Erasmus Exchange Students at Växjö University

- Network formation and utilisation of resources -

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Abstract

The aim writing this thesis was to get an understanding about how Erasmus exchange students find their way in their new environment. Furthermore, to see what kind of resources are available for them and which they eventually use if they have a problem or just to make themselves feel more comfortable. The students’ ages are between 20 and 23.

The thesis analyzes the strategies the exchange students are using. In detail, where they meet people and what is supporting them. It also analyzes resources the students are relying on and the satisfaction with the students’ life at Växjö University.

The data were collected with eleven interviews. Within the interview was also handed out a questionnaire to the interviewed student.

The result shows that the living situation is a coefficient when it comes to socializing, in this case living in a corridor. Also, going out to the students’ pub and attending Växjö International Students (VIS) activities. Erasmus exchange students tend to rely on resources in the home country which are the family or friends or they are likely to rely on other students from the same country or foreign students as well. The overall satisfaction of the students life is on the upper third of the certainly measurement.

Keywords: Erasmus exchange students, social network, resources, conditions of life
Summary

The thesis deals with network formation of Erasmus exchange students at the University of Växjö. The aim of the study was to understand how the students find their way in their new environment. Following research questions was posed: What kind of strategies do exchange students use to build their social network? What kind of resources is available for the students? Which resources do they use?

The data was collected through a qualitative interview with eleven Erasmus exchange students and handed out a questionnaire. They are on Exchange at the University of Växjö and are in the age of 20-23.

The theory used in the thesis is about the life-condition approach, the social network analysis and the distinct network patterns by Bochner et al..

I sent out request via the University e-mail address first. Through this strategy I could reach just one student so I decided to send out 50 requests via the internet network facebook. The response on facebook was higher and finally I had eleven interview partners.

Previous studies declare that the financial situation of the students is an emerging issue during the time abroad and they also present findings about the living situation. They state that where the students lived helped them to make contacts but there where no finding about what kind of living situation is supporting socializing. Whereas this study shows that the living situation is a coefficient when it comes to socializing, in this case living in a corridor. Also, going out to the students’ pub and attending Växjö International Students (VIS) activities. The students tend to rely on resources in the home country which are the family or friends or they are likely to rely on other students from the same country or foreign students as well. The overall satisfaction of the students’ life is on the upper third of the certainly measurement, which is also measured in previous research.

Keywords: Erasmus exchange students, social network, resources, conditions of life
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1. Introduction

This chapter deals with a short background according to the research. Furthermore some terms, present previous studies will be explained and finally the problem which will be followed by the research aim and the close accumulates of the research questions will be discussed.

1.1 Background

Ulrich Beck is stating in his book (1992), we are living in a risk society. But what makes our society transform to a risk society and how is this influencing the individual? We are living in a world that is accompanied by words like “globalization” and “internationalization”. The individual has to face that being unique nowadays has nothing to do sorely with the special character every individual is given. The things you are doing in your life are making you unique. And these days the society is not satisfied with ordinary vitae. You must make your life unique, experience special things, and expand your skills to meet the requirements. The individuals have to face loses of traditions that feature security. The “risk society” is full of opportunities which individuals have to choose, and followed by the fear to make the right choices. The individuals are absolved from class and have to plan their own labour market biography. You have to put yourself at the centre of your life plan (Beck, 1992, p. 75 ff). Young people are put to the challenge of the “do-it-yourself” biography (King et al., 2003, p. 232).

These exigencies strike mostly the adolescents that are in the education phase. European students are influenced by the changes in the society. The decision of going abroad to study has become a option to enrich the vitae and, further develops their skills that give them a good position on the labour market. The percentage of European students going abroad to study has increased since the worlds largest support programme for international student mobility was founded in 1987: The Erasmus programme (Teichler, 2004, p. 395).

Until now, 1,5 million students were going abroad to study with the Erasmus programme. Alone in Sweden, in the year 2004, over 2800 students were leaving the country to study abroad, and approximately 6700 students were
entering Sweden. In the year 2006 the number of students coming to Sweden increased to roughly 7000 students (European Comission, 2008).

1.2 Definition of terms

Erasmus
The Erasmus programme was launched in 1987. On the one hand, ERASMUS is the name of a famous medieval scholar and on the other hand, the acronym of the name of the programme European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. The aim of the programme is to further students’ mobility. The Erasmus programme provides fellowships to cover the additional costs for studying in another country. In this context, “university” means every institution of higher education that is officially recognised in the respective country. In the year 1989, the European Community Course Credits Transfer System (ECTS) was introduced as an experimental pilot project. Moreover it is Erasmus offering the academic staff the possibility to make study visits to institutions within Europe. The Erasmus department is in Brussels and is in charge of all the applications for financial support. The major components of the Erasmus programme are: Erasmus supports regional mobility rather than a global one to concentrate on common cultural characteristics. The aim is to promote a temporary study abroad. Erasmus promotes mobility and cooperation within networks of departments sending and receiving students (Teichler, 1996, p. 154 ff).

Network
The analysis of networks consists of the intention to study the regularities in how people and collectivities behave. It is not about regularities in beliefs about how they ought to behave. Because of this, network analysts avoid standardised explanations of social behaviour (Wellman, 1983, p. 162).

Social Network
The major concern of social network is social relationship. Network analysts study social structures and the most direct way to study a social structure is to analyze the pattern ties linking its members. They search for deep structured-
regular network patterns and the actors are seen as constrained by these structures. The focus is on structural dependence (Wellman, 1983, p. 162).

1.3 Previous research

In this chapter relevant research will be introduced that is connected to the Erasmus programme and studying abroad, to research that which is connected to network formation. Both research areas are important for my aim of the study.

1.3.1 Studying abroad with the Erasmus programme

Ulrich Teichlers “Erasmus Evaluation research project” was published as an article in the *European Journal of Education* in 1996 with the tile: Student Mobility in the Framework of ERASMUS: findings and evaluation study. The aim of the study was to find out the problems of Erasmus exchanges and to find strengths and weaknesses in the programme. The data was collected over a period of seven years. The main finding of the survey were that the average age of the students was 23 years (p. 159) and that the financial support that is offered by the program is not covering all the expenses the students have during their time abroad. (p. 176).

In 2004 an article from Teichler was published under the name: *Temporary Study Abroad: the life of Erasmus students*. The outcome of the study was based on the individual itself, in this case the Erasmus exchange student. The main findings comprised of all the reasons for going abroad. The most common answers were self-development, academic experience abroad and travelling (p. 379). The most students declared that where they lived helped them to make contact with host country students and students from other countries (p. 400). 66 percentage of the students felt that they were well integrated in the social life of the host country (p. 404).

In 2008, an article by Manuel Souto Otero was published which focused on the financial issue and family background of Erasmus students. Otero made a data collection during 2006 in a thirty-country survey. Otero stated three main questions. First the motivation for going abroad, the second refers to cross-
country inequalities and the third refers the evolution in the profile of students accessing the programme across time. The main findings were that the students in the sample were between 21 and 23 years old. The data showed a high degree of satisfaction with the programme and a high degree of social integration (p. 142). According to the survey the average monthly expenditure during the Erasmus time was 699 Euro. Whereas the expenditure in the home country was 586 Euro. The major explaining was that percentage of the students lived with their parents before (p. 143). Erasmus students are likely to come from a privileged socio-economic background (p. 146). Furthermore, the article declared that the students’ parents income status was either average or above average.

1.3.2 Network formation
Lada Adamic and Eytan Adar (2005) published: How to search a social network. The aim of the article was to find out how individuals find short paths in a social network using only local information about their immediate contacts. They simulated such experiments on a network of actual e-mail contacts within an organization as well as on a student social website. The main finding was that in the first case messages reached most individuals in a small number of steps. Using information about the target outperformed simply choosing the highest degree neighbour. In the case of the online community, the strategy was less successful; the data was not rich enough to come to a final result (p. 202).

Adalbert Mayer and Steven L. Puller made a survey about network formation on university campuses which was published in 2007. They documented the structure and composition of social networks on university campuses. They used administrative data and information from Facebook.com. They documented the factors that are the strongest predictors of whether two students are friends. The main findings were that social networks exhibit only modest segmentation across some important dimensions. Social networks are highly segmented by ethnicity, and this is present at schools ranging from small private institutions to large public universities (p. 346).
1.4 Problem discussion

The Erasmus exchange students leave their familiar surrounding and social network and come to Växjö/Sweden, which is probably a strange place for them. In their home country at their home university they have possibly a social network of friends and their family and most likely social resources which are a basic for their health and their identity (Keupp, 2002, p. 14).

The students come into a new environment, with a new language, a new culture and new people. It could be that some of the students have a “cultural shock”. They have to find their way and have to make new social contacts, make some friends and finally build a social network which accommodates resources the students can rely on. There is a risk that some students experience social exclusion or can not stand the cultural change. Financial problems can also come up, which the students have to deal with. The Erasmus students could also become a risk group that needs special resources. Connected to social work this could be a counselling with professionals that are specialised for this group and can deal with specific issues. The question comes up if the Erasmus exchange students demonstrate a risk group that probably needs a special treatment that decreases risk factors?

1.5 Aim

The aim of the study is to understand how Erasmus exchange students find their way in their new environment.

1.6 Research questions

- What kind of strategies do exchange students use to build their social network?
- What kind of resources is available for the exchange students?
- Which resources do the exchange students utilise?
2. Theory

The theory presented below will help to operate in the thesis and which will also be the origin in the analysis and the final discussion. Facts do not speak for themselves, we need to understand and explain the data collected, and a theory which works as a guide and as a structure for the analysis (May, 1997, p. 31).

2.1 Conditions - of - life - approach

The first theoretical approach is a sociological concept.

2.1.1 Definition of the condition - of - life - approach

As a condition of life is the universe of external conditions designated. Through this condition is the life of persons or groups influenced. Conditions of life give the opportunity to develop themselves from within. Conditions of life assign freedom of action. On the other hand individuals are able to influence their life conditions and also arrange them. The condition of life is standing for the socioeconomic, sociocultural and sociobiological livelihood.

One basic character of the concept of life conditions is its multi dimension approach. The concept always includes several areas of life. For example it is used in poverty research to capture undersupply (Engels, 2008, p. 1).

2.1.2 History of the condition - of - life - approach

The concept of life conditions is originally formulated with different accentuations. Otto Neurath, who adopted the concept of “circumstance” in the first half of the twentieth century, underlines the multi dimensions of life circumstances and their effect on individuals (Engels, 2008, p. 1 f).

Afterwards put Gerhard Weisser the accent more on scope of actions to help the individuals to realize their life chances. He understands the life condition as a
freedom of action, which an individual or a group uses for the satisfaction of their interests, or which assigns the sense of life (Lessman, 2006, p. 33).

“Als Lebenslage gilt der Spielraum, den die äusseren Umstände dem Menschen für die Erfüllung der Grundanliegen bieten, die er bei unbehinderter und gründlicher Selbstbesinnung als bestimmend für den Sinn seines Lebens ansieht” (Weisser, 1957, p. 6).

“As life conditions are seen the freedom if choice, because the external circumstances which individuals bid to fulfill their basic concerns, which the individual by unhindered and cheerfully stocktaking of oneself as assertive for the sense of his life”. (Translated by the author)

2.1.3 Advancement of the condition - of - life- approach

Ingeborg Nahnsen developed five single scopes to be able to operate the approach.

These five single scopes are:
- Financial- and supply scope
- Contact- and cooperation scope
- Learn- and experience scope
- Regeneration- and leisure scope
- Disposition scope

With these five single scopes you can describe the entirety of the circumstances (Nahnsen, 1975, p. 145 ff).

2.1.4 The empirical conversion of the condition - of - life- approach

The empirical move toward to the life- condition- approach must firstly appoint the relevant analyze dimensions. Three aspects of the life conditions you have to differentiate:
- the material resources
- the social life condition and the social supply
- the corporately attendance

The material resources are the income, avocation, education, habitation and so on. Under social life conditions and social supply are individual life
circumstances and network resources. The corporately attendance is the active use of material and social resources.

Figure 1.0 Conceptualization of the condition-of-life approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material-economic resources</th>
<th>Individual circumstances</th>
<th>Freedom of action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Income</td>
<td>· Social network</td>
<td>· Cognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Avocation</td>
<td>· Family</td>
<td>· Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Education</td>
<td>· Health</td>
<td>· Practical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Habitation</td>
<td></td>
<td>orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· Competence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Figure according to Fuchs et al. (1995, p. 75)

In figure 1.0 you can see the conceptualization of the life-condition-approach which gives an impulse for the empirical conversion. In this concept you can see the three dimensions of analysis which will be used for the operationalisation.

2.2 Social network analysis

“Social network analysis is a method for capturing the complexity of social relationships” (Hawe & Ghali, 2007, p. 62).

A social network is the structural approach that is based on the study of interaction among social actors. Social network analysis studies the relationship that links individual human beings. Social networks can also link actors that are not individuals at all; it can examine links among groups or institutions. The social network approach is that the “patterning of social ties in which actors are embedded has important consequences for those actors”. Network analysts want to uncover these kind of patterns and try to “determine the conditions under which those patterns arise and to discover their consequences” (Freeman, 2004, p. 2).
According to researching social network analyses are used to gain unique insights into wide aspects of social phenomena. Phenomena like social inclusiveness of the setting, the process which underlies hierarchy and stratification (Hawe & Ghali, 2007, p. 63).

2.2.1 History of the social network analysis
In the late 1800’s Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies comprised the precursors of social networks. At the turn of the twentieth century, Georg Simmel was the first to think of the term social network. Three main traditions of network analysis appeared at the first decade of the twentieth century: the systematically recording and analysis of social interactions in small groups, the interpersonal relations at work and the systematically study of networks. In the 1950’s, the main traditions where developed. Scholars where working on combining the different tracks and traditions. Finally Granovetter and Wellman elaborated and popularized the social network analysis (Freeman, 2004, p. 14ff).

2.2.2 Application of social network analysis
The outline of a social network helps to establish a networks value to its individual. A smaller network that is tighter can not be as useful for the individuals that are included than a network with more loose ties. They are also called weak ties. Networks that are more open and have many weak ties and social connections have a higher chance to introduce new ideas and opportunities for the individuals that are included than more tight networks. A group of friends who are likely to constantly do activities together in the same group share the same knowledge and opportunities. If individuals are in a group where single members have connections to other social worlds, these individuals will have admission to a wider variety of information (Scott, 1991, p. 149 ff).

2.3 Distinct network patterns by Bochner et al.
Another but very useful theory is explained in the article “The friendship patterns of overseas and host students in an Oxford residence” by Bochner et al. which was released in 1984 in The Journal of Social Psychology.
Bochner et al. describe in their article three distinct social networks, for students that go abroad, where each has a distinct psychological function: monocultural, bicultural and multicultural. Bochner et al. used this concept for analyzing the network of oversea students but I will transfer it just to the Erasmus exchange students because the circumstances are equal.

1. Monocultural network
This network consists of bonds with compatriots and its function is to provide a setting for the rehearsal and expression of ethnic and cultural values.

2. Bicultural network
In this network the bonds are with host nationals and its functions are to facilitate instrumentally the academic and professional aspirations of the sojourner.

3. Multicultural network
This network consists of bonds with no compatriot foreign students and its functions are recreational as well as providing mutual support based on a shared foreignness.

(Bochner et al., 1984, p. 690)

2.4 Conclusion of the theory
The “condition - of - life” approach is more based on resources. Resources or conditions that allow an individual to have a freedom of choice. With this approach I can measure the circumstances under which the Erasmus exchange students live in Sweden and see if these conditions can lead to a freedom of choice. The social network analysis has the focus on relationships and interactions. Through this relations you can measure the opportunities the individuals have. The given opportunities are also leading to conditions the individuals have through their relations. The distinct network pattern by Bochner et al. classifies the connections of the students in three different networks which have three different psychological functions.
3. Methodology

In this chapter the methodology will be presented including the methods that are used to answer the research. The chapter starts with the research approach followed by the choice of method and collection of data. Then, the respondents, the procedure and the implementation will be presented. Furthermore, the methodology will be discussed, ethical issues will be argued and an approach for the data analysis will be given.

3.1 Pre understanding

The topic of the study came to my mind because I was an Erasmus exchange student one semester ago, so in the spring term of 2008, at the University of Växjö. My perceptions about the whole research are influenced through this. I also lived on a corridor with different cultures together and also had to face the same challenges as the students this semester. I was living downtown, which is approximately 20 minutes to campus by bike. This semester I am not an Erasmus student any more, I have totally different living and social conditions now. I am living together with a Swedish girl in a shared apartment and have mostly Swedish friends, so it is quite a difference to the life of Erasmus students.

3.2 Research approach

There are two main research approaches when you conduct scientific research, deductive and inductive. The approach used depends on the research topic.

The deductive approach starts by deducing a hypothesis and formulating a subject. The subject has to be tested and the data collected is used to test the theory. If the data do not agree with the hypothesis, the theory is rejected as false. With the inductive approach, theory is the outcome of research. Data will be collected and analyzed to develop a theory. The deductive approach shows what is happening and the inductive approach makes clear why something is happening (Bryman, 2008, p. 9 ff).
In figure 2.0 the relationship between theory as explained above is pictorial visible.

The purpose of the study leads to an inductive direction. The aim of the study is to understand how Erasmus exchange students find their way in their new environment.

When it comes to conducting the data, there are two main sorts to be finding, qualitative and quantitative. The difference lies in the ways of tackling and analyzing. Quantitative research projects are characterized by having a population for which the researcher wants to find a conclusion. The data can not be collected on the whole population. Just a specific amount of people will be measured in a random sample, which will be representative. After the collection of data, statistic is used to analyze the data. This is done by arranging the data in tables, making graphs of the data or opposing summary statistics of it (Gudmund, 2003).

“Qualitative research is an umbrella term for an array of attitudes toward and strategies for conducting inquiry that are aimed at discerning how human beings
understand, experience, interpret, and produce the social world” (Sandelowski, 2003).

Qualitative Research includes the perspective of the measured person, also referred to as the “actor’s point of view”. This research is marked by certain defining imperatives that include case orientation, sensibility to cultural and historical context and reflexivity. It is directed toward producing idiographic knowledge based on the understanding of particular phenomena or events (Sandelowski, 2003).

3.3 Choice of Method

Different procedures are found when it comes to carrying out a survey, through interviews, questionnaires or observation. In an interview one or more individuals ask a person or a group questions. An interview can be personal, by telephone and it can take a few minutes, or over one hour. A questionnaire is written inquiries which will be sent out to the people. Observations are used if something will be explained which is happening in a certain moment, assuming that the researcher can be present and register what is happening (Holstein & Jaber, 2003).

Figure 3.0 Overview about the different methods

Figure 3.0 gives a overview of the different methods and structuring them to make it more clear and easier to understand.
3.4 Collection of data

The aim of the study is to understand how Erasmus exchange students find their way in their new environment, how they will build their social network in this strange environment. To answer my research question I decided to make qualitative interviews and hand out quantitative questionnaire. The quantitative questionnaire is used to have a background of the eleven students and to enrich the qualitative data. The findings of questionnaire are relevant for the eleven interviewed students.

3.4.1 Interview

The interview is a qualitative interview. Seale mentions that the interview is one of the most common methods according to social research (Seale, 1998, p. 202). I use a qualitative interview to be able to understand the Erasmus exchange students. “Interviews yield rich insights into people’s experiences, opinions, aspirations, attitudes and feelings” (May, 1997, p. 109).

Four types of interviews can be found, the structured interview, the semi-structured interview, the unstructured or focused interview and the group interview. In the structured interview the researcher controls the interview through predetermining questions, meanwhile in the unstructured interview the respondent is expected to answer the questions in his or her own terms (May, 1997, p. 110).

The interview contains nine questions and the structure of the interview is a semi structured. “This is a term that covers a wide range of instanced. It typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but it is able to vary the sequences of the questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference from that typically found in a structured interview schedule. Also, the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies” (Bryman, 2008, p. 196).

3.4.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a quantitative questionnaire; it is a self completing questionnaire. “With a self - completing questionnaire, respondents answer questions by completing the questions themselves. As a method, the self
completing questionnaire can come in several different forms (for example post or mail)“ (Bryman, 2008, p. 216).

The questions are mostly closed questions and conduce to get demographic, geographic and evaluation information. The questionnaires were handed out after the interview to not affect the student for the interview.

3.5 Measured group

The respondents are students which are in the Erasmus programme and therefore European students. Just the group of students which came to Växjö University in the fall semester 2008 so in the end of 2008 are in my group of interest. Erasmus exchange students normally go abroad for one semester or one year. I simply measured the group that enrolled for the fall semester 2008 or for the fall and spring semester 2008/2009. The other point from this enclose group is that in my opinion this students are more close to the time when they settled down and had to face the challenge of meeting new people than for exchange students that are here since a longer time. Students living on campus were measured. The most Erasmus exchange students are accommodated on campus but there are also two other students residences down town. These students have a different daily life, environment and rhythm. I wanted to measure a group that lives in the same area to have fewer difficulties in the analysis since these students are all in the same position, they live on campus. I measured both male and female in the age from 20-24. I wanted to measure students from campus because they have the same premises; they have the same accessibility activities and the same points of references. And according to the age, in my opinion students from 20-24 could still have to struggle with their identity. For example, if I would take for someone aged 27, this student could potentially be sure what he wants in life and how the relations he is searching for. There could be differences and this could lead to very different results, therefore it is hard to generalize in the end.

Finally eleven interviews were made: six were female and five male. According to Gilbert “researchers usually seek a representative sample, they only have sufficient resources to study a small number of people” (Gilbert, 2001, p. 62). He also attaches that the aim of the researcher is to generate a theory and a broader understanding of social processes and social actions hence is the representativeness of the sample less important (Gilbert, 2001, p. 62 ff).
I interviewed three students from Germany, two from Italy, two from the Netherlands one from the United Kingdom, one from Spain, one from Austria and one student from Finland. From my point of view this is a good average of the countries which are most represented from Erasmus exchange students at Växjö University.

3.6 Procedure

The International Office provided me with a list including all Erasmus exchange Students living on campus with their address, date of birth and their university mailing address. I collected fifteen students from this list and sent them an e-mail where I asked for the interview. Just three students even read the e-mail and just one student replied to this e-mail. So this way was not the way to reach this group. From my own experience I know that almost all students use the internet network facebook.

3.6.1 Facebook

Facebook was launched on February the fourth in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. It is a social network that was at that time exclusively for Harvard students. Within four months, thirty more college networks were added to facebook. Facebook continued to grow; in September 2005 it was also open for High School students. Finally in 2006, facebook opened to anyone with an e-mail address. In October 2008 facebook had a number of almost fifty million unique visitors (Mayer & Puller, 2007, p. 332).

I took 50 names of the list gave them into the search machine at facebook and sent these students the same message. A few students replied, some students I sent a second message to and asked them more directly and three students I talked to personally afterward and then they agreed. For the interviews I booked a group room in the library. The library is a neutral place and it is a familiar place where the etiquette is the same for everyone. In the group rooms of the library it is silent so it was a good environment to talk. I always picked the students up from the entrance and then I first asked the interview questions which were tape recorded, and then I handed out the questionnaire. The interview took approximately 20 minutes.
3.7 Implementation

The interview was started with asking nine questions which were tape recorded. The questions were about contacts, relations and about feeling lonely. Through each question I should understand which ways the students make contacts, how they stay in touch and how much security the network here on campus gives them. After asking the questions I handed out the questionnaire. Through the questionnaire, I wanted to get demographic and geographical information, but also information about the family, the financial situation and the satisfaction here in Växjö. These findings of the questionnaire are relevant for the eleven interviewed students.

3.8 Method Discussion

The problems according reaching the students through e-mails and later on facebook were already mentioned. According to the e-mails I sent to their University address only three of the fifteen e-mails were read, so the University e-mail account is not checked regularly and reaching students through this e-mail account is rather hard. My second option was sending messages via facebook. More than 50 messages were sent out but just a small amount of students replied. Reason for this can be that students get many messages via facebook and they saw this message just as another “spam” in their Inbox, other reason could have been that they are busy with exams or just did not see any relevance.

3.8.1 Language barriers

The interview, the messages sent, the questions asked and the questionnaire were all in English. Ten of eleven students I interviewed do not have English as their mother tongue. During the interview some students asked the meaning of specific questions and had sometimes difficulties to express themselves. Also, English is not my mother tongue either and influenced the conversation. There is the risk that some students did not mention specific topics because they did not know how to express themselves. So there are some quality meanderings but since almost all the students have a different mother tongue than English, the result can be seen as general from my point of view.
3.8.2 Bias

As mentioned above, the language barrier could have brought some bias in the data material which includes also me as German student that does not speak English as my mother tongue. According to this problematic, Gilbert argues that “much of what we call interviewer bias can more correctly be described as interviewer differences, which are inherent in the fact that interviewers are human beings and not machines” (Gilbert, 1998, p. 147).

Some of the students I interviewed knew each other so there is the possibility that the students compared notes about the interview questions which would have influenced there answers. But this is something I can not comprehend. Furthermore, the research is just with a small number of participators. The possibility exists, because the results according to satisfaction are very positive, only students replied that are very satisfied. That this special group had no problems to agree to an interview because they are satisfied with their temporary situation and therefore tended more participate. This is a possible bias as well.

3.9 Ethical Issues

According to Seale “it has increasingly come to be the case, though, that social researches are expected to take ethical issues into account when developing a proposal. The amount of attention to ethical issues required depends on the sensitivity of your proposed study” (Seale, 1998, p. 56).

The group is limited just to European students. The interview questions are partly sensitive for example questions about the family and the financial situation. If I took for example students from the Middle East into consideration as well I would probably have been faced with a different cultural and religion. As an interviewer you should be prepared and this includes having pre knowledge about the interviewed person, which was for European students given, in my case. One of the ethical impulses that a researcher has to take into consideration is the informed consent. “Informed consent entails informing the researcher objects about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project” (Kvale, 1996, p. 112).
Before making the interview the students were informed that they can deny the questions and that they can go out of the interview whenever they want (alone deciding requirement/ autonomy requirement). I also informed them about the purpose of the study (openness requirement). The interview was based on a free participation and the implementation was explained in the interview application and before the interview again. The students also got the information that their anonymity will be conserved. I did not ask the students for personal dates, just their age, the country where they are from and there sex. Through the International Office I already knew the names of all respondents. I used this information just for reaching the respondents not for any further measurement. I kept their names in confidential (confidential requirement).

3.10 Validity, reliability, generalizability

Through the interviews, I could generate new findings and construct the knowledge on the bases of the experience of the Erasmus exchange students, how they met people, how they stayed in touch with their social contacts and what kind of recourses they used to make themselves more comfortable. The validity and reliability of the information obtained through interviewing was guaranteed with follow up questions, clarifications and a summary after each question made by the interviewer to be sure that their answers were understood in the correct way. The semi-structured interview assured the reliability of the obtained results. The focus lay on a set of questions which where directed to the measured group. In my opinion by repeating the question in a following interview, with the same group of interest (same conditions) some results could have the same obtain but there could also be some results that differ. The result depends on different facts, for example, depending on which country the interviewed person comes from and also on the individual itself.

From my point of view, if there was a quantitative research with a higher number of randomized respondents, then there would be a higher chance to generalize the obtained findings.
3.11 Data Analysis Process

For the data analysis I started to overview the demographic, geographic and evaluation data from the questionnaire. Diagrams were formed with the help of the programme Excel. For the interviews, I made a revision by reading through all of them and looking for common patterns. I started to categorize them and find themes. The findings are related to the theoretical concepts that have been chosen before. The theory helped to explain and describe them. The theoretical framework was used to understand the issue and remain the focus.

4. Results and Analysis

This chapter will outline my research. I will present the results of the interviews and questionnaires. I interviewed eleven Erasmus exchange students, ranging from the age of 20-24 living, on the Växjö University campus. First I will present demographic and geographic dates, then I will present the evaluations and the interview outcomes will be shown in detail.

4.1 Demographic and geographic data and motivation for coming to Sweden

There were five male students and six female students.

The average age of the students was ~22.45 and the nationalities were English, Dutch, Spanish, Austrian, Italian, German and Finnish.

Diagram 1.0 show in which area the family of the students live. Most of the students come from small areas; just two students come from a larger area.

Diagram 1.0 Area where the family lives (n=11)
4.1.1 Motivation for coming to Sweden
Almost all students declared that they came to Växjö to improve their English only two students declared that they want to improve their Swedish. Also, the education was one of the main reasons they went on Erasmus. The courses at Växjö University best fit in the programme of the students and their home university gave them less destinations. Other reasons also mentioned were that this abidance in Sweden would be good for the vita and that they heard from other students that Växjö is a nice place to make an exchange.

4.1.2 Living condition in the home country
Here the circumstances under which the students lived in before they came to Växjö are presented.

Diagram 2.0 shows the living situation in the home country before the students came to Växjö. Five students lived at their parents place before, four in their own flat and two in a student house.

Diagram 2.0 Living situations in the home country (n=11)

All of the interviewed students living in the south lived at their parents place before they came to Sweden. The students in the north were more likely to live on their own or in a student house.

The students that lived on their own lived on average 3,03 years away from home. The number differed from 0,8 years until 4 years.
4.1.3 Financial situation in the home country and in Sweden

Firstly, the income of the family of the students will be presented to see under which conditions they came to Sweden and then have a look at their financial satisfaction here in Växjö/Sweden.

In Diagram 3.0 you can see the family income of the students. The most incomes lay in the average scope. Just two families of the students have their income below the average of their country. These two students come from the south region in Europe.

![Diagram 3.0 Income of the family](image)

Diagram 3.0 Income of the family

Diagram 3.1 shows the satisfaction of the financial situation here in Växjö. The most are in the mid-range of satisfaction. Nobody is very dissatisfied or satisfied.

![Diagram 3.1 Financial situation in Växjö](image)

Diagram 3.1 Financial situation in Växjö, 1= very dissatisfied, 6 very satisfied (n=11)
4.1.4 Satisfaction of the social life

This chapter deals with two more evaluations which are important for the final analysis.

In diagram 3.2 the Satisfaction of the studies in Växjö is visible. Most of the students are satisfied or almost satisfied. Two students tend to be not satisfied.

Diagram 3.2 Satisfaction of the studies as an exchange student 1= very dissatisfied, 6 = very satisfied (n=11)

In diagram 3.3 you can see the satisfaction of the International Office here in Växjö. Most students are satisfied, and even three students are very satisfied.

Diagram 3.3 Satisfaction of the Support from the International Office in Växjö 1= very dissatisfied, 6= very satisfied (n=11)
4.2 Networks within the students move

Diagram 4.0 shows the social networks after Bochner et al. (1984) the students have their most relations with. The most students have contact to both students from their home country and other Erasmus exchange students, or they have just contact with other Erasmus exchange students. Just two students have regularly contact with other students from their home country and just one student has the most contacts with Swedish students.

Diagram 4.0 Networks of the students (n= 11)

Reasons for having contact with companions were first of all language aspects. They think conversations in their own language are easier to follow and it makes them feel more comfortable. One student pointed out: “The home country makes you always kind of safe”. On the other hand are some students thinking that “there is no point of going abroad if you just hang out with people from your home country”. And the one student that has the most contact with Swedish students says that the Exchange students are “really clique and just stay in groups”.

4.3 Living situation influences the social connections

First it will be presented where the Erasmus exchange students live here on campus and then showing how this living situation influences the social network formation.
Diagram 5.0 shows the living situation of the students. Most of the students live in corridors and, just two in a shared apartment and one in a single apartment.

![Diagram 5.0 Living situations on Campus of Växjö University (n=11)](image)

All the students that live in a corridor gave a positive feedback about living there and the students that did not live in a corridor said that they would like to live in a corridor and that they would probably meet more people through that.

The students not living in a corridor had no contact to their neighbours, and also had the feeling that they speak less English because of their living situation. The students’ that live in a corridor think that they meet more people. At the beginning, if you don’t know anybody, you have at least the people from your corridor you can spend time with. The students saw the corridor as a fixed point for their student life here in Växjö. “Whenever I want to see people I just go to the living room”.

For them it is a security for not being alone. The corridor is also seen as a resource: “If you have a problem, you have somebody”. When it comes to making contacts, the students think that in a corridor you have automatically more contact and it is easier to have relations. One girl said: “I would not socialize as much as if I would live on my own, the corridor is very important”.


4.4 Satisfaction of the social life and how to meet people

Diagram 6.0 shows the satisfaction of the social life of the students in Växjö. All students declared a high level of satisfaction. Seven students were satisfied and even four students were very satisfied.

![Diagram 6.0 Satisfaction of the social life, 1= very dissatisfied, 6= very satisfied (n=11)](attachment:diagram.png)

4.4.1 Student pub as a central meeting point

Almost all the students said that they go out very often and also met lot of people there. Therefore the student pub is a kind of meeting point. Also pre- or house parties were mentioned (at a pre party people meet before they go to the pub to drink some alcohol together). The halves of the students are doing sports regularly and catch up with some people there. Another central meeting point that was mentioned was the introduction days organized by the International Office and the lectures.

4.4.2 Making relations for having company

Most of the students search for relations here in Växjö to be not alone and have some company. They want to have somebody they can rely on if they have problems.

One student said: “Everybody is in the same situation far from home, so it is kind of family”. Also, many students want to get to know new cultures and want to have friends around the world, some students even spoke about an “international network” they want to build up. At the same time all the students
pointed out that they have no deep relations here in Växjö: “you can not aspect to find best friends here”.

4.4.3 Influence of student organizations in the social life

At Växjö University many students’organizations exist. One of these organizations is the VIS (Växjö International Students). They organize a lot of events for the Exchange students and also support the International Office during the “Welcome days” where the students are welcomed and introduced to the school and town. The VIS is the first contact for Exchange students at the University.

In diagram 6.1 you can see the students’ level of satisfaction of the VIS. The results are really positive, all students declared that they were satisfied and even one student said that he/she was very satisfied.

Diagram 6.1 Satisfaction of the VIS, 1= very dissatisfied, 6 = very satisfied (n= 11)
In Diagram 6.2 you can see the answers of the question: Did events by the VIS help you to settle down in Växjö? Ten students answered with yes and just one with no.

![Diagram 6.2 Support of VIS by settling down (n=11)]

In Diagram 6.3 you can see the answer to the question: Did VIS events help you to make relations to other students? Ten of the students answered yes and one answered no.

![Diagram 6.3 Support of VIS by making relations (n=11)]

4.4.4 Staying in touch via internet networks

When the students were asked how they stay in contact with their friends or other connections, there was one answer arose in every single interview first: facebook (see Appendix 1, p. 39). Facebook as a social network on the internet is already explained in chapter three. Other ways of staying in contact included the mobile phone, chat or meeting in lectures. The students pointed out that they use these ways seldom because facebook is so much easier. Some students first made a facebook account when they came to Växjö, because they felt excluded
from the social life on the Campus and from the student life in Växjö in general. One student said: “Facebook is really important to socialize here in Växjö”. Other students argued that “facebook is really important for the Erasmus life”. The students use Facebook to post their events and invite each other to parties or share pictures. They even chat via the Facebook web page. “If I would not be on facebook I would miss a lot of all the events, I think it is really good”.

4.5 Resources Erasmus exchange students use if they have a problem

In the questionnaire, I asked, “whom do you ask for help if you have a problem” (see Appendix 2, p. 40)” The students crossed six times “other Exchange students”, four times “students from my home country”; three times the “International Office”. Three times, “local students” was declared and three times “my buddy”. The students are likely to ask other exchange student and students from their home country.

I asked the students in the interview what they are doing if they feel stressed or lonely (see Appendix 1, p. 39). Almost all students answered that they call home, either their parents or friends from home. They also mentioned that they meet people from their country, meet people from their corridor or meet some friends while having “fika” (Swedish word for having a coffee together).

4.6 Most important findings and analysis

In this chapter, the most important findings from the data collected will be presented and at the same time I will analyze it with the help of the theory explained in chapter two and the previous studies presented in chapter one.

4.6.1 Living situation before coming to Växjö/Sweden

Five of the eleven students lived at their parents place before, four students in their own flat and two students lived in a student’s home. Therefore, six of the eleven students already lived on their own before and were separated from their family and know how it is to manage a life on their own.
For the other five students coming, to Växjö seemed like a bigger step. They had to leave their network in which they probably lived their whole life in. They live for the first time on their own but in a strange country with a different language. At the beginning, there was no one they know to rely on. For these students, the social life conditions changed considerable (Fuchs, 1995, p. 74).

4.6.2 Financial situation
Most students declared that their family has an average income, whereas the overall financial satisfactions in Växjö seem to be averaging as good but with some meanderings towards dissatisfaction. So the financial condition seems a little bit lower then in the home country.

These findings also agree with the study of Teichler (2004). According to his study, 20 percentage of the Erasmus students mentioned financial problems because the average monthly cost of studying and living in the host country were slightly above 700 Euros which compared to the home country were just 400 Euro. This can be also transferred to the situation in Växjö. The University indicated that an Erasmus student needs approximately 7490 SEK per month to have a normal students’ life (Växjö University, 2008).

4.6.3 Living situation in connection to the social life
Most of the students live in corridors and they think that this living situation enriches their social life. In their opinion, the corridor is very important and they would not socialize as much if they were to live on their own. On the other hand students stated that they would prefer living in a corridor and that they have the feeling that they socialize less than other students and “…that two students meeting is determined by specific institutional factors (academic college, dorm, and cohort)” (Mayer & Puller, 2007, p. 340).

The living situation is a key coefficient for building up social connections and socializing. It seems there is a lower risk for being alone and a higher chance for having resources they can rely on. Habituation is also one of the basic prerequisites for freedom of action. This condition is not for all the students, but everybody has a standardized place to life. For some students, this living condition brought a more rich social life than for the other students. This condition is not equal but is still fulfilled (Fuchs, 1995, p.74).
4.6.4 Enrichment of the social life

The overall satisfaction of the social life was very positive. If you compare this result with the study of Teichler, the findings are similar. In Teichlers study, 66 percentages of the consulted students were satisfied with the social life in the host country (Teichler, 2004, p. 404). Also every student mentioned that the students’ pubs are a meeting point for people on Erasmus, and that they made many contacts in the pubs. Also, house parties were mentioned as a place where the students made their connections. Parties are seen as a good way to make connections, but also the lectures at University and the introductory days organized by the International Office were mentioned.

4.6.5 Social network of the students

Erasmus exchange students are more likely to have weak ties when they are introduced to new ideas and opportunities. This means the students have access to a wider variety of information than at home. The students stated that their ties at home are stronger and that they have no deep friendships in Växjö (John, 1991, p. 149 ff).

Erasmus students are more likely to be with students from their home country or other exchange students that they classify as part of their “Monocultural network” and “Multicultural network” (Bochner et al., 1984, p. 690). Speaking their mother tongue gives them security while catching up with their comrades makes them feel safe and makes them at home. According to Mayer and Puller, “social networks are characterized by a number of common characteristics and students of the same race are more likely to form a friendship than students of different races” (2007, p. 333ff).

The Erasmus exchange students tend to be cliquish with their comrades whom also Mayer and Puller mention in their article: “Social networks on campus are cliquish, the distribution of numbers of social connections is right skewed, and agents with many ties and to be connected with agents with other many ties” (Mayer & Puller, 2007, p. 330). Whenever they have problems they are more likely to rely on their friends that have the same nationality.
4.6.6 Student organizations influence the social life

VIS gave the students an overall positive feedback. VIS offered a lot of events and travelling for the exchange students and a high number of them are participating. Almost all the students I interviewed stated that VIS enriched their social life and helped them to make connections with other people. For the exchange students, a huge part of their free time is organized by the VIS that the exchange students do not have to figure out as much on their own. The VIS gives them adequate support during their spare time and many opportunities for socializing.

4.6.7 Facebook as a tool for staying in touch with each other and enriching their social life

*Facebook* was the overall answer when I asked the students how they stay in touch with the other students here in Växjö (see Appendix 1, p. 39). *Facebook* seems like one of the most important tools for socialize with the students. All activities are posted on *facebook*. Through this internet network the students have an easy access to all the activities and can contact each other in an easy and free way. Mayer and Puller describe: “Facebook friendships are very likely to measure interaction on campus. … students describe their facebook friends as acquaintances made at school or social activities” (Mayer & Puller, 2007, p. 332).

4.6.8 Transfer of the results on the life condition concept

If you transfer the result on the concept of “life conditions” after Fuchs et al. (1995) which is described in detail in chapter three it will lead to a freedom of choice for the students because all the requirements are fulfilled. This freedom of choice also means satisfaction. The material - economic resource requirements are all completed, the students are more or less satisfied with their financial situation; there is a average satisfaction for the education and a more than averaged satisfaction with the habitation. When it comes to the individual circumstances there exist some variations. According to the interviews, all students have a working social network. Contact with the family is taking place via internet or phone calls. According to the students, the family remains a resource. All this requirements lead to the freedom of action which the Erasmus
exchange students have. According to the questionnaire overall satisfaction exists.

5. Final discussion

The problematic of the thesis was to understand how Erasmus exchange students find their way in their new environment. I wanted to find out what kind of strategies the exchange students use to form their social network. Furthermore, in order to see what kind of resources are available for the students and which of them they are finally using. One of the main findings is that the living situation is a coefficient for socializing. All interviewed students pointed out how important the corridor is and that the corridor is supporting them to socialize and the students who did not live in a corridor made clear that they have the feeling to socialize less than other students. The corridor was also declared as a resource on which the students can rely on.

The second important finding was that VIS is an important coefficient for the social life of the students. VIS supports socialization and arranges free time activities. They give kind of a security for the social life. Even if a student has not the tension to socialize or difficulties to make new connections at least through VIS he can create some free time activities and meet other people. The great assumption of the VIS shows that such offerings are needed and perhaps even advanced. From my point of view this is a protection of social exclusion.

The third main finding is the way of staying in touch. Facebook rules the way of staying in touch. The students post events, chat, share pictures and send messages. The whole student life is mapped on facebook and it makes it easy for the students to socialize through this internet network. For meeting people and making contacts the students declared the student pubs and parties on the corridors as the easiest way to get in contact with people. Although all students stated that they made no real friends, exchange students have just weak ties, deep friendships were not developed.

When it comes to the free time arrangement, most of the students declared that they go out quite often and that the student pubs are a place where they also
made social contacts. Apart from it sport activities were mentioned as well. The students use sport to relax and declared that they also socialize but not as much as at the other activities mentioned below.

According to the results the corridor is really important and according to my research perhaps all students should be accommodated in a corridor. Then, at least, the corridor as a social surrounding and potential social network would be guaranteed for the students if they want to accept this surrounding as a basis for socializing. Some of the findings concur with the previous research presented in chapter one. For example the age, which was also around 23 and the satisfaction with the social life, which was really high.

Furthermore, were also financial problems stated. Financial deviance came up in my research but was not stated as that problematic as in the previous research. No one of the interviewed students mentioned that they take part on students’ activities offered from the Swedish students. Although there is a wide-ranging offering of student activities’ which cover all interests. The exchange students tend to stay in their group and prefer to go out; the cultural offering from the Swedish students seems not to be used. What probably is related to the finding that exchange students are not likely to have much contact with Swedish students. One way for a higher integration of exchange students in the Swedish student life could be to try to get the exchange students more involved through offerings that they feel spoken to also. This issue could lead to further research where reasons will be measured why the exchange students are kind of excluded and ways of integration could be worked out.

If we have a look at the Erasmus exchange students as a risk group again, my research did not uncover any deeper problem. But still in my opinion there should be at least the opportunity given to enlist someone’s assistance. One outcome of the research was also that if the students have a problem they are likely to rely on sources in their home country. Perhaps there are ways to offer more resources to make the students feel more comfortable locally and offer some more resources, for example a special counselling for exchange students. A professional that is specialised on different cultures and is able to understand the students and is able to give confidence would be quite helpful. This could be perhaps a project for later research where such strategies could be tested to see if
the students would adopt such offerings and what they can gain from this and if those offerings would make them feel more comfortable in the host country and at the host university.

6. Conclusion

From my point of view my three research questions are answered although I could not figure out specific strategies because it seems like Erasmus exchange students do not have special strategies for their own. Through the huge support offered by the International Office and the VIS the students do not have that many difficulties. At the beginning they go to parties to meet people and they are likely to accept the offers made by VIS to create their free time or spend time with people from their corridor. I could also find out what kind of resources the students rely on. Mostly they rely on their family and friends in their home country.
Bibliography


Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1. Why did you want to come to Sweden and especially to Växjö?

2. Did you already have contact to other future exchange students before you come to Växjö? How?

3. What do you expect from social network/relations?

4. How do you make relations to other people here in Växjö?

5. What kind of activities are you doing?

6. Do you have a person of trust you can contact if you have a problem?

7. Which resources do the people have in your social network? Do you miss some resources?

8. What are you doing if you feel stressed or lonely? Who or what can support you?
Appendix 2

Questionnaire

1. What is your sex?
   Male          Female

2. How old are you?
   ________

3. What is your home country?
   ______________________

4. Where did you live in your home country before you came to Sweden?
   Parents Place    Students home    own flat

5. If you lived on your own, i.e. without your parents, how long did you live by
   your own?
   __________

6. In which area lives your family?
   o Big city
   o Suburbs of a big city
   o Town or a small city
   o Country village
   o Farm or home in the countryside

7. How would you describe your family’s income?
   o Above the average of my country
   o Average
   o Below the average of my country

8. Where do you live on campus?
9. When did you arrive in Växjö?


10. How long will you stay in Växjö?


11. How is your level of satisfaction with your studies as an exchange student?

Very dissatisfied  1. /  2. /  3. /  4. /  5. /  6. very satisfied

12. How often are you in contact with your family or friends from your home country?
   ○ Never
   ○ Less than once a month
   ○ Once a month
   ○ Several times a month
   ○ Once a week
   ○ Several times a week?
   ○ Every day?

13. Please evaluate the following aspects of your stay in Växjö

Support from the International Office here in Växjö

Very dissatisfied  1. /  2. /  3. /  4. /  5. /  6. very satisfied

Financial situation

Very dissatisfied  1. /  2. /  3. /  4. /  5. /  6. very satisfied

Social life

Very dissatisfied  1. /  2. /  3. /  4. /  5. /  6. very satisfied
14. How is your level of satisfaction with the student organization VIS (Växjö International Students)?

Very dissatisfied 1. / 2. / 3. / 4. / 5. / 6. very satisfied

15. Did events organized by the VIS help you to settle down here in Växjö?
□ Yes □ No

16. Did VIS events help you to make relations to other students?
□ Yes □ No

17. Whom do you ask for help if you have a problem?
○ International Office
○ Another student organization
○ The student union
○ Students from your home country
○ Exchange students
○ Local Students
○ Other ______________________
○ I don’t know anybody to ask for help