

Erasmus student mobility and Emerging Adulthood: implications on students' development

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on Erasmus student mobility and emerging adulthood. We attempt to detect possible emerging adulthood characteristics to Greek university students, in the frame of their participation in mobility programmes. A qualitative analysis with in-depth interviews of students was applied, in order to investigate the implications of this experience for Emerging Adulthood. Interviews were addressed to Greek students from various disciplines that participated in mobility programmes in different countries and higher education environments during the past two years. The research revealed empowerment of specific emerging adulthood characteristics of the participants, while studying abroad emerges as a significant learning experience that fosters students' developmental process to adulthood.

KEYWORDS

Erasmus, student mobility, emerging adulthood, higher education, student development

RÉSUMÉ

La présente étude se centre sur la mobilité des étudiants Erasmus et l'émergence de l'âge adulte. On tente de détecter de possibles caractéristiques de l'émergence de l'âge adulte aux étudiants des universités helléniques, dans le cadre de leur participation aux programmes de mobilité. Une analyse qualitative avec des entretiens en profondeur, a été appliquée dans le but d'enquêter les implications de cette expérience sur l'émergence de l'âge adulte. Les entretiens se sont adressés aux étudiants grecs, de diverses disciplines, qui avaient participé à des programmes de mobilité, dans divers pays et aux environnements d'enseignement supérieur pendant les deux dernières années. La recherche a révélé autonomisation des certaines caractéristiques de l'émergence de l'âge adulte, alors que les études à l'étranger se révèlent comme une expérience significative d'apprentissage qui favorise le processus de développement de la vie adulte.

MOTS-CLÉS

Erasmus, mobilité des étudiants, émergence de l'âge adulte, enseignement supérieur, développement de l'étudiant

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the participation of both students and teachers in mobility programmes is high, while according to the reports of the European Commission (2019), the benefits concern not only the areas of personal but also social and professional development. Our previous studies on Greek student mobility (Raikou & Karalis, 2007, 2010) are in total accordance with those findings, while a crucial conclusion resulting from our research is that the mobility of students fosters elements of formal, non-formal and informal learning, with an emphasis on the latter, as they have a great impact on the development of the individual. This conclusion is confirmed by other current studies that acknowledge mobility programmes as an opportunity that promotes going beyond the formative aspects of learning (Maciejewska, 2018, p. 352).

Among other findings of our study (Raikou & Karalis, 2010) is the promotion of lifelong learning, the development of qualifications and recognized skills (high level of specialization, a broader understanding and international experience, etc.), the acquisition of knowledge and skills aiming to professional preparation and broadening professional orientation, as well as the development of European citizenship and the reinforcement of self-confidence.

But how do these skills relate to the developmental process of young people to adulthood? It should be noted that the development of the above skills by students takes place in an age phase with special characteristics. Young people of this age are in a transitional phase in their development towards autonomy and maturity, the so-called emerging adulthood.

WHAT IS EMERGING ADULTHOOD?

Studying the field of developmental psychology, Erikson (1968) is a key figure, who determined the age of 18 to be the beginning of adulthood. According to the well-known psychologist, at this age the individual entered the phase of becoming independent from his family and taking responsibility for his decisions, since this age marked the beginning of his professional activity and the creation of his own family. However, fifty years later, the conditions have changed significantly and the current situation presents a different picture (Arnett, 2007).

In recent decades, several studies have been conducted in the field of developmental psychology, according to which there is a distinct period in the development of the individual, which follows adolescence but does not have all the characteristics of adulthood. According to the international literature, adulthood is not only determined by age, because this criterion is not stable, both diachronically per period and synchronically per society (Kokkos, 2005). Individuals after the age of 18 and up to shortly before the age of 30, are known to no longer belong to adolescence, while they have political and legal rights. However, at this age period, individuals, most of whom are students, do not have professional stability while they have not yet started their own family.

Bearing this in mind, American developmental psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2004) systematically studied this period of a person's development, naming it *emerging adulthood*. In his research (Arnett, 2007; Reifman, Arnett, & Collwell, 2007) he points out that emerging adulthood is a period associated with developmental challenges, difficult in some cases, but very heterogeneous per context, mainly due to socio-cultural differences.

It is important to note Arnett's remark (2000) that emerging adulthood is not observed worldwide in young people, but mainly in developed modern societies, which provide the opportunity to explore the different alternative paths in their lives (Petrogiannis, 2011). However,

even among these societies, there are differences in nationality, economy, social classes, and culture in each region (Arnett, 2004; Arnett et al., 2014). The findings of these researches, with emphasis on the influence of the socio-cultural context in the formation of emerging adulthood characteristics were confirmed by similar research conducted in recent years in Greece, mainly on students of Greek universities (Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017; Galanaki & Sideridis, 2018; Leontopoulou, Mavridis, & Giotsa, 2016; Petrogiannis, 2011).

In his work, Arnett identified five dimensions of emerging adulthood, which include a) identity explorations, b) instability, c) self-focused, d) feeling in-between and e) possibilities. In other words, despite the socio-cultural heterogeneity, it was established from the above research that these dimensions are identified, with a different, however, hue and importance depending on the context. The dimensions of emerging adulthood are described as follows:

a) During this period there is an exploration of identity. Young people try probabilities and process their thoughts on how they want to live their lives and the commitments they will make, mainly focusing on relationships, profession and ideology (Arnett, 2000). Although the formation of identity begins in adolescence (Erikson, 1968), however, during emerging adulthood the young person, without full dependence on parents during adolescence and without commitment to specific roles s/he will take on in adulthood, has the ability to try alternatives and explore different lifestyles (Galanaki & Amanaki, 2007/2008). It is perhaps the 'best opportunity for such a form of self-discovery' (Arnett, 2004, p. 8).

b) This is probably the most unstable period of human life. During this time there are usually very frequent changes in love relationships and work. According to Arnett (2014) this instability is mainly attributed to the young people's internal search for identity. Nevertheless, in some cases he believes that it is due to external factors such as a dismissal in the workplace or different choices of their partner (Arnett, 2000; Arnett et al., 2014). However, instability can also occur as far as young people's studies are concerned. Contact with reality is likely to lead them to change their original plan for what they want to study and what profession they will choose to do in the future (Galanaki & Amanaki, 2007/2008).

c) During this period, the individual focuses so much on herself, as in no other period of her life. The demands by parents and school during adolescence and the professional and family obligations of adult life, absorb the individual so that she does not have the opportunity to turn to herself and think about her. In contrast, young people during emerging adulthood may have the most time available for this, because their responsibilities are usually less. They have the opportunity to focus on themselves, a positive element according to Arnett (2004), because in this way they discover their potential, acquire useful skills for the future, both at the level of interpersonal and professional relationships, while learning to function as self-sufficient individuals and rely on their own abilities and strengths.

d) During this period, individuals have an in-between feeling, because they feel that they cannot identify themselves neither as adolescents nor as adults. In many cases, they are partially dependent on their parents, while they do not fully realize their ability to take responsibility and make independent decisions, elements that young people associate with adult life, because this ability is gradually acquired (Arnett et al., 2014). It is a slow process that is related to the aforementioned dimensions, since the instability observed, as well as the exploration of identity and self-focus that characterize emerging adulthood, require time and justify the almost ten-year duration of this developmental period.

e) It is a period full of possibilities and optimism. Young people, despite the difficulties they often have to manage, one of which is the economic crisis of recent years, have a positive attitude and high expectations for their future. Since they have not yet experienced the challenges

of 'real life' (Arnett, 2004, p. 16) and have not been forced to make important decisions, they feel optimistic and feel that they have a wide variety of choices, as well as many possible scenarios for their future (Galanaki & Amanaki, 2007/2008).

STUDENT MOBILITY AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

As shown by the description of the dimensions of emerging adulthood, during the process towards adult life it is necessary to process experience, become acquainted with oneself and acquire professional and social skills. Therefore, during the process towards adult life we should process experiences, through which we get to know ourselves, while at the same time we acquire general skills. According to Lintzeris & Karalis typology (2020), general skills refer to a set of skills, behaviours and attitudes considered important for life beyond school. This group is divided in three indicative subsections (cognitive skills of high level, socio-emotional, systemic) according to the nature and meaning of every skill. As the authors mention, the group of general skills 'includes a number of complex competencies, which combine theoretical knowledge acquired in the formal education context and practical skills acquired and developed from professional and social experience, throughout the full life course' (p. 10).

As Cranton points out, a person's life experiences, even if not directly related to the subject, are very important in his/her education and affect the way the person learns (2000, pp. 28-34). According to Dewey, the creation of educational experiences contributes to the development of learners, an element that is confirmed by relevant research (Taylor, 2007). In his work, Dewey inextricably links experience with education (1938/1980). More specifically, he develops the basic principles of experience and how through it humans attribute meaning, while pointing out that it is a lifelong process which is completely related to learning (Raikou, 2019; Raikou & Karalis, 2020).

All these processes towards adult life, in order to be able to take place in a fertile and functional way for the young adult, presuppose the parallel existence of reflective experiences and critical thinking (Raikou, 2014). On the other hand, if we consider the impact of the socio-cultural context on the development of emerging adulthood as described above, we shall understand the crucial role that the university plays as a social context in which the young person lives and is active. Especially in Greece, where the majority of young people are studying at university, this influence is decisive (Raikou & Karalis, 2010). The university framework could be seen as an intermediate stage between the family and the wider social context, contributing to the transition from full family dependence of adolescence to the autonomy of adulthood (Raikou, 2019).

But is the university a framework that provides significant learning experiences, which are opportunities for the development of reflective thinking (Raikou & Karalis, 2011)? According to Fink, it is (2003). However, if we focus on the subject of this text, the question that arises has to do with whether the Erasmus programme creates challenges and dilemmas – in the sense that Dewey raises the dilemma (Raikou, 2018) – to the participants and if the students' mobility experience constitute a significant learning experience for the participants. Therefore, as far as young people's developmental process to maturity is concerned, is the Erasmus mobility programme an experience that has a significant impact? In the present study we are interested in examining the influence that we assume is exerted on students who participate in the programme, through the prism of the five dimensions of emerging adulthood.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to search and highlight the characteristics of the emerging adulthood of Greek students who had participated in Erasmus mobility programmes during the last two years. Using a qualitative approach, it was attempted to analyze the experience of these students, regarding the dimensions of emerging adulthood. The main question was to trace whether and to what extent the participation of students in the mobility programme affects the degree and intensity of occurrence of the five dimensions of emerging adulthood and consequently whether it strengthens the young person's path to adulthood.

The chosen method for conducting the research was semi-structured interviews of 20 Greek university students of various disciplines (Humanities, Economics, Sciences, etc.). The recruitment of students was performed in a convenient way, while the research took place during July- October 2019. The research questionnaire contained 18 open-ended and closed-ended questions and it was developed by the researchers, based on the findings of previous researches they had conducted (Raikou & Karalis, 2007, 2010). The questions concerned motives and obstacles during their participation in mobility programmes, as well as the benefits they received from that experience, at an academic, personal and social level.

In the present study we will concentrate on the questions connected with the five dimensions of emerging adulthood. More specifically, the research questions that are examined concern the following: a) Which dimensions of emerging adulthood are highlighted through participation in the mobility programme and how are they described by this particular group of students? b) How is the student mobility programme related to emerging adulthood?

The participants were students of the University of Patras (11), National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (7) and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2). Regarding their gender, eleven were female and nine were male, while concerning their year of study, eight were in their third year, ten in their fourth year and two in their fifth. From the 20 participants, seven study at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, seven study at the School of Economics, four study at the School of Natural Sciences, one studies at the School of Legal Sciences and one studies at the School of Health Sciences.

The data collected were the students' responses concerning the experience of participating in the Erasmus mobility programme. In order to process the data, a qualitative analysis of the students' answers to the questions asked during the interview was performed. For data analysis, an analysis standard in three consecutive steps was followed. In the first step, the students' opinions are recorded by creating original categories, which were established through the analysis of their answers to the open-ended questions of the interview. From this analysis, categories emerged for every question that described the students' answers. Afterwards, these categories were matched with the dimensions of emerging adulthood, as described in the previous section, and finally the synthesis and detailed description of the characteristics of emerging adulthood for the group of students who participated in the mobility were conducted.

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section, the detailed description and identification of the characteristics of emerging adulthood are presented, as they emerge from the analysis of the responses of the participating students in the interview. The presentation of the results is done according to each dimension of

the emerging adulthood, determining the characteristics of the specific group, in order to highlight its peculiarities.

Dimension 1: Identity exploration

This is the period of identity exploration, during which young people try various possibilities about what kind of people they want to become and what kind of life they want to live, especially when it comes to their interpersonal relationships, work and ideology (Arnett, 2000, 2004).

The majority of the participants (17/20) state that they gained important knowledge through the Erasmus experience, while at the same time they worked on key issues related to the formation of their identity and the course of their lives in the future. These benefits concerned the acquisition of social skills mostly, which refer to intercultural, interpersonal and communicative elements of their personality. In particular, familiarization with and awareness of other cultures (11/20) were highlighted, as well as strengthening of their socialization (10), stating greater communication ease, in creating relationships and in understanding and empathizing with others.

In addition, another area that they consider to have been strengthened which, additionally, they were able to process through this experience, was the professional one, with the redefinition of their goals, as well as the acquisition of professional, technical and theoretical knowledge and skills. Specifically, 15/20 participants stated that the experience of mobility had a moderate to large effect on their professional preparation for the future. This effect is related to the employment perspective abroad, to the acquisition of specific professional skills (independence, self-confidence, discipline, flexibility) and to the clarification or even confirmation of their professional orientation.

Finally, they had the opportunity to become better acquainted with themselves and their potential, to broaden their horizons concerning their relationship with other people, as well as to process their role as individuals and European citizens. Regarding their perception of Europe and their European identity, the majority states that they have changed their minds after the experience of mobility (17/20). This change is related to the realization of the ease of movement within the European territory, as well as to the strengthening of the feeling that they themselves are European citizens, with common features and strong links among them. Some indicative thoughts of the participants are the following:

"I really think that the Erasmus programme helped me gain knowledge and skills at the interpersonal level, that is, I met many people from different countries who have different ways of thinking and living than my own, which helped me to open my horizons and to see some things differently. It also helped me become more communicative and outgoing, perhaps because I think I was a little more of an introverted person before Erasmus" (S11).

"I think that when you travel you learn new things, you learn yourself, you are more independent, you have more responsibility and that makes you a fuller and more complete person. You learn to trust as you live with strangers and to believe in your potential" (S4).

"Clearly the way I understand the concept of Europe and not only Europe but of the whole world has changed because I've met people from America, Latin America, etc. and it's been a huge experience because it's a completely different culture from us and you understand the way they think, the way they work, they have a completely different mentality. You realize that moving within Europe is much easier than traveling from Greece to another place" (S8).

"Well, I can't say I gained technical skills, but interpersonal yes. I began to reach out to people more easily, to be more comfortable using the English language, and to find it easier to socialize with people of foreign nationalities in general. This also applies to my

intercultural skills; it is easier for me to communicate with people who come from the other side of the world. As for professional skills, I would say that I gained them more indirectly because I became more independent and more confident in my abilities" (S18).

Dimension 2: Instability

It is a time of instability. The period of emerging adulthood is probably the most instable period of human life. It is the period during which frequent and continuous changes in love relationships and work take place (Arnett, 2000, 2004).

According to the answers of the participating students, after the experience of mobility abroad, the majority states greater confidence in their choices. There is an increase in responsibility and assuming duties (12/20), as well as clarification and stabilization regarding educational (16/20) and professional choices (14/20). Some indicative answers are:

"I think that yes, because going to a foreign university you understand that you want to do a postgraduate degree abroad or a Master's degree. Even before I wanted to continue my studies abroad, I just feel more sure now" (S9).

"Here in Greece, I did not take as many responsibilities as when I was abroad, because I live with my parents, so the responsibilities I have here are limited and concern my personal interest. However, I believe that living abroad for a few months has made me mature and autonomous because I am now looking for the opportunity to take on more responsibilities, regarding both personal matters and living" (S12).

"Yes, I feel more prepared, because it was a great preparation to do a work placement in a school for three months and it helped me in the sense that some time ago I looked for a job abroad and I received positive answers because I had participated in an Erasmus programme and it definitely played a role, but also the school itself made me a job offer to work there" (S15).

Dimension 3: Self-focus

It is the most self-focused period of a person's life. The period of emerging adulthood is when young people focus mainly on themselves, in the sense that they do not have many responsibilities and have very few daily tasks (Arnett, 2000, 2004).

The experience of living abroad seemed to enhance self-awareness and one's potential for the participating students. The change in the environment and the challenge of responding to different circumstances, pushed them to turn to themselves and realize the potential and characteristics of their personality. As we can see from the other dimensions, all the participants stated that they experienced a significant impact and change on a personal level, which mainly concerns increase of responsibility (12/20), undertaking of initiatives (18/20), strengthening self-confidence (19/20), independence and the use of opportunities.

As for general skills, they apply to all areas, cognitive, socio-emotional and systemic. In particular, regarding cognitive skills, we mainly identify the ability to solve problems and critical thinking (Lintzeris & Karalis, 2020, p. 8). In terms of socio-emotional general skills, a strengthening of all characteristics (sociability, communication, self-management and empathy) can be observed. Finally, from the systemic skills we mainly identify adaptability, responsibility and decision making. Some of the participants' views are as follows:

"I think it affected how I see myself and myself in general, for the better, made me stronger as a person, since I realized that I can make it on my own in many difficult situations without the help of anyone" (S5).

"I have set goals for my future and I think it is very important to know what you want, so that you can then set smaller goals and achieve them. One of my biggest goals is my future employment which will be greatly assisted by my participation in the Erasmus programme and the skills I picked up through it. Finally, I would like to travel much more than before and get to know different places and different people. I believe that I can achieve all these goals" (S20).

"I think this is the biggest change the Erasmus programme has made in my life, the fact that it changed the way I see myself and my abilities, because I realized through a lot of things, such as the fact that I was on my own for the first time, which can be very simple for others, I realized that I can be responsible for myself, communicate on my own and carry out the things that need to be done, from the simplest, such as cooking, up to something more complex, like paying a bill at a foreign power company for example. So, yes, I surely feel more confident, I know my limits and what I can do" (S19).

Dimension 4: Feeling in-between

It is the period when young people feel that they are in-between. During this period of their lives, young people cannot identify themselves neither as adolescents nor as adults, but somewhere in-between (Arnett et al., 2014).

In order to study the in-between feeling, we chose to explore the key concepts of responsibility, independence, self-confidence and undertaking initiatives. We believe that these concepts are directly related to whether the young person continues to be dependent on others and has characteristics that are typical of an adolescent or he is progressing to adulthood.

According to the research findings, 12/20 students state that their ability to take responsibility, at a professional, educational and personal level, has been enhanced. By way of illustration, they mention household responsibilities, professional obligations, academic requirements as well as management of their money. However, 5/20 state that they acted with the same degree of responsibility before the Erasmus programme mobility.

In addition, 11/20 students feel more independent and now rely on their strengths, compared to 3/20 who felt independent even before the Erasmus experience. However, 9/20 continue to rely financially on their parents, while 3/20 still state the need for support from their family and friends.

As for the effect on student confidence, 19/20 students state that it was enhanced after the Erasmus experience. The self-confidence they share refers mainly to issues concerning academic, professional and personal goals.

Finally, according to the answers, 18/20 students were encouraged to take initiatives, once again mostly on a personal, but also on a professional and academic level. By way of illustration, we mention the decision to establish a residence independent from parents, volunteering and socialization, finding a job, the choice of postgraduate studies, etc. Indicatively, we can mention the following thoughts of the participants:

"I think I'm encouraged after the Erasmus experience to take more initiatives such as starting to look for more jobs, having a more comprehensive view of the career opportunities that different jobs offer in different areas so that I can find the one that I consider more satisfying for me and my needs, and I also started looking for more seminars, postgraduate programmes to make sure that what I have chosen is definitely what I want and it will lead to the employment opportunities that I need. At the same time, I wanted to try to get into a programme where I can help many children who come to our country for Erasmus" (S5).

"During Erasmus, I went through the process of living alone, something I didn't do before since I live with my parents, so yes, I took on a lot of responsibilities there, especially on a personal level. When I returned to Greece, however, that changed as I continue to live with my parents and so I don't have the opportunity to take on any more responsibilities, although I am able to do so and I would like to do so" (S14).

"I believe that Erasmus makes you stand on your own two feet because you are alone, and you learn to survive without having your own people around. So you rely on your abilities to believe in yourself and not depend on others. We can all do it on our own, we just need a boost that I think Erasmus gives you" (S4).

Dimension 5: Possibilities & optimism

It is a time of possibilities and optimism, in which hopes grow and people have an unrepeatable opportunity to transform their lives (Arnett, 2000, 2004).

According to the research findings, general optimism was enhanced for 11/20 students and optimism for the professional development was enhanced for 14/20 students. As for general optimism, it mostly concerns the feeling for a better quality of life in the future and mainly abroad (10/20), as well as the achievement of personal goals (10/20). Regarding professional optimism, this is mainly due to the belief that the Erasmus experience will improve their CV (14/20), since practicing a foreign language abroad, as well as utilizing the knowledge and skills they acquired from the programme will strengthen their career path. Indicative examples of students' views are the following:

"My participation in the Erasmus programme adds something positive to my CV. This particular university where I studied has a very good 'reputation' in Europe, a very good level of professors so it will have a very good impact in the future when I find myself in a job interview. So yes, I think that if I achieve the other goals I have set, I will have a very good career path" (S13).

"In general, I am quite optimistic, and I believe that I will achieve my goals. The work part worries me, but I think everything will go well. My mind is free, and I hope things get better for everyone" (S6).

"I feel very optimistic about the future, I think things will come by themselves and that through the experience I have gained I will be able to cope with many situations, professional, etc., so I think it has helped me a lot" (S1).

"If I want to practice medicine abroad, yes, it will definitely help me because it is a programme that is very well known and in part certifies my ability, for example, that I can work in an environment beyond Greece" (S16).

CONCLUSIONS

The present research confirms the findings of our previous studies (Raikou & Karalis, 2007, 2010), that the Erasmus experience enhances the acquisition of knowledge and the development of participants' skills, while also fosters the processing and possible change of their attitudes towards other peoples in Europe as well. Examining these findings in relation to the developmental course of the students and the age phase of the emerging adulthood in which they are, we would say that there is a clear strengthening of its specific characteristics, which is due to the experience of mobility.

It is clear from the above analysis that important features of all dimensions of the emerging adulthood of the participating students are distinct and fell under relevant influence through the experience of student mobility. In an attempt to summarize the results in terms of the way emerging adulthood manifests itself to the students we studied, we would say that first of all, the exploration of identity is evident, both in its general social dimension and in its individual parameters such as that of professional, relational and European. Furthermore, processing of the ideology of the participants is also observed, especially with regard to the issues of interpersonal and intercultural relations.

Regarding the dimension of instability, we can see a decrease, as participating students show an increase in responsibility and assuming duties, and also clarification and stabilization of their choices. Moreover, all students manifest self-focus, as the experience of mobility has been a challenge for them but also an opportunity to turn to themselves and get to know their personality, while testing their abilities, but also by providing themselves with important skills. Respectively, the in-between feeling has decreased, due to the challenges that young people have to face in a foreign country on their own, by strengthening initiatives and increasing responsibility, although in many cases financial dependence on the family remains. Finally, the feeling of optimism and possibilities is quite evident in the answers of most students, while special emphasis is given to the increased professional opportunities that they believe they will have.

It seems, therefore, that the Erasmus student mobility programme strengthens the path to adulthood, because it pushes students to gradually shape their social and professional identity, as well as to take responsibility and take initiatives and decisions. And even though before mobility they are found closer to adolescence (more intense instability, feeling in-between, etc.), after the mobility they take a step towards maturity. As the literature points out, boosting autonomy and self-esteem combined with a secure attachment style, protects young people from difficulties in socializing and possible symptoms of depression during adulthood (Germani et al., 2020). However, the intensity and degree to which participants in the research go through their development process is different from person to person, depending, as we have seen in the literature (Arnett, 2000), on the sociocultural context in which they live, both during the period of mobility abroad as well as during the preceding and following period in Greece.

As a result, the kind of experience they have at the Erasmus programme acts as a catalyst for the emerging adulthood of the participants. The findings of the research confirm the view that experiential learning offers opportunities for the development of general skills. After all, as Lintzeris & Karalis (2020) point out, most of them are not developed nor activated, or at least to such a great extent, as much through formal education solely, as through other, mostly experiential, learning environments. According to the above findings, student mobility and the experience of living and studying in another country could therefore be considered as such a learning context. It is a framework that combines formal education with non-formal education to a significant extent, enhancing the development of young people's skills, especially at a critical time in their lives like emerging adulthood.

Therefore, student mobility could be considered as a significant learning experience that creates challenges and fosters students' developmental process to adulthood. However, if we take into account that significant learning experiences are related to the development of reflective processes, it would help even more if opportunities for reflective consideration of this experience were provided, either during the time at the foreign university or immediately after, at the home university. This is because if a lived experience is to lead us to learning, it is necessary to be accompanied by reflective consideration (Richert, 1991). Therefore, at university, which is in any

case a socio-cultural framework that has a significant impact on the development of young people (Raikou & Karalis, 2010), especially during the phase of emerging adulthood (Raikou, 2019), it is important to use the aforementioned Erasmus experience reflectively, in order to provide a comprehensive significant learning experience to the participating students.

In conclusion, it could be argued that, although this study results in the description of the dimensions in the context of Erasmus student mobility, it is considered necessary to explore these dimensions on a larger scale and with weighted research tools in order draw safer conclusions.

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