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Reference:

Öz Yakup, Van Praag Lore.- Can participation in learning abroad mobility support pro-European Union attitudes among youth?
European educational research journal - ISSN 1474-9041 - London, Sage publications ltd, (2022), p. 1-17
Full text (Publisher's DOI): <https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041221084849>
To cite this reference: <https://hdl.handle.net/10067/1879190151162165141>

Can Participation In Learning Abroad Mobility Support Pro-European Union Attitudes Among Youth?

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Abstract

The role of education in the development of pro-EU attitudes is often examined by focusing on the association of educational attainment and the development of pro-EU attitudes. However, student exchanges and youth mobility have also become pillars of the foundation of the European Higher Education Area, figuring out the Maastricht Treaty and the Bologna Declaration. Accordingly, based on a utilitarian approach, the current study investigates the role of participation in learning abroad mobility in the development of positive views on the EU. In doing so, Flash Eurobarometer 478 data was used and multinomial logistic regression analyses were performed by student and non-students groups of youth in the new (NMS) and old (EU15) member states. The findings show that the role of participation depends on the degree of positive views, and it makes a significant contribution to having Very Positive views on the EU among non-students in both national groups and students in the NMS. Findings also demonstrate that participation is more important than consideration in the development of Very Positive views. So, even if respondents could have already been supportive of the EU before participation, participation also takes their positive views on the EU to a higher level.

Keywords

Eurobarometer, learning abroad mobility, pro-EU attitudes, youth mobility, EU15, NMS

Introduction

The debate on public attitudes toward the European Union (EU) has been extensively studied in the literature. Several factors are proposed to investigate the public opinion toward the EU, such as personal and perceived national cost-benefit analyses regarding; cultural, personal values, and beliefs about; the impact of domestic proxies and governments, the media, and political elites on EU membership. Such factors are often investigated through three approaches; identity, utilitarian, and cue-taking approaches (Braun and Tausendpfund, 2014; Hobolt and De Vries, 2016; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; McLaren and Guerra, 2013).

Many researchers focus on the factors affecting public attitudes toward the EU from different angles. Among others, the utilitarian approach is the most studied within this field in the literature. Studies applying the utilitarian approach mainly focus on the following: the role of the Euro crisis (Braun and Tausendpfund, 2014); socio-economic inequalities (Simpson, 2019); perceived national threats and benefits (Arikan, 2012); educational attainment (Hakhverdian et al., 2013); perceived personal gains and loss (Tucker et al., 2002); expected economic gains (Bayram, 2015); low-level of transfer of sovereignty to the EU; and potential benefits for future generations (Tanasoïu and Colonescu, 2008) in promotion of the pro-EU opinions among people. By contrast, from an identity approach, scholars examine the role of values (Kuşdil and Simşek, 2008), emotional reactions (Vasilopoulou and Wagner, 2017), religious beliefs (Nelsen and Guth, 2003), religiosity, and religious identity (McAndrew, 2020) regarding public attitudes toward European integration. Lastly, departing from

the cue-taking approach, researchers analyze the role of the media as a cue-transmitter for promoting pro-European ideas (Adam, 2009), and the public construction of state identity by the elite (Aydın-Düzgit, 2018) in regard to positive perceptions regarding the EU.

Cross-country studies investigate how the impact of the above factors differs across member states. For example, Lauterbach and De Vries (2020) examine how the Eurozone crisis shaped the generational differences regarding EU support and found support for EU differ by the creditor (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, and the Netherlands) and debtor states (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) within age cohorts. The study of Göncz (2013) examining the effect of the crisis on people's perception of the EU also shows that, between 2007 and 2011, respondents from the Central and Eastern European countries were significantly more neutral/ enthusiastic about their countries' membership, while their counterparts in older member states (EU15) were significantly more likely to have negative opinions. Hobolt (2014) shows that over a third of the respondents are in favor of a further deepening of integration (transferring more power to the EU), but also oppose a further widening (enlargement of the EU). Such respondents are the better-educated and highly-skilled people of the creditor states. Searching for the role of political orientation in attitudes toward the EU, Alvarez (2002) finds that the effect of conservatism is much stronger in the Eastern than in the Western European countries.

Although such a great variety of factors are examined in the literature, either for single-country cases or country-group comparisons (i.e. Eastern vs Western, creditor vs debtor states), certain factors were not studied in-depth, such as the education. Education is often treated as a control variable within this field of research, together with other socio-demographic factors like age, income, or gender. Furthermore, it is often represented by the level of education. As stated by Hakhverdian et al. (2013), the contribution of the level of education to pro-European/EU ideas is often clear: "It is a well-established fact that the lower educated are more skeptical of European integration than their higher-educated counterparts." In their research, they also find that such contribution has been increasing over time between 1973 and 2010, especially after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Hakhverdian et al., 2013).

However, the contribution of education to pro-EU attitudes is not only limited to the impact of being highly educated. This is because, as Hakhverdian et al. (2013) also state, the signing of the Maastricht Treaty took political, economic, and cultural integration a step further and transferred more national sovereignty to the European level. Accordingly, national educational systems were also affected by the consequences of this treaty, and so were national higher education systems.

With the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, a formal competence for the educational systems was also recognized for the first time in the member countries (Litjens, 2005). In this way, an important threshold was passed for the Europeanization of the national higher education systems. This tendency was further accelerated by the Bologna Declaration, recognizing a common framework for degrees and organization of higher education institutions, and particularly the free movement of students (Litjens, 2005).

Within this context, the contribution of education to pro-EU attitudes may be further elaborated on by focusing on the impact of the creation of supra-national higher education space and, in particular,

investigating the effect of learning abroad mobility opportunities provided at the EU level. Starting from the early 1950s, the mobility of young people through transnational educational programs, projects, or events, either organized by civil society or governments was often considered to be an essential way of creating future European generations (Norwig, 2014). However, as mentioned above, the role of education in attitudes toward the EU was often examined in a limited manner, with insufficient attention being paid to further aspects of education. Therefore, in the current study, we focus on the contribution of education in a wider sense to the development of pro-EU attitudes. We aim to investigate the contribution of youth mobility to the development of positive views on the EU from a utilitarian approach.

In this manner, we take the EU as an institution or an entity representing a system of government that people could be supportive of or against its policies regarding European integration. So, from the lenses of a utilitarian perspective, people will support the EU if they think the policies of the EU bring them several opportunities in their individual life or for their countries. For example, in an integrated Europe, with the removal of the mobility limitations caused by the national borders, people can find more opportunities for work, or they may gain more capital in different countries where they can use their professional skills at their best. Besides, people can think that their countries would benefit from the common market opportunities and the fiscal transfers from the EU. Hence, based on such cost-benefit analyses regarding their perceived benefits of human or economic capital, people could support the EU and European integration (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016). Likewise, in the current study, we argue that people could also develop positive attitudes toward the EU if they can benefit from the opportunities of European integration in the field of education, not only based on the perceived positive consequences of economic or political integration.

Hence, considering the generally accepted cultural, social, academic, and professional development opportunities of education abroad activities (Berghoff et al., 2014; González et al., 2011; Tran, 2016), we expect that people will be more supportive of the EU if they can benefit from or participate in learning abroad mobility opportunities provided by the EU.

We also believe that this is timely research, figuring out the rising Euroscepticism in the last decade caused by several issues such as global financial crisis, migration and refugee issues (both from inside and outside the EU), rising authoritarianism in some member states, Brexit, and lastly, the Covid-19 Pandemic that “questioned the idea of open borders and free movement, one of the cornerstones of the integration project” (Christiansen, 2020: 15). Accordingly, international student mobility was also limited by the pandemic, higher education institutions have faced uncertainties and forecasted a decrease in the number of international student enrollments; and in Europe, a great deal of the student mobility programs was either canceled or continued virtually (Farnell et al., 2021). Therefore, investigating the role of learning abroad mobility in the attitudes of citizens toward EU could be important research before the end of Pandemic and the start of physical mobility of international students as well as filling the gap in the literature related to the limited investigation of the impact of education on pro-EU attitudes. As a result, firstly, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: *Participation in learning abroad mobility contributes to having positive views about the EU.*

In the present study, we want to compare the contribution of youth participation in learning abroad mobility to having pro-EU attitudes between the student (respondents who are full-time students) and non-student groups (respondents having part-time or full-time jobs). This is innovative as most previous research focuses on student participation in international mobility. Nonetheless, the EU also supports the mobility of non-student youth groups and less is known about its impact on EU attitudes (Berg et al., 2013; EC, 2010; Kettunen, 2017). There are different programs enabling non-student participation in learning abroad mobility opportunities, such as the European Voluntary Service (EVS), and European Solidarity Corps. The duration of such activities depends on the program type. Nonetheless, these programs are relatively short compared to students' international mobility and range from 2 weeks to 2 months in general (Devlin et al., 2017). Mobility programs for students often include academic/study-related activities, but mobility programs for non-students are particularly open for staff, trainees, apprentices, youth workers, and other young people. Therefore, learning abroad mobility activities for non-students could include any non-formal learning activity related to their personal and professional development (Berg et al., 2013; Devlin et al., 2017). Accordingly, considering the differences between the participation of student groups and non-student groups of youth in learning abroad mobility, we formulated the second hypothesis:

H2: *Participation in learning abroad mobility contributes to having positive views about EU within student groups and non-student groups of youth.*

Lastly, considering possible country-group differences (Alvarez, 2002; Göncz, 2013; Hobolt, 2014; Lauterbach and De Vries, 2020), we investigate the contribution of learning abroad mobility to pro-EU attitudes within country groups, namely the Old (EU15) and New Member States (NMS). Investigation of such contribution by country groups is also important, understanding the differences in youth participation in learning mobility. This is because several studies focusing on students' study abroad mobility also show that EU15 states are still dominant in the mobility patterns, especially in the Erasmus Program. EU15 countries are at the center of student mobility whereas the new member states are rather on the periphery, and student exchanges are denser among the EU15 states in general (Dabasi-Halász et al., 2019; González et al., 2011; Shields, 2016). Therefore, based on possible differences between country groups, we wish to examine the third hypothesis:

H3: *Participation in learning abroad mobility contributes to having positive views about the EU within student and non-student groups of youth, depending on whether they are from the EU15 or the NMS.*

Literature Review

As global student mobility has become a growing movement in the last decades, the total number of international students reached 5.3 million in 2017 (UNESCO, 2020). This makes the international higher education market more valued than ever. But, an economic rationale is not the only motivation behind the internationalization of higher education systems globally. There are also political rationales in which international student mobility could be thought of as an instrument in power relations among different countries. International student mobility could be beneficial for nations in increasing their soft power in international affairs and enhancing public diplomacy through students (Akli, 2012; Engel and Siczek, 2018; Metzgar, 2016; Triana, 2015).

However, this role of international student mobility could change when it comes to a group of countries establishing regional integrity. In this case, the instrumentalization of international student mobility could be for a greater goal related to collective development and sustainability rather than individual (country-level) interests. The EU case would provide an interesting example of this situation. As underlined in Europe 2020 Strategy, mobility of the people, especially of the youth, could be seen as an essential instrument of sustainable and inclusive growth of the EU (European Commission [EC], 2010). So, international student mobility could be an important basis for European integration, social inclusion, identity, and citizenship (Aradau et al., 2010; Maas, 2007; Mazzoni et al., 2018).

Within this context, the idea of a united Europe can be dated back to the Middle Ages (Vaughan, 1979), but after World War Two, the integration of Europe was more possible than ever, and such an idea was expressed by many leading figures of different European countries (Nelsen and Stubb, 1994). The mobility of young people, through international educational activities, in the making of a future European community also came to the fore during these years (Norwig, 2014). Therefore, from those days until now, the mobility of youth, especially the mobility of students, has emerged as an important way of sustaining European solidarity and integration (Mazzoni et al., 2018; Norwig, 2014). As a result, youth mobility has become one of the prominent sources for inclusive growth of the EU (EC, 2010).

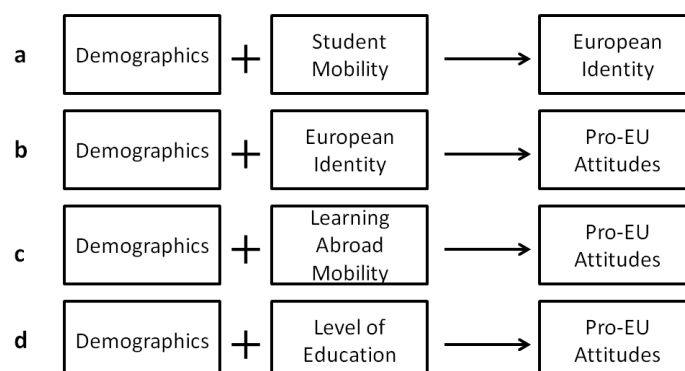
Accordingly, several intra-European mobility opportunities were provided for young people over the years by the EU. A well-known example of such a program is the Erasmus+ Program. Over the last 30 years, more than ten million people have participated in the Erasmus+ Program and its predecessors (EC, 2020). Such an increase in the number of young people participating in learning abroad programs across Europe has encouraged several researchers to examine the impact of youth mobility on European integration (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Kuhn, 2012; Mazzoni et al., 2018; Méndez García et al., 2021; Mitchell, 2012; Oborune, 2013; Prati et al., 2019; Sigalas, 2010; Stoeckel, 2016; Van Mol, 2013, 2018; Wilson, 2011).

However, considering the focus of the current study, these studies focus mainly on the impact of intra-European student mobility on European identity (Item “a” in Figure 1), rather than pro-EU attitudes. Additionally, the European identity is taken as a dependent variable in such studies. But, European identity is generally taken as a predictor of attitudes toward the EU in studies related to pro-EU attitudes (Item “b” in Figure 1), considering the Hobolt and De Vries’ (2016) classification of identity, utilitarian, and cue-taking approaches. Figure 1 reveals such differences.

Additionally, as mentioned above, the current study focus on the role of learning abroad mobility (Item “c” in Figure 1), covering both the mobility of student and non-student groups of youth, rather than limiting the role of education in pro-EU attitudes by focusing on the level of education only (Item “d” in Figure 1), which is generally studied by the political scientists in the field of European studies (Hakhverdian et al., 2013).

Figure 1

Representation of Studies Related to Association of the Aspects of Education, European Identity and Pro-EU Attitudes



Within this context, the following paragraphs represent a review of studies focusing on the association of intra-European student mobility and European identity first, after which a review of studies examining the impact of youth mobility on pro-EU attitudes is given. It should be noted that studies related to the role of student mobility in the development of European identity are not related to the scope of the current study, but they are important to show how the political rationale of internationalization of higher education works in a European context. So, from this point of view, the current study relates to these studies since we also elaborate on the political rationale of internationalization of higher education in a European context, but by focusing on pro-EU attitudes rather than an identity formation related to Europe. On the other hand, in the context of the current study, studies related to intra-European youth mobility and pro-EU attitudes represent a more suitable background for the current study.

All in all, the existing literature in this vein is still not enough since the researchers from the fields of sociology or educational sciences focus on the role of student mobility in the formation of European identity which is a social construction on Europe based on collective identities, rather than identification with the EU and its institutions (Van Mol, 2013, 2018). Identification with the EU and its institutions is more suitable for the examination of pro-EU attitudes, which is studied by researchers from the field of political sciences in general. Still, these researchers also more focused on the role of educational attainment or participation in pro-EU attitudes. Hence, in the current study, we also try to fill this gap in the literature by focusing not only on students' mobility but also the mobility of non-students groups of youth and taking pro-EU attitudes as a dependent variable to focus on people's identification with EU and institutions rather than Europe.

Intra-European Student Mobility and European Identity

The association of intra-European student mobility and European integration is often examined focusing on students who participated in the Erasmus Program and their identification with Europe (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Kuhn, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Oborune, 2013; Sigalas, 2010; Stoeckel, 2016; Van Mol, 2013, 2018; Wilson, 2011). Based on structuralist models in general (Recchi, 2015), researchers focus on the role of "social relations and their spatial contexts" in European identity formation. Referring to the "transactional thesis" (Deutsch, 1957; Fligstein, 2008; Kuhn, 2015), they aim to investigate how contacts between citizens of different countries foster the development of

collective identities (Van Mol, 2018). They take intra-European student mobility as a case for such investigation and focus on the changes in the perceptions of students regarding European identity after the Erasmus study experience. Accordingly, they assume exchange students' contacts with others (social interactions), either the nationals of the destination country or other exchange students, would increase their identification with Europe or would form a sense of European identity.

Concerning the cognitive dimension, previous research investigated how students' mobility can contribute to them seeing themselves as European (Kuhn, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Oborune, 2013; Sigalas, 2010; Van Mol, 2013), thinking they have many things in common with Europeans (Sigalas, 2010; Stoeckel, 2016), considering themselves as European citizens (Van Mol, 2013), considering their country's EU membership as a good thing (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Oborune, 2013) and European unification as a good thing (Oborune, 2013). In an affective dimension, however, they investigated how students' mobility can contribute to trusting Europeans (Oborune, 2013; Sigalas, 2010), feeling close to Europeans (Oborune, 2013; Sigalas, 2010; Stoeckel, 2016), feeling attached to Europe (Kuhn, 2012; Sigalas, 2010; Stoeckel, 2016; Wilson, 2011), and having pride in being European (Sigalas, 2010; Stoeckel, 2016). In short, most of them find that intra-European student mobility may only have a partial impact on developing European identity and that the Erasmus Program does not strengthen identification with Europe. The main argument behind this result is that the Erasmus Program may involve students who are already passionate Europeans (Kuhn, 2012).

Nevertheless, several other studies also produce results in favor of the impact of the Erasmus exchange. As an example, Mitchell (2012) finds a significant difference between Erasmus and non-mobile students in terms of attachment to, interest in, and identification with Europe, but she also suggests further investigation to confirm whether this difference is the result of the abroad study experience or just an over-representation of European identifiers. However, Stoeckel (2016) shows that studying abroad is related to a significant strengthening of European identity, even using a control group and using pre-test and post-test measurements. He also finds that social interactions make a significant contribution to European identity among students who have weaker identification with Europe before participating in the Erasmus program.

Intra-European Youth Mobility and Pro-EU Attitudes

In studies related to the association of intra-European youth mobility and pro-EU attitudes, the unit of analyses is composed of both student and non-student youth groups and the participants often range between 15 and 30 years of age. Accordingly, these studies not only focus on academic exchange programs but also cover all types of transnational mobility activities, even having friends in other European countries. In addition, pro-EU attitudes represent diverse mental orientations toward the EU, such as beliefs, opinions, emotions, feelings, evaluations, and tendencies about the EU in particular ways (Tenenbaum et al., 2019).

In this regard, in the work of Méndez García et al. (2021), attitudes toward the EU elaborate on university students' perceptions of Spain's membership of the EU and a sense of belonging to the EU. Based on the qualitative findings, students would seem to have utilitarian outlooks on the EU. Such opinions are mainly expressed by non-mobile students. Nonetheless, both non-mobile and mobile students show marked feelings of belonging to the EU and feeling at home as EU citizens. Differently, Mazzoni et al. (2018) define attitudes on the EU, reflecting certain evolutions using two items; "We

should be happy that the European Union exists” and “Life in my country would be better if there were no European Union.” They found a positive relationship between mobility and positive attitudes toward the EU. Additionally, both short-term and long-term mobility showed a significant indirect effect on positive attitudes toward the EU. Prati et al. (2019) focus on cross-border friendships rather than mobility. They measured the attitudes toward the EU, based on whether the participants’ position lies between certain adjectives; namely, “competent/incompetent, efficient/inefficient, warm/cold, friendly/unfriendly, just/unjust, and fair/unfair.” Their study demonstrates that cross-border friendships longitudinally predict positive attitudes toward the EU between 2016 and 2017.

Overall, studies related to the contribution of youth mobility to pro-EU attitudes, are scarce. Additionally, most studies use pro-EU attitudes as a proxy for other variables, especially in studies focusing on European identity. Therefore, sometimes it is hard to separate items used for pro-EU attitudes from other concepts, such as “Europeanism,” “European citizenship,” and/or “European identity.”

Method

Data Source and Sample

The study uses data gathered by the Flash Eurobarometer 478 (EC, 2019), conducted at the request of the EC Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. It was administered in 28 EU member countries among populations aged between 15 and 30 in 2019; including the UK, since it was still an official member of the EU during the data collection period. The survey covers the population of the respective nationalities, residents in each member state, using a multi-stage random sampling design. Accordingly, the sample covers 10,786 respondents who were interviewed by telephone through the Kantar e-Call center (CATI system). However, in the current study, a sample of 10,347 respondents is used in the analyses, because of the missing cases in the dependent variable, representing positive views of the EU.

Measures

The dependent variable is derived from answers to Question DX2: “In general, please tell me if you have a very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative or very negative view of the European Union? (One answer only).” The answers were of a 4-Likert Type; namely, Very Positive, Fairly Positive, Fairly Negative, Very Negative, and DK (Do not Know)/Refusal (Spontaneous). Therefore, answers were re-coded as Fairly Negative and Very Negative into Negative (0), and Very Positive and Fairly Positive remained the same. DK/Refusal re-coded as Missing. Negative (0) was selected as the reference category. The reason for merging negative answers into one, and keeping positive answers separated, is mainly methodological. In addition, the low percentage of Very Negative (4%) answers would also lead to biased results.

Independent variables consist of mobility, gender, occupation, type of community, and the national group. Mobility represents the main independent variable. It was derived from the composition of two questions: D7, “Excluding travel for tourism or living with one’s family abroad, have you ever stayed abroad for at least two weeks? For example, for studies, training, work, exchanges or volunteering”; and Q2, “You said earlier that you have never stayed abroad for the purpose of studies, work, exchanges, and so on. Have you considered taking part in any learning experience

abroad?” Accordingly, there are three types of students when mobility is questioned: Those who participated (hereafter, “participated”); those who considered, but couldn’t participate (hereafter, “considered”); and those who had never considered participating nor participated (hereafter, “neither”). Therefore, students who have never considered participating (neither) are selected as the reference category.

Other independent variables represent the control variables. Accordingly, gender was simply composed of female and male, with the male being selected as the reference category. Occupation is derived from the answers to Questions D5a, D5b, D5c, D5d, and D5e. In the dataset, there is a composite variable (D5r) merging and representing all twenty-two occupation types, ranging from self-employed to manual worker, from manager to civil servant, from retired to full-time student, and refusals. Accordingly, D5r was re-coded into students (respondents who are full-time students) and non-students (respondents having a part-time or full-time job), with non-students being selected as the reference category. Type of community was derived from Question D13: “Would you say you live in a . . .?”; and the possible answers are rural area or village, small or medium-sized town, and large town/city. Accordingly, rural area was selected as the reference category. The national group refers to the old (EU15) and new member states (NMS) of the EU. EU15 are those members of the EU before 1996 and NMS are those members of the EU after 2003. Accordingly, NMS was selected as the reference category.

Analytical Strategy

An ordinal logistic regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses at first. However, certain methodological problems (the test of Parallel Lines and Goodness-of-Fit Indexes (Pearson and Deviance values were both significant)) remained salient in the analyses, even whether merging Very Negative and Fairly Negative answers. However, making multinomial logistic regression by treating the dependent variable as categorical (rather than ordinal) and merging negative views eliminated the above-mentioned methodological problems.

Nevertheless, the multicollinearity problem was checked before all of the multinomial logistic regression analyses. VIF values were no higher than 1.02 and the tolerance values were no smaller than 0.98. According to Hair et al. (2014), the VIF value lies between 1.00 and 10.00 and it should be closer to 1.00, with the tolerance value lying between 0.10 and 1.00 and it should be closer to 1.00. This reduces the multicollinearity problem among the variables.

Findings

Before passing the findings of multinomial logistic regression analyses, cross-tabulations are represented in Table 1 to reveal the general association between views on the EU and independent variables. χ^2 statistics show significant differences for all of the independent variables.

When the association of mobility and the views on the EU are elaborated on in detail, it can be seen that those respondents considering participation in mobility have more positive views than respondents who have participated in mobility. However, for a higher level of positive opinion (Very Positive), respondents who have participated have a more positive opinion on the EU than respondents considering participation. For negative views on the EU, those respondents considering participation in mobility have fewer negative views than respondents who have participated in

mobility. Such findings show that respondents who have considered participation already have pro-EU attitudes before participation in mobility. However, multinomial logistic regression analyses represent more detailed findings.

Multinomial Logistic Regression Analyses

As shown in Table 2, participation in learning abroad mobility positively and significantly contributes to positive views on the EU in the all-data analysis (Model 1). Participation increases the likelihood of having very positive and fairly positive views on the EU, 2.02 and 1.24 times, respectively. This confirms our first hypothesis. Nevertheless, it is important to note that when people considered participation in mobility, this contributes more to Fairly Positive views than actual participation itself. However, the contribution of participation changes when separate analyses are made for students (Model 2) and non-students (Model 3). Among students, neither participation nor consideration makes a significant contribution to having fairly positive views on the EU. Only participation significantly increases the likelihood of having very positive views. Among non-students, respondents who participated and considered mobility are 2.09 and 1.55 times more likely to have very positive views on the EU, respectively, than respondents who neither participated nor considered participation. Accordingly, our second hypothesis is partially confirmed, since participation makes a positive significant contribution to having very positive views only.

Table 1

Cross-tabulations between Views on the EU and Independent Variables

Independent Variables	n	Positive Views on EU		
		Negative	Fairly Positive	Very Positive
		%	%	%
Gender***	10347			
Female	4676	15.0	71.8	13.1
Male	5671	21.5	62.6	15.9
Type of Community***	10312			
Rural area	2594	20.5	66.5	13.0
Medium size town	3601	19.7	67.6	12.7
Large town	4117	16.4	66.3	17.3
Mobility Type***	10319			
Participated	3705	17.2	64.6	18.1
Considered	3573	16.7	69.2	14.1
Neither	3041	22.5	66.4	11.1
Occupation***	10311			
Students	3051	14.1	70.1	15.7
Non-students	7260	20.5	65.3	14.2
EU15 vs. NMS *	10347			
EU15	5617	18.9	65.7	15.5
NMS	4730	18.3	68.1	13.6

*p≤0.05; **p≤0.01; ***p≤0.001

The differences in the contribution of participation to pro-EU attitudes also change between the EU15 and the NMS. In the EU15 countries, neither participation nor consideration can make a significant contribution to having positive views on the EU among students (Model 4). However, among non-students, participation increases the likelihood of having fairly positive and very positive

views on the EU, 1.46 and 2.63 times, respectively (Model 5). Furthermore, it makes more of a contribution than consideration.

In the NMS, participation makes a positive and significant contribution to having very positive views on the EU in both groups of youth (Model 6 and 7). Yet it increases the likelihood of having very positive views on the EU, 2.28 and 1.65 times more among students and non-students, respectively. Moreover, for both groups of youth, the contribution of participation to having very positive views is more than the contribution of consideration. Therefore, our third hypothesis is partially confirmed because participation cannot make any significant contribution to having positive views among students in the EU15, and it makes a significant contribution to having very positive views only among both groups of youth in the NMS.

Considering the control variables, the difference between living in or outside the EU15 states does not make a significant contribution to either type of positive view on the EU (Model 1). However, for both views, students are more likely to think positively about the EU than non-students (Model 1). Respondents living in large towns are more likely to have both types of positive views on the EU than respondents living in rural areas (Model 1). However, such positive views are more likely to be shared by non-students living in both nation groups (Model 5 and 7). Lastly, females are more likely to have both types of positive views on the EU than males, and this is especially valid for non-student groups of youth, in both EU15 and the NMS (Model 5 and 7).

Table 2

Multinomial Logistic Regression Analyses for Very Positive/Fairly Positive vs. Negative

Independent Variables				EU15		NMS	
	All	Students	Non-students	Students	Non-students	Students	Non-students
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
	<i>Exp (β)</i>	<i>Exp (β)</i>	<i>Exp (β)</i>	<i>Exp (β)</i>	<i>Exp (β)</i>	<i>Exp (β)</i>	<i>Exp (β)</i>
Very Positive vs. Negative							
Mobility							
Participated	2.02***	1.75**	2.09***	1.54	2.63***	2.28*	1.65***
Considered	1.52***	1.34	1.55***	1.13	1.59**	1.91*	1.56**
Gender							
Female	1.18*	0.90	1.30**	1.19	1.28*	0.54**	1.29*
Type of Community							
Large town	1.56***	0.88	1.91***	0.79	1.90***	1.05	1.91***
Medium size town	0.98	0.62**	1.16	0.59*	1.20	0.67	1.10
EU Nation Group							
EU-15	1.11	1.07	1.14				
Occupation							
Students	1.55***						
Fairly Positive vs. Negative							
Mobility							
Participated	1.24***	1.05	1.29	0.97	1.46***	1.23	1.17
Considered	1.27***	1.14	1.30***	1.08	1.29*	1.29	1.34**
Gender							
Female	1.62***	1.50***	1.65***	1.79***	1.48***	1.10	1.84***

Type of Community							
Large town	1.21**	0.94	1.29***	0.93	1.20	0.94	1.40**
Medium size town	1.05	0.82	1.12	0.86	1.04	0.73	1.23
EU Nation Group							
EU-15	0.92	0.99	0.90				
Occupation							
Students	1.51***						
Nagelkerke R²	0.035	0.024	0.034	0.027	0.034	0.031	0.035
Model χ^2 (df)	299.23 (14)***	58.01 (12)***	204.59 (12)***	42.06 (10)***	104.49 (10)***	27.05 (10)**	103.62 (10)***

*p≤0.05; **p≤0.01; ***p≤0.001

Discussion

The findings of the current study show that participation in learning abroad mobility is positively and significantly associated with having positive views on the EU. However, considering participation in learning abroad mobility (but not having had a chance to participate) also relates positively and significantly to having positive views on the EU. The important difference in the roles of participation and consideration emerges in the level/degree of positive views. In other words, for a higher degree of positive views (Very Positive), participation makes a greater contribution than consideration. For having a lower degree of positive views (Fairly Positive), consideration contributes more than actual participation in general. These results show that respondents having fairly positive views on the EU may already have pro-EU attitudes, but to have a greater degree of positive view, participation is still needed.

These results add to a better understanding of the contradictory findings in the literature, especially for studies examining the association between student mobility and European identity. A number of studies show that participating in student mobility programs, especially Erasmus, can not make a significant impact on European identity or does so only partially (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Kuhn, 2012; Oborune, 2013; Sigalas, 2010; Van Mol, 2013; Wilson, 2011). However, other studies find that participation can make a positive and significant impact on European identity, or pro-EU attitudes (Mazzoni et al., 2018; Mitchell, 2012; Stoeckel, 2016). The results of the current study confirm both opposing findings.

More specifically, the results of Model 2 show that participation makes a significant contribution to having Very Positive views among students, but it does not add to it to the same extent as having Fairly Positive views. When positive views regarding the EU are examined among people living across different EU nation groups, participation does not contribute significantly to either type of view among students in the EU15 (Model 4). This confirms the results of researchers arguing that there is no significant relationship between student mobility and European identity. Moreover, most of such studies focus solely on students from the EU15 countries, especially from the UK, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy. We should remember that these are people living in the EU15 member states, who have had free movement by right for four decades. By contrast, people of the NMS, living in Central and Eastern European countries, have only obtained this right after the enlargements between 2004 and 2013 (Favell, 2009). Therefore, for students living in the EU15 member states, the impact of mobility may have already reached saturation level. This could also explain the inability to find any significant relationship between student mobility and European identity among students living in the EU15 member states. Additionally, among non-students in the EU15, participation can positively and

significantly contribute to having both types of positive views on the EU (Model 5). Such a result may also confirm Kuhn's (2012) arguments in which she emphasizes the need for participation in learning abroad mobility among low educated people to develop a European identity.

Within this context, an important difference between the EU15 and NMS emerges. In the NMS, participation does not significantly and positively contribute to the development of Fairly Positive views in both groups of youth (Model 6 and 7). However, for the development of Very Positive views, participation makes a significant and positive contribution, not only among non-students but also among students. Therefore, these results show that student mobility programs can still make a difference to European identity and pro-EU attitudes in the NMS as opposed to the case in the EU15.

Limitations

The findings of the current study are limited because of the nature of the main independent variable. The item representing the main independent variable (participation in learning abroad mobility) in the questionnaire was asked generally, not separating respondents by whether they participated in learning abroad mobility when they were students or after they graduated. Moreover, non-students include respondents who have part-time or full-time jobs, in other words, non-full-time students. This means that the category of non-students may also include some students having part-time jobs, which could also vary across geographical regions and national groups. As a consequence, the actual number of non-student respondents who participated in learning abroad mobility could be lower than currently represented in the sample. Therefore, among non-students, the contribution of participation in learning abroad mobility may have been underestimated. As a result, learning abroad mobility could make a greater contribution to the development of pro-EU attitudes among non-students than has been found in the current study.

Conclusion

In the current study, the role of learning abroad mobility in developing pro-EU attitudes is investigated from a utilitarian approach. This study departs from the hypotheses that participating in learning abroad mobility would contribute to having positive views regarding the EU. The results have shown that our hypotheses are partially confirmed. In short, the role of participation depends on the degree of positive views, and it makes a significant contribution to having Very Positive views on the EU among non-students in both national groups, among students in the NMS. Additionally, the results demonstrate that participation is more important than consideration in the development of Very Positive views. This shows that respondents could have already been supportive of the EU before participation, but participating in learning abroad mobility may take their positive views on the EU to a higher level and reinforce these views.

Hence, it could be said that participation in learning abroad mobility could still be effective on having pro-EU attitudes, especially among non-students and in the NMS. So, policymakers should consider stimulating learning abroad opportunities for non-students to develop more positive views regarding the EU. Besides, considering the role of living in large towns in which the respondents have significantly higher positive (Very Positive) views on the EU than their counterparts living in rural areas, the access of non-students living in rural areas to learning abroad mobility opportunities should be enhanced in both EU15 and the NMS.

Lastly, considering the political rationale behind the internationalization of higher education, the current study reveals that there is a need for similar studies focusing on the role of learning abroad mobility, of both students and non-students group of youth, in developing positive attitudes toward EU, as an institution and a governing system since most of the studies in the field of international student mobility, first focuses on students' mobility, and then the identification of these mobile students with Europe. However, considering the recent enlargements of the EU and the inclusion of some post-Soviet countries, Brexit, the negative effects of Covid-19 Pandemic and raising nationalism in some member countries, the need for an integrated Europe has never been so much obvious, and researchers should rethink the role of student mobility in this integration. So, from this point of view, further studies in the field of international student mobility should focus on not only European identity but also attitudes toward the EU, since the aforementioned factors are important threats to the unity of the EU as an institution and a governing system as well as people's perceived identification with Europe.

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