

**ERASMUS STUDENTS IN PORTUGAL: THE PERCEPTION AND THE
IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL CRISIS**

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Abstract: Studies on social representations already seem to be relatively common in the field of Social Sciences. However, the particular circumstances being experienced throughout Europe as a result of the international crisis seem to bring with it new possibilities for analysis. It is in this context that falls this present analysis in which are presented the preliminary results of a larger study on the perception and experience of Erasmus students in Portugal within the economic environment in which we live in. Thus, we intend to initially assess the extent the financial crisis has had impact on the motivations and expectations of those students, later to suggest an interpretative model of these results. From a conceptual standpoint, we supported this analysis in international studies and on migratory phenomena studies. In terms of methodology we chose to carry out a questionnaire then subjected to statistical analysis.

Key words: students, Erasmus, financial crisis, perception, narratives, Portugal

JEL Codes: O52

1. Introduction:

The aims of this study are to understand the students ERASMUS perceptions in the relocation from their countries to Portugal and to evaluate if economic crisis is regarded as a phenomenon which could disturb their integration and adaptation to the hosts' contexts.

For this purpose, questionnaires were designed to be applied to the different ERASMUS students at ISMAI.

Given the objectives, it becomes important to recover, albeit in a brief way, some concepts such as social, stigma or stereotype representation. As "images constructed on the real" (Minayo, 1994: 108), social representations are an important methodological tool. A social representation can be defined as a system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: to establish an order that individuals can orient themselves and master their material and social world; and to allow the existence of communication between members of a community which start to have a code for social change and for the clear designation and classification of different aspects of their world and their individual and group history (Moscovici, 1973: 17).

Social representations are the result of a process of collective elaboration, socially shared, contributing to the construction of an identity (Jodelet, 2001).

By placing the individual in his social and historical context, the social representations theory stresses data that integrate networks of meanings with impact on the

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reconstruction of the senses which in turn affect behavior and communication processes.

The concept of stigma (Goffman, 1986) is also particularly interesting in this context as it resulting always from a condition that escapes normality it is fundamental in the construction of identities (group and individual). In fact, the issue of stigma allows us to understand how individual identities always end up being marked by the weight difference.

As for stereotypes, as stresses Vilela (2001), its entry in the field of social sciences dates from 1922, the year that Walter Lippmann sets it with images in our head. Later, Sociology would recover the term to name the representations that different social groups had made on regard to the third party and that had an impact on the way they interacted with each other. The word, of interdisciplinary usage and multiple and diffuse sense, leads us then to notions of image, representation, (pre)concept and categorization.

Giddens (1997) considers that the crisis of modernity arises mainly from a change in values which, in turn, sets up the change of the *status quo* of the traditions that promote the standardization of social life. For this author, the appearance of post-traditional social order lies in the context of a globalizing and culturally cosmopolitan society. Globalization is a complex phenomenon and "(...) a complex mixture of processes that often operate in a contradictory way, producing conflicts, disarticulations and new forms of stratification" (Giddens, 1994: 11).

Also to Castells (1999), the globalization process is one of the factors that has more promoted the accelerated change in recent decades. Globalization is a multidimensional process that could encompass six main and interrelated dimensions: economic, political, military, ecological-environmental, cultural and social.

Thus, local and even personal activities, relating to the daily lives of individuals, can be influenced or determined by distant events or institutions, constituting a dynamic of global interdependence.

Harvey (1992) and Castells (1999) perceive globalization as a phenomenon that alters the visions of time and space, since we are witnessing an accelerating trend of the pace of life, a conquest of spatial barriers and we have the perception of shortening of space and time. It is a new form of society, a network society, promoted mainly by the implementation of new technologies whose role was crucial in the spread of ideas and values.

"This is the time of the new, new culture, new economy, new media, new knowledge, new policies, new science" (Carneiro, 2001: 23).

According to Giddens, dialogic democracy offers the only alternative to what he calls the politics of life, which concerns to lifestyles, in a post-traditional society representing the opportunity to develop authentic forms of human life, not linked to normative truths (Giddens, 1994, 1996, 1997).

It is noticed that what is presented to the human collective is a world of uncertainty and risk. This does not mean that there was no risks to life previously, but that the origins and extent of these risks, in modernity, are considerably modified, bringing a component of unpredictability.

Modernity has brought an unwavering faith in the steady material progress and the idea that, as a collective, the more mankind takes ownership of physical and social reality, the more able will be to control it and use it for his own interest, but the unpredictability has emerged as a vulnerability factor in this belief (Beck, 1997).

This society has risks whose consequences are unknown and drives the individual to make choices every day, in a context of great unpredictability (Innerarity, 2004/2009).

Nowadays, we're living the time of complexity. We search the meaning of life, because we move through uncertainty. We don't know our common future. Some authors have some answers offered by different ways to understand the society. Many studies intend to understand the maintenance of social contemporaneity. We have already referred Beck's vision (1992) about the risk society, however we must also refer Innerarity (2004/2009) who thinks that it's difficult to preview to where humanity walks within a scenario of uncertainty and invisibility; others, like Zygmunt Bauman writes about a fragmented (1995), individualized (2001) and under siege (2002) society, and Castoriadis (2007) have the perception of adrift. Lyotard, (1989), Gidens (1997) or Castells (1999) describe the post-modern society characterized by the loss of tradition and change of values. Lipovetsky (1989/2006) refers a hypercomplex, a hyperconsumption society in which emerge the empty individual.

The transition corresponding to any event that results in a change of relationships, routines and roles of a person and that may affect the idea or concept about himself and the world around him (Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995, in Pine and Ferreira, 2002), is always based on an adaptation, which in turn, may be affected by the interaction of three sets of variables: the individual's perception on the transition, the characteristics of contexts before and after transition and the characteristics of the individual which experiences the transition.

Schlossberg (*in ibid*) tells us of four sets of factors that influence the way to deal with the transition, which are: Situation (e.g. what precipitated the transition? Occurs in a "good" or a "bad" moment? What is its duration? Are there any other sources of stress present?); *Self* (eg, socioeconomic status, gender, age, health...); Support (e.g. intimate relationships, family, friends, institutions...) and Strategies (e.g. *coping strategies* that change the situation, that control the significance of the problem, that help to deal with stress ...).

It is in this conceptual framework that can be seen as potential situations of transition experiences related to ERASMUS mobility, not only by changes it produce (eg, at the level of activities and daily responsibilities) but also by constant adaptations it require (eg, at the level of study strategies and relationships with colleagues and teachers), and that can be evaluated as positive or negative aspects, depending on the individual characteristics and resources. According to Caíres and Almeida (2001) this transition is complex and involves processes which are often difficult: geographical and emotional separation from the community of origin to the host community, validation of their ability at the host country university and involvement in the academic and social activities.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) argue that the age of the young adult is a period in which resides the identity development, a peculiar period of psychosocial transition, transformations, challenges of all kinds: ideological, vocational, professional, social,

emotional and sexual. Despite these challenges, these authors have an optimistic view considering that growth is the natural result of the confrontation with the environment eventualities, being in this perspective that this study fits.

The self-concept, according to Pereira (2004), is the perception that an individual has about himself, in the most varied facets, whatever they are social, emotional, physical or academic, corresponding to the whole self-esteem and positive and negatives feelings that each individual relates to himself as a result of their experiences. This author adds that the image that one has of oneself is the result of his personal life experience, being its construction a complex process of construction of the personal structure. The way a person perceives and evaluates may condition the way he relates to the other, and in this way their ability to adapt to new contexts.

Marsh and Shavelson (1985, in Pereira, 2004) argue that the assessment that is made for the self-concept construction is based on evaluations of others meanings, being the credibility of the appraiser a determinant key of the value that has its evaluation.

A fundamental concept for the self-concept construction is the self-efficacy, that is, the belief in being able to organize cognitively, behaviorally and socially their skills in the sense of their outlined objectives (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura (1997), *coping efficacy* points to the fact that an individual has confidence in their ability to handle and / or manage complex and difficult situations. A key factor is the linguistic difficulty, not only in the difficulty of understanding the syllabus, but also by the fact that they lead to an inhibition situation that restricts a proactive attitude. This limitation not only impairs participation in the learning process, but also impairs the participation in the new social context, including socializing with people of the host country.

Pinheiro and Ferreira (in Pouzada *et al* , 2002) say that the process of transition and adaptation can be accompanied by feelings of loneliness and depression as well as fatigue behavior, emotional and behavioral disorganization.

Vasquez and Garcia-Vasquez (1995, in *ibid*) and Young and colleagues (1994, in *ibid*) highlight a specific type of stress - acculturation stress - ie stress implicated by the effort that these students do to change their behaviors and values in order to adapt to a new culture.

Adapting to a new culture entails, often in these students, a sense of nostalgia for the household and country of origin as well as a feeling of discomfort and disorientation in the new place, and a new culture may precipitate anxiety, since we can see the loss of familiar signs and symbols, a lack of benchmarks, namely of social norms and rules to guide their actions and understand the behavior of others.

However, transition can also enhance personal growth as it promotes the adoption of new values, attitudes and behaviors. There are many advantages to these students to do, not only a prior work (prior leaving the country of origin) in promoting personal self-knowledge, but also to do a work of disclosure of the institutions to which they apply, as well as knowledge promotion of host societies.

The encounter with other cultures is an opportunity for reorganize cultural identity. The confrontation with another culture, especially when it comes to living in a strange country, implies a questioning of self and other.

It will be most likely that these students, as temporary immigrants, develop more accommodation strategies, in order to keep past, which are intended to regain in a no

so far future, assuming a relationship with the others without deep identity transformations, particularly with regards to cultural identity.

"The perception and social influence pass effectively by interactions between individuals or between groups" (Leyens & Yzerbyt, 2004: 13). This statement finds already its plea in our genetic heritage. Moreover, as highlights H. Wallace (1946): "The individual is eminently a social being. He is, not as a result of outside contingencies but by inner need. He is genetically social" (cit. by Leyens & Yzerbyt, 2004: 22). We were born with a genetic load/ heritage that leads us necessarily to the other, this heritage is essential to personality development and formation. We are beings in relation, the same as saying that the other imposes on us as "vital necessity". We are born dependent on others and the whole route or social life will go on interdependence (Leyens & Yzerbyt, 2004), which is justified, in philosophical terms "beings in relation", psychological terms (genetically) and social terms (need of the other for developing hereditary potentialities). Thus, the existence or formation of different types of groups also imposes itself as a genetic need. Thereby, as stated by Neto (2000: 507), one of the fundamental questions in group psychology regards to the explanation of group formation, ie, regards to the explanation of the reasons why we come together as a group.

In this sense, "(...) a person can join a group to achieve goals that they could not achieve working alone (...) groups may consist to ways of satisfying human needs and to obtain social rewards, such as approval, belonging, prestige, compliment, love or friendship (...)" (Neto, 2000: 507).

Mackie and Goethals (1987) suggest the existence of objectives that can be attained by groups: utilitarian, which are related to the needs of the group in money, fulfillment, influence, etc.; knowledge, which are related to obtain information, knowledge or shared consensus about reality among group members. Groups can also help members to achieve a social identity, providing a definition recognized by a consensual way and an assessment of who you are, how to behave and how to be treated by others. Thus, groups promote a reduction in subjective uncertainty. In addition, since we and the others evaluate us given the relative attractiveness, desirability and prestige of the groups to which we belong, we are motivated to come together to groups that are evaluated positively by consensual way and that will propitiate a positive social identity.

Leyens and Yzerbyt (2004: 26) refer that "anxiety, gregariousness and social comparison" are inseparable and fundamental concepts in certain social contexts.

As the same authors emphasize "anxiety provokes the desire to be with others, but not with any others", and so this concept also extends to the concept of "social comparison" that is a process in which people come in an almost automatic way (Gilbert and others, 1995, cit. by Leyens & Yzerbyt, 2004: 28) and that they use for several purposes: to feel confident in their opinions, to relieve what is possible, to increase self-esteem or to get protected against influence.

The ERASMUS reality configures, in a way, the referred assertions. The comparison with the others allows each one to be defined as subject at the same time unique and similar to the other and speaks directly to the problems posed by the globalization of culture, allowing thinking "what is the weight of world cultures" (Warnier, 2000: 9).

As points out the same author (*ibid*: 10-11), all culture-tradition is tied to a particular historically and geographically situated society, not being able to live or transmit independently from society. Reciprocally, there is no society without its own culture, and we can say that every culture is socialized. This consideration, far from simplifying the analysis, makes it even more complex.

Language and culture configure the identity, meaning identity as a set of repertoires of action, language and culture that make an individual recognize their dependence on a particular social group. Identity, however, depend not only birth or choices made by individuals (Warnier, 2000). It is considered more relevant to speak of identification since this is contextual and floating. In the framework of the globalization of culture, the same individual can take multiple identifications that mobilize different elements of language, culture, religion, depending on context. "Individual and collective identification by the culture has as its corollary the production of otherness in relation to groups whose culture is different" (Warnier, 2000:13). The contact between different communities can elicit different reactions: idealization of another; attraction; contempt and misunderstanding, and sometimes rejection that can lead to contours of xenophobia. The culture and identification have a crucial role when proposing repertoires of action and representation ready to be implemented, allowing players to behave according to the norms of the group. By doing so, the actors affirm their dependency, when moving up on their own, as well as the conflicts of power and interests that oppose to the other actors. The repertoires give meaning to action. The languages and cultures change because they are immersed in the turbulence of history, leading us to reflect upon diversification and diversity of cultures and fundamentally about the importance of intercultural contacts that enable and justify the reality and mobility of Erasmus students.

Study results:

This study intends to understand if and how the present financial crisis, that Portugal is facing, changes the perceptions the Erasmus students have about the country.

Having this objective in mind, a questionnaire was prepared using open questions so that each respondent could express his/her opinion without any constraint. Posteriorly, they were handed to a group of Erasmus Students at a Portuguese University. We have received and analysed 35 questionnaires which have been filled in by a randomly selected group of Erasmus students at ISMAI - Instituto Superior da Maia.

This questionnaire gathered information regarding:

- When and how the students heard about Portugal for the first time;
- What the students thought about Portugal before arriving;
- Why they have chosen Portugal as their Erasmus destination;
- What they now think about Portugal;
- Their opinion about the Portuguese financial and economic crisis;
- How they see the future of Portugal.

The average age of the students in this group is 22 years old, having the younger student 20 and the older 28 years old. They are taking several different bachelor degrees at their home university, namely degrees in administration, human resources, public relations, advertisement, psychology, library information science, sports and

tourism. The group is mainly built by women that represent 65% of the total number of respondents (Figure 1).

The group of respondents has students from several different European countries (Figure 2). The biggest slices come from Spain and Poland (29% each). There is also an important presence of other East European nationalities (also 29%), Romanian (14%), Slovakian (8%) and Slovenian (6%). There are also students from Italy (8%) and Turkey (6%).

Figure 1 – Gender

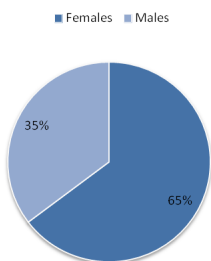
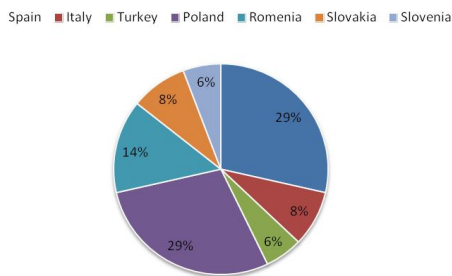
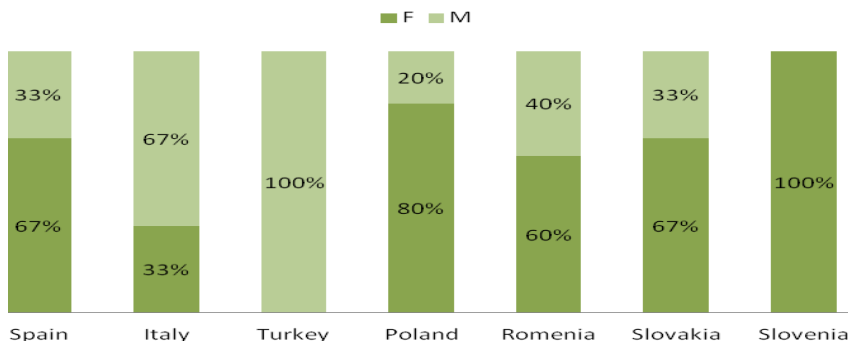


Figure 2 – Home Countries



The analysis of the respondents by nationality (Figure 3) allows us to observe that there were more women than men in all countries except for Italy and Turkey. Besides, the group of students from Turkey were all males, while the group from Slovenia were just girls.

Figure 3 – Gender by Nationality

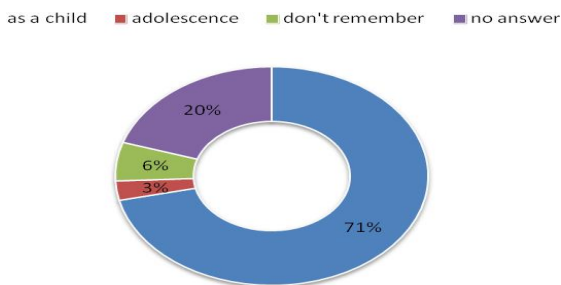


When and how the students heard about Portugal for the first time

When asked **when they heard about Portugal** for the first time (Figure 4), most students referred to have heard about it when they were **children** (71% of the respondents). A small percentage (3%) answered it was during their adolescence. Finally more than a quarter of the students did not answered (20%) or said not to remember (6%).

The analysis of these results by gender, allow us to conclude that 65% of the women and 84% of men have said to know Portugal since their *childhood*. This difference is explained by the fact that more women (35%) than men (8%) did not remember or have not answered the question. Only male students (8%) have mentioned to hear about Portugal for the first time when they were adolescents.

Figure 4 – When students heard about Portugal for the first time



Regarding *how they heard about Portugal* for the first time, most students referred to have heard about it when they were *at school* (57% of respondents). A lower percentage said they heard about it at home with family and relatives (14%). Other answers included the proximity to home country (only for Spanish students), the media and the internet, maps, football matches, tourism trips, and friends. Table 1 shows the list of answers to this question and the percentage of students that have chosen them. The sum of the percentages on this table, like on the Tables that follow, does not equal 100%, since some respondents gave more than one answer.

Table 1 – How students heard about Portugal for the first time

ANSWER	FREQUENCY OF THE ANSWER
geography and/or history classes at school	57%
home with family and relatives	14%
proximity to home country (Spain)	11%
do not remember	9%
through the media or internet	6%
on a map	6%
through football matches	3%
on tourism	3%
through friends	3%

By gender, the answers to this question did not show a significant difference. 59% of women and 58% of men have said they have learned about Portugal at school for the first time. In the analysis by country of origin stands out the difference between the Spanish and the rest of the students. Nearly all Spanish students referred to have known Portugal ‘since always’ (30% of the Spanish respondents) or since they were children (60%). The remaining (10%) have not answered the question. These respondents answered to have heard about Portugal for the first time at home (30%) and at school (20%). They have also mentioned the importance of the geographical proximity between these two neighbour countries as a form to first know Portugal (40%). Other mentioned forms were tourism and friends. Most of the Italian (67%) and East European (80%) respondents answered they have learned about Portugal for the first time at the elementary history and/or geography lessons at school. The remaining students from Italy did not answer the question while students from East Europe also reported to have heard about Portugal at home through their families or through the

media and the internet. Finally, Portugal has become known to Turkish students during their childhood through football or through a map.

What the students thought about Portugal before arriving

The answers to the questionnaires concerning the students’ expectations about the country before arriving (Table 2) mainly referred to the idea of a *beautiful* country, with a lot of *sun* and *warm* weather, close to the *ocean* and with good *surfing* spots (49% of the total number of respondents have chosen one or more than one of these elements). The reference to these images was particularly dominant in East European countries (Figure 5). More than a quarter (26%) of the answers mentioned the anticipation of a country *similar to Spain*. To this result there was a significant contribution of the Spanish students together with a smaller influence of the Italian (Figure 5). There was also an important allusion to the *Portuguese people* that was characterised as nice, kind, friendly, smiling and polite (23%). It is also worth mention the fact that a small percentage of students (11%), namely East European female students, mentioned the idea of an *‘easy-going’ life-style*. Finally, there were a few more not so frequently mentioned elements in the questionnaires. These concerned aspects such as the *level of living*, the idea of *fun and parties* and the impression of an *interesting, fascinating* country or a *great and developed* state.

Table 2 – Main ideas about Portugal prior to arrival

ANSWER	FREQUENCY OF THE ANSWER
warm, sun, ocean, surf spots	49%
similar to Spain	26%
kind, friendly, polite people	23%
interesting, fascinating country	11%
life without rush	11%
not too expensive to live in	6%
great and very developed country	6%
fun and parties	6%

When analysed by gender, the answers to this question show that the idea of a warm, sunny country by the ocean was slightly more prevalent on female (50%) than male students (42%). Women (27%) also were more prone to emphasise the qualities of the Portuguese than man respondents (17%).

As mentioned, both some Spanish and some Italian students stated that before arriving to Portugal, they thought Portugal was similar to Spain. In fact, 80% of the Spanish students have reported to see Portugal before their arrival as a similar country with the same culture and weather and a similar language. Likewise, the only idea pointed out by Italian students, concerning their perspective about Portugal prior to their arrival, was the expectation that it would be the same as Spain. Spaniards also referred to the Portuguese level of living as being not very expensive and the kindness of the Portuguese people, among other aspects that were not frequently mentioned.

The idea of a beautiful, warm country was shared by East European (75% of respondents from East Europe mentioned it) and Turkish students. Before arriving to Portugal, Turkish students saw Portugal as a warm country (50%) with a polite people

(50%). The Polish students saw it as a beautiful, warm country bathed by the ocean (80%), with a smiling friendly people (40%) and where life is lived without rush (20%). Romanian students also referred to the weather and beauty of the country (60%). They have also said to think Portugal was a great and very developed country (40%). They believed it to be an interesting and fascinating country with a different culture, a beautiful language and many tourist attractions (40%). All students from Slovenia thought it was a sunny, warm and beautiful country with good spots for surf, an 'easy-going' lifestyle and with a kind people.

Reasons for choosing Portugal

The principal reasons for choosing Portugal as their Erasmus destination (Table 3) were meaningfully related to the prior conjectures the students had about the country. Those reasons were related to the *weather*, the *ocean* and the *beauty* of the country (pointed out by 37% of the students), the *proximity and similarities* to the home country (23%), the wish to learn the *Portuguese language* (11%). There were also other reasons such as the desire to know the *western life style* (14%), the interest in the *Portuguese culture, architecture and history* (9%), the perception of Portugal as a country where is *not too expensive* to live in (9%) and the influence of *friends* (9%). Some students (11%) also answered Portugal was their *only available option* to join the Erasmus program. Other factors were mentioned in a few answers but they were not considered relevant since they were not sufficiently frequent (two or less students have pointed them out).

Table 3 – Main reasons for choosing Portugal

ANSWER	FREQUENCY OF THE ANSWER
warm, ocean, beauty of the country	37%
proximity and similarities to home country	23%
know western lifestyle	14%
learn Portuguese	11%
only option	11%
Portuguese culture, architecture and history	9%
not too expensive	9%
friends	9%

The analysed by gender shows that the climate, the Atlantic and the beauty of the country were more decisive for men (50% of the total of male respondents) than for women (32%). Men were also more influence by factors such the opinion of friends (17%) and the choice of the best academic option (17%). Women (32% of the total of female respondents), in particular Spanish women, were more susceptible to the close distance to and the similarities with their home country than men (8%). Female respondents (23%), namely East European female students, were also more influenced by the curiosity to know the western way of life.

When analysed by place of origin, there were significant differences in the answers. Most Spanish students have chosen Portugal as their Erasmus destination due to its proximity both geographical and cultural (mentioned by 80% of the Spanish

respondents). It was also important the fact that life in Portugal is seen as not too expensive (30%). These arguments were mainly predominant among Spanish women.

There were several reasons pointed out by Italian respondents as determinants of the choice for Portugal as their Erasmus destination. These were a previous trip through Portugal, the fact that it was the ‘best country’ among those that could be picked, the ocean, the language and the beauty of the country. The Atlantic Ocean seems to have attracted the curiosity of Italians, probably because their country is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea.

Turkish students justify their choice for Portugal by saying that was the best option available to them. Portugal was referred to be among the preferred destinations, together with the North European countries, Norway, Ireland, Sweden, Holland and Denmark.

Polish students referred their curiosity about the Portuguese way of living (20%) and interested in the Portuguese culture, traditions and architecture (20%) as reasons for their option. They also referred the wish to learn the Portuguese language (30%) as a motive of their choice.

The other East European students elected Portugal as their Erasmus destination mainly due to its geography. The warm weather and the ocean were pointed out by 40% of those students as a reason for their choice. Also important in their option, was the fact that Portugal is a distant, western country with a different lifestyle and a different ‘vision about everything’ (pointed out by 30% of those students). The Portuguese history and traditions (10%) have also influenced their option.

What they now think about Portugal

There is a very long list of representations of Portugal for these students (Table 4).

Table 4 – Images of Portugal after arrival

ANSWER	FREQUENCY OF THE ANSWER
warm, sun, surf, ocean, beaches	46%
gastronomy	46%
wine	34%
nice, helpful, kind, friendly, chill, smiling people	31%
wonderful sightseeing and monuments	31%
night life, party/fun	26%
football	26%
Portuguese culture and traditions	23%
Douro and Ribeira	17%
olives, fish, sea food	14%

The most important of those seem to be the *sunny warm weather*, the *ocean*, the *beaches* and *surf* (46% of the students referred one or more of those elements) side by side with the Portuguese *gastronomy* (46%) where the typical ‘francesinha’ from Oporto, a hot sandwich with beef, sausage, ham, cheese and a special dressing, takes the lead. Also important is the Portuguese *wine* (34%) where the Port wine stands out. The perceived characteristics of the *Portuguese people* are another important reference

of the country (31%) as well as the sightseeing and monuments which are considered to be wonderful (31%). The *night life* and *football* (each mentioned by 26% of the respondents) are significant images of the country as well. Also referred were the Portuguese *culture* and *traditions* - including the Portuguese language, the urban popular song 'fado' which is one of UNESCO's world intangible cultural heritages, the feeling 'saudade' and bullfights (23% of the respondents have referred one or more of those elements). The UNESCO's world heritage site of Ribeira by the River Douro (17%), the olives, the fish and the sea food (14%) are all present at that list, among several other elements not so frequently mentioned by respondents (three or less students have pointed them out).

For Spanish students, gastronomy seems to be the more important of those elements (80% of the Spanish students have mentioned it). The 'francesinha' shows up repetitively in their questionnaires, as well as codfish. Towels and sheets (40%) are also frequently mentioned in particular by women. Other representations include sightseeing and tourism (40%), the idea of 'parties' and 'fun' (40%), Ribeira and the River Douro (30%), as well as 'fado' (20%). Other varied elements were mentioned yet none of them repeated itself frequently.

For Italian students, the list of representations for Portugal includes monuments like the iconic Lello Library, the Bridge D. Luís I, designed by Gustave Eiffel, in the 19th century and the oldest part of Porto, Ribeira. It also reflects some elements of the Portuguese academic tradition like the famous *café* Piolho, close to the centenarian main building of Porto University and the academic city of Coimbra where the oldest Portuguese university is settled since the 13th century. Fado, Port wine and Surf are also present side by side at this list.

Amid the list of representations of Portugal for Turkish students appears the church, the organisation of the cities, the high consumption of beer, the kindness of the Portuguese people, the rain, the ocean, and the forest. The concern about preserving the Nature was also mentioned, probably due to a trip that was organised by the University to the National Park of Gerês.

There is a long diversified list of representations of Portugal for Polish students. At first place, Portuguese natural conditions, resources and products such as the sun, the warm weather, the ocean (80%), the fish, the sea food, the olives (50%) and the wine (40%) seem to be important symbols of the country for these students. The kindness and friendly ways of the Portuguese people (40%) also seem to be an important image of the country. Finally, football (40%), namely F.C. Porto and Cristiano Ronaldo, is too an important representation of Portugal. Once again, there were several other aspects present in this group of questionnaires but none of those was mentioned very frequently (only two or less students have referred them).

Portuguese gastronomy seems to be the more important representation of Portugal for the other East European students since it is referred by 60% of the students. The Portuguese wine and in particular Port wine are also referred by the majority of students (50%). The warm weather, the ocean, the sunny beaches and the surf, as well as, the kindness and friendliness of the Portuguese people are also mentioned by 50% of these respondents, among other not so significant aspects.

The students' opinion about the Portuguese financial and economic crisis: Analysing the answers to this question (Table 5), one may conclude that more than one

third (34%) of the Erasmus students, which responded to this study’s questionnaire, think that the Portuguese financial and economic crisis is *the same that affects their home* countries. Female respondents were more prone to give this answer than were their male colleagues (36% vs. 25% respectively). This was also the response given by 1/3 of Italians, 70% of Spaniards and 20% of East Europeans (namely Polish and Slovenian). A smaller percentage (9%) of the total of respondents believes the crisis is *not as bad as it is at their country of origin*. Examining this answer by country of origin, one may conclude that this was only given by Italians, Romanians and Slovenians and that it was more prevalent on men (17% vs. 5% on women). Simultaneously, another even smaller portion (6%) of respondents thinks the Portuguese crisis *is worse* than it is at their homeland. This answer was given only by Spanish women.

Table 5 – Opinions about Portuguese crisis

ANSWER	FREQUENCY OF THE ANSWER
same as home country	34%
better than home country	9%
worse than home country	6%
have not notice it	20%
do not know/ no answer	14%
other answers	17%

One fifth of the students replied that they *have not yet noticed* the crisis in Portugal. This answer was given mostly by men (25% vs. 18% on women). The analysis by nationality showed that Italian and East European students had given this reply.

How students see the future of Portugal.

A large part of the students involved in this study did not answer this question or said not to have an idea about what to expect for the future of Portugal (43%). Table 6 lists the answers received in this question and the frequency of those answers as a percentage of the total number of questionnaires completed. Like in previous questions, the sum of these percentages might not sum up 100% since some students gave more than one answer.

45% of those who did reply the question were *optimistic* about the future of Portugal. 15% of them have said to believe that it will be better than at their homeland while 10% think it will be the same. Only 5% of those who replied were pessimistic.

Table 6 – Opinions about the future of Portugal

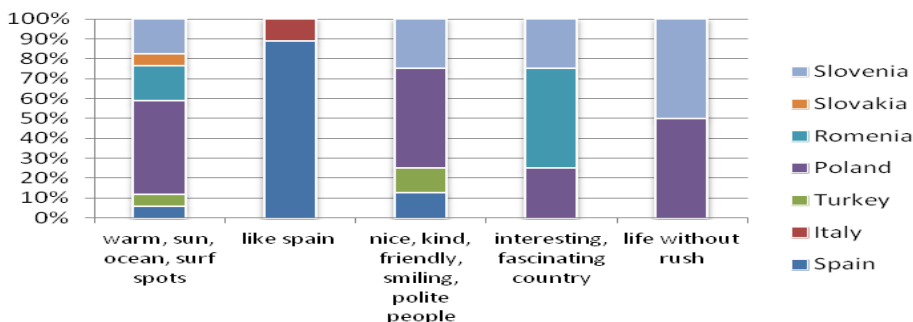
ANSWER	FREQUENCY OF THE ANSWER
optimistic	26%
pessimistic	3%
same as Europe	3%
same as home	6%
better than at home	9%
do not know/ no answer	43%
other	14%

When analysing the answers by country, one concludes that 50% of the Spanish respondents haven't answered this question or have said to have no idea about the future of Portugal. 20% think the future in Portugal will be the same as in Spain while 30% are optimistic it will succeed. Likewise, all Italian students that have answer this question, are optimistic about Portugal's future. The Turkish students think the future will be better because the country is making an effort to solve its problems. Also they seem to believe Portugal is not sufficiently known abroad. In their opinion, if Portugal was better known outside its borders, its future would be better. When questioned about the Portuguese future, 50% of Polish students have not answered or have said 'not to have an idea', 30% are optimistic and 10% have said it to be dependent on the Portuguese youth's will to help its country. Finally, 30% of the other East Europeans believe that the future of Portugal will be better than their countries'.

Study conclusions:

This study has concluded that prior to their arrival the most frequent image of Portugal held by the Erasmus students, which have filled in the questionnaires, was that of a *warm sunny* country that is close to the **ocean**. This image was especially predominant in the answers given by East European students (Figure 5). The second most frequent answer attained to this question was that of country very *similar to Spain*, to which contributed the opinion of the Spanish themselves and also the Italian students. Thirdly, the characteristics of the *Portuguese people* perceived as being nice, kind and friendly were also significantly present in the answers. According to the answers, this image was held mainly by Polish and Slovenian but also by Spanish and Turkish. The idea of an interesting and fascinating country due to its language, history and tourist attractions together with that of a country where life is lived without rush were the forth more frequent answers. These two images of Portugal were exclusively held by East European respondents.

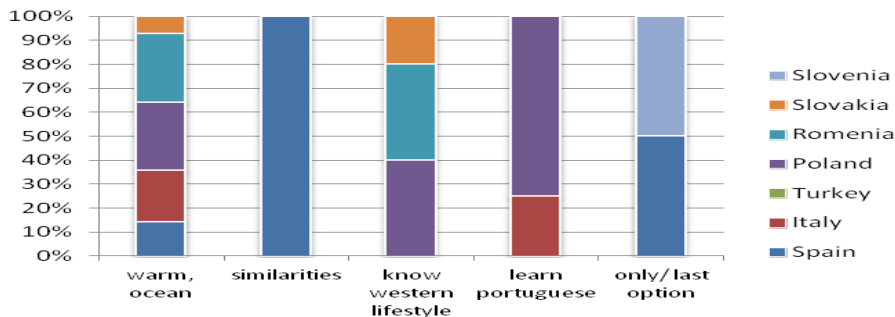
Figure 5 – Main ideas about Portugal prior to arrival: weight of each country on the total number of answers



In this group of students, the most important reason which encouraged the choice of Portugal as their Erasmus host country was the *weather* and the *Atlantic Ocean*. Excluding Turkish and Slovenian students, at least one of these elements was pointed out by every other nationality (Figure 6). The second most mentioned justification was the *geographical proximity* and *similarities* with the students' home country. Inevitably, this reason was exclusively given by Spaniards. To know the *western life style* was the third most frequent answer to this question which, not surprisingly, was given only by East European students. The wish to *learn Portuguese* expressed by

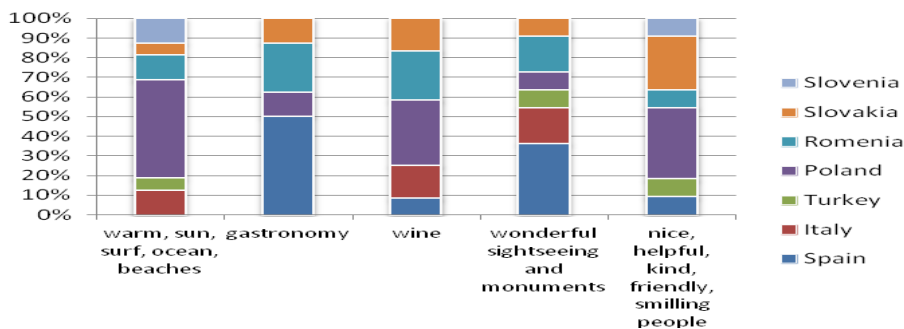
Italians and Polish was the fourth most frequent answer to this question. With the same number of answers was the fact that Portugal was the *only available option* as a host country for some students.

Figure 6 – Main reasons for choosing Portugal as the Erasmus destination: weight of each country on the total number of answers



Presently, the main images of Portugal held by this group of students are somewhat different from those held before arrival (Figure 7).

Figure 7 – Main images of Portugal after arrival: weight of each country on the total number of answers



The idea of a *warm* country with *sun*, *ocean*, is still one of the most frequently mentioned. Except for the Spanish, every other nationality has pointed out one or more of these elements. Also belonging to the top 5 frequent answers is the *kindness and friendliness* of the Portuguese that is referred by every nationality except for the Italians. However, after being in Portugal for two to three months, new images have come forward, like *gastronomy* and *wine*. The Spanish and Romanian students seem to be the most pleased with the Portuguese gastronomy, but it has also been mentioned by Polish and Slovakian. The Portuguese wine is referred by every nationality except for the Turkish. The idea of *wonderful sightseeing and monuments* is also frequently mentioned by every nationality excluding the Slovenian.

Most students that have collaborated with this study, in particular Spaniards, Italians, Polish and Slovenian think that the Portuguese crisis is the same as at their homelands. A few students, all from Italy and Slovenia, believe that it is worse at their countries while a few others, all Spanish, think it is better. Most students are optimistic about the future of Portugal. Romanian and some Slovenian believe it will be better than that of their home countries.

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