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**Erasmus: The Grand Tour of Modern Times**  
**Information Provision. A Comparative Study Between Five European Universities**

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## Introduction

From the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, young elite boys would leave their hometown and spend some time abroad; this phenomenon was known as 'the grand tour'. They would learn a new culture, a new language and most importantly they would learn a lot about themselves. That is why we can suppose that the Erasmus programme is the equivalent of the grand tour in this modern time.

This dissertation is composed of four main chapters all treating the information provision Erasmus students have before, during and after their Erasmus period abroad. The first chapter talks about the Erasmus programme itself, the history of the programme, the conditions to participate and the typical Erasmus student. Also a link with the humanist Desiderius Erasmus is made.

In the second chapter the aim of this dissertation and the different research methods we used to get to the results treated in the next chapters are explained. Chapter three highlights the results we discovered through interviewing 35 (former) Erasmus students. We compare the thoughts and experiences on information provision from our interviewees with earlier researches like the ESNSurvey (2009) and the research that has been done by Krzaklewska and Feyen (2013) to see if there has been made readily improvements or if there is still a lot of work regarding information provision for Erasmus students.

The second big part of this dissertation consists of another research. We try to find out how the universities welcome their incoming Erasmus students and which information they provide their incoming Erasmus students with, by analysing five European universities' websites and their welcome mail. Also former Erasmus students of these five universities have been interviewed and gave their insight on how they felt and what information they lacked. Finally, we offer for each university, some suggestions that can improve the information provision they offer to their incoming Erasmus students to make the students' stay at their university even more pleasant.

## Conclusion

The Erasmus program is a real success story. When in 1987 only 3244 students participated, today 270.000 students and staff spent a period abroad on a yearly basis. The number keeps growing, so it is very important that the program keeps improving. In the first chapter the history of the program got explained, from 1987, when the first students left to study a period abroad to the recent name change in Erasmus+. We described who the typical Erasmus students are and where they would go on Erasmus, according to the trends and growing interests in different countries. At the end of chapter one we found out why this program is called Erasmus, the name refers to the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus, who spent a lot of his life studying and working abroad.

In the methodology we explained how we received all our data. We contacted the students by social network and by the snowball-effect. For the second part of our research we used the internet to contact the universities and the former Erasmus students.

After interviewing 35 (former) Erasmus students and comparing our data with the data from the ESN Survey (2009) and Krzaklewska and Feyen (2013), we found that there are still big differences concerning information provision in the various universities. A lot of interviewees mentioned that they felt a lack of knowledge before their departure and, a buddy upon arrival. There are also a lot of similarities between the Erasmus students: they all need to fill out a Learning Agreement and an application to get accepted at their host university, they all had initial problems that later on got resolved and most of them had a lot of international friends and almost nobody made local friends. When we compared our research to the ESN survey, we noted that the working points we discovered were virtually the same as the ones described in the 2009 survey. It is important that the students get the essential information, mostly they look for it on the website of the host university so it is important that the information provided on these websites is accurate and up-to-date.

Finally, in the last chapter, we compared five European universities in their way of welcoming new incoming Erasmus students. Here as well, we saw big differences between the universities. Some universities just send a link to their universities' homepage, whilst others send a lot of information in their welcome mail. The more information the students got in their welcome mail and the more information was provided on the website of the university, the easier it was for the Erasmus students to find the information they needed. After interviewing the ten Erasmus students and comparing the websites we noticed a readily improvement in various universities, this extends from a new website to better information provision. It is a very positive sign that the universities are still improving and do their best at offering a good service to their students. Because like all the 35 interviewees said in the first research part, Erasmus is the time of your life and all of them would recommend it. As far as my own experience, I know that Erasmus is a unique program that gave me the opportunity to live and learn in another country and like some interviewees mentioned, it makes you grow as a person.

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