examination of effectiveness of the Contact Theory framework in reducing the prejudices and stereotypes during the Erasmus Programme. Considering the nature of prejudice and different factors that influence their creation as well as characteristics of establishing contact between members of different groups, the results cannot be generalized. However, they may give a new perspective in the method on how prejudice reduction can be examined and in which direction should individual parties in Erasmus programme work in order to improve the overall success of the same. The results were summarized under three categories: the Erasmus students' initiative, positive as well as the negative aspects of Erasmus process.

The first category, the Erasmus students' initiative category showed that the source of prejudice is not rooted in the character structure of these students. Therefore, applying knowledge of the Contact Theory to reduce prejudice and stereotypes that occur between the Erasmus students and Turkish students is appropriate. The second category, describing the positive aspects of the Programme, showed that four out of the six propositions of the Contact Theory (Aronson et al., 2013) such as the equal status, friendly informal setting, contact with multiple members of the out-group present and social norms that promote and support equality among groups are being supported during the Erasmus Programme at Akdeniz University Tourism Faculty. Taking into consideration that the Erasmus Programme allows students to interact more with each other both inside and outside the classroom, it creates the suitable environment for positive interaction between members of different groups. On the one hand, it is institutionally supported by the rules and guidelines written in the official documents of European Commissions and at the University Erasmus programme is taking place. But, on the other hand, both Erasmus and Turkish students are able to interact and communicate in a more friendly and informal settings which is proposed by the Contact Theory.

The third category actually shows the aspects in which the Erasmus Programme failed to use all the prerequisites of the Contact Theory in order to reduce intergroup prejudices and stereotypes. Two of these unused sources for a better intergroup contact are mutual interdependence and common goals and these two should be more emphasized during the courses of the Erasmus Programme. The stereotypes about Erasmus students who are coming on holiday not to study should be decreased if the full goals of the Erasmus program and prejudice reduction efforts are to take place. By incorporating them more into regular students' courses

and providing them the equal attention as to Turkish students, missing assumptions of the Contact Theory will be fulfilled and the results of the exchange programme will be even better.

Actually, both Erasmus and Turkish students already have the same goal and it is to successfully finish the course. The results of this study place a specific emphasize on the role of teachers as mediators and facilitators in the Erasmus process. It is therefore, our recommendation to include teachers as coordinators and creators of more interaction between students, encouraging interdependence between the Erasmus and local students as well as to show them the way how to reach the common goal. However, the teachers again should have the institutional support of the faculties and university in terms of organization of courses, the size of classrooms, new teaching methods to create learning environment where students will have to rely more on each other's experiences and knowledge to gain this goal.

The researchers believe that Tourism Faculties and Colleges are great places to start with, due to the fact that tourism is a phenomenon that has been tearing down the walls of prejudice and stereotypes since the beginning of the mankind. It is not in the personality of students of tourism to be 'over prejudiced' which is why the intergroup contact can be of great influence in helping them reduce the barrier that prejudice and stereotype bring with themselves. During their studies, after completing the Erasmus programme and later on in their professional career, they will be one of the most efficient ambassadors of prejudice-free and stereotype-free world, based on positive experiences they had during the students exchange programme such as Erasmus.

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