**IEREST**

**Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers**

**Module 1 - Activity 4**

**Meeting others abroad**

1. **Introduction**

The activity is related to the goal of reflecting on what it means to engage with others during a stay abroad. It aims to help students respond critically to situations where, during their residence abroad, they may experience any of the following felt or imposed needs to:

* Meet exclusively ‘local’ people,
* Avoid or stay with their co-nationals, and/or
* Avoid or stay with exchange student communities.

The activity helps students refrain from creating categories of ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ others, reflecting on the idea that all people are potentially interesting and worth meeting.

The activity also aims at encouraging students to engage with other mobile students, for instance by having former mobile students share experiences with new mobile students.

Finally, it aims to help students to reflect on how their questions can elicit certain information and opinions from their interlocutors, which can be used - perhaps unconsciously - to form an essentialist view of self, other, and certain places. More practically, students experience ways of conducting an interview from potentially non-essentialist perspectives.

The estimated overall time for completing the activity is 11-12 hours.

1. **Learning objectives and outcomes**

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|  | **Learning objectives**  This activity aims to enable students to: | **Learning outcomes**  Learners will be able to: |
| **1** | Reflect on each person's uniqueness but also similarities, and on the fact that difference is not necessarily negative and that sameness in not necessarily positive either. | Recognise and explain the variety and complexity that exist among individuals in social groups. |
| **3** | Become aware of the ways in which people (re)construct and/or (re)negotiate their own and others’ multiple identities depending on experiences, encounters, contexts, and interlocutors. | Describe ways in which people (re)construct and/or (re)negotiate their own and others’ multiple identities depending on experiences, encounters, contexts, and interlocutors. |
| **4** | Consider the problematic nature of using certain terms (e.g. ethnicity, race, nation) to frame identity. | Recognize and explain the problematic nature of using certain terms (e.g. ethnicity, race, nation) to frame identity. |
| **6** | Understand that what people say about their culture may be interpreted as what they wish others to see about themselves, and which may not be applicable to others from that culture or group. | Interpret what people say about their culture as a personal observation, and possibly as evidence of what they wish others to see about themselves. |
| **7** | Understand how key concepts such as stereotyping, ethnocentrism, essentialising, and prejudice can lead to misunderstandings and misrepresentations of people from other horizons. | Recognise when misunderstandings may be the result of stereotyping, ethnocentrism, essentialising and prejudice. |

1. **Overview and description of tasks**

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| ***Task 1.***  **Discovering a new study destination** | * Introduce the activity and its objectives. * Ask questions and stimulate class discussion to introduce the main topic. * Ask students to browse through brochures/websites of their sojourn destination. * Split the class in groups of 3/4 students and ask them to identify sections which present ‘the locals’ and answer the questions. * Introduce some theoretical concepts such as ‘essentialising’ and ‘otherising’. |
| ***Task 2.***  **Following an Erasmus ‘reporter’** | * Ask groups to watch the video of Perrine in Coimbra and complete the table provided *(Attachment 1)*. * Ask students to compare and discuss their answers in a plenary. |
| ***Task 3.***  **Interviewing new acquaintances** | * In pairs, students prepare to interview an international student at their home university. * In pairs, they conduct and video record their interview. |
| ***Task 4.***  **Watching the interview with a critical eye** | * Ask students to analyse the views expressed by the interviewee. * Invite students to share their feedback on the interview and their observations. * Ask students to self-assess their learning. |

***Task 1. Discovering a new study destination***

Time required: 1.5 hours

*Task overview. In this task, the students draw on their previous experience of travel in order to observe and analyse information on local communities in the brochures/websites of various study destinations. Students are invited to discern the difference between the essentialist and the non-essentialist view of culture.*

1. To introduce the topic of the activity, ask the students to briefly discuss the following questions. This can provide you with initial information on the students’ past experiences abroad.

* Have you ever been abroad? When? How long for? Where did you stay? Was it a holiday or did you go for other purposes?
* Who did you go with? What did you do?
* Who did you meet? What languages did you speak and with whom? Were there people you tried to avoid? Why?
* How did you prepare for the trip (e.g., read a guidebook, talk to people who had been to the country)?
* Moving on to your choice of destination for your study abroad, why did you choose that specific destination?

1. Bring along a certain number of brochures/guides for students about different places in Europe or ask the student to bring a brochure/guide about the place where they are going to study. Alternatively, these can be found and read online. Examples of these are:
   * Study in Belgium, Leuven: <http://www.kuleuven.be/english/living>
   * Study in Italy: <http://www.study-in-italy.it/php5/study-italy.php?idorizz=6>
   * Study in Finland, Helsinki: <http://www.studyhelsinki.fi/en/student-guide>
   * Study in United Kingdom, Durham: [https://www.dur.ac.uk/international/studyabroad/exchange/incoming/](https://www.dur.ac.uk/international/studyabroad/exchange/incoming/" \t "_blank)

In small groups, students skim through the brochures and try to identify sections where they talk about local people. Suggested questions:

***In the sections talking about local people observe the following points:***

* What is said about local people?
* In your opinion, why have the authors selected these pieces of information?
* Who do you think the authors are?
* Is the information useful?
* Have the students ever found these ideas useful when abroad?
* Do students think that this information will help them meet local people?

***Examine the way the authors talk about language use:***

* What language(s) are mentioned?
* What is said about them?
* Which one(s) do they suggest should/will be used?

***Look at the pictures:***

* How are they connected to the text/descriptions of the institution/city/country?

1. Introduce students to some core concepts such as ‘culture’, ‘non-essentialism’ (*Slides 10-17*), ‘stereotyping and ‘otherising’ (*Slides 18-21*).

***Task 2. Following an Erasmus ‘reporter’***

Time required: 4 hours

*Task overview****.*** *In this task, the focus moves to the context of Erasmus student mobility. The students view the video portrait of Coimbra, Portugal by Erasmus student Perrine (Leuven, Belgium)* [*http://www.at-home-in-europe.tv/blog/video.php?video=hECpYACHKcs*](http://www.at-home-in-europe.tv/blog/video.php?video=hECpYACHKcs)*. Students are invited to analyse the video clip closely and critically.*

1. Distribute the hand-out (*Attachment 1*) to the students, and explain that the following task is based on the video portrait by Erasmus student Perrine (Leuven, Belgium) of her host university community in Coimbra, Portugal: <http://www.at-home-in-europe.tv/blog/video.php?video=hECpYACHKcs>. The students complete the table as they watch the video for the first time, focusing on the highlighted and ignored elements of culture.
2. Divide the students into pairs. Play the clip again from 1:55 to 10:53. Ask the students to formulate one or more additional questions that Perrine could have asked each of these people: Jorge, Sofia, Ricardo.
3. The students then compare and discuss their answers in plenary, with reference to some of the theoretical concepts introduced earlier.

***Task 3. Interviewing new acquaintances***

Time required: 3 hours

*Task overview. In this task, the students are asked to interview an incoming/returning Erasmus student about his or her experience. Before carrying out this task, the students need to know who they will be interviewing, and fix an appointment. Either the teacher can provide a list of potential names, or the students can be asked to find their own interviewees.*

1. In pairs, students prepare to interview an international student at their home university who is from the university (or country) where they will be doing their study abroad. If no such student is available, they prepare to interview a student who has already returned from a study period at that university (or country). During preparation, the following ideas are presented to the students to help them consider ways of conducting the interview that could move towards a less essentialist interviewing style (see also *Slides 10-17*):

* Welcome the unexpected, the unconnected, what does not fit in instead of looking for a single straightforward story;
* Explore a variety of facets, layers, and perspectives instead of looking for a uniform picture of the home setting;
* Look for similarities as well as differences between here and there;
* Probe for the specifics of lived experiences and witnessed events when the interviewee makes all too general statements;
* Focus on the hesitations, repetitions, and demurrals of the interviewee in order to explore the hidden oppositions and assumptions on which cultural identity is constructed;
* Focus on how the interviewee may speak to what (s)he assumes the interviewer wants and does not want to hear.

1. Out of class, students conduct in pairs a video-recorded interview with an incoming/returning Erasmus student. The final interview should last no more than 15 minutes, although students can record and edit a longer video if they prefer, cutting it down to 15 minutes.

***Task 4. Watching the interview with a critical eye***

Time required: 3 hours

*Task overview. In this task, the students analyse the interviews they conducted. Then they share their interviews with the rest of the class and report on their observation. Finally, they reflect on their own learning throughout this activity.*

1. In their pairs, students analyse the views expressed by the interviewee in terms of:

* The cultural image that is projected of each setting—considering which phenomena, traits, rules, norms and values are cited;
* The attitude the interviewee holds towards each setting;
* What message the interviewee is sending about his or her cultural identity, and about the cultural identity of his/her hosts;
* Ways in which the interviewers or interviewees may have questioned or made explicit the way these cultural identities were constructed;
* What is indicative of a (non-)essentialist viewpoint on the part of both the interviewers and the interviewees;
* How interviewees construct Erasmus students’ communities and people they have met or tried to avoid meeting. What do these stories/constructions tell us about their attitudes to diversity?

The students write notes on these points, in order to be able to present and discuss their analysis with the rest of the class.

1. The students share their interviews with the rest of the class and report on their observation. If the group is small, the interviews can be watched in class. Otherwise, they can be shared among the students before the lesson so that all students can watch the interviews before the discussion. If there is no time for this, the discussion can take place before the viewing, and the students can be asked to watch the videos produced after class.
2. Invite students to self-assess their learning with the support of *Attachment 2*. Invite students to share with the class their reflections about their own learning.
3. **Assessment methods**

* Self-assessment using a form (see *Attachment 2*) provided at the end of the overall activity (*Task 4*).

1. **Suggested readings**

* Gillespie, A., Howarth, C. S., & Cornish, F. (2012). Four problems for researchers using social categories. *Culture & Psychology, 18*(3), 391-402.
* Holliday, A. (2010). Complexity in cultural identity. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *10*(2), 165-177.

1. **Materials and resources**

* A computer, access to the Internet, a projector.
* Brochures/guides about different places in Europe.
* Video cameras/mobile devices for video-recording.
* The IEREST slides.
* Two IEREST attachments:
  + *Attachment 1*: Reflective observation grid (*Task 2*).
  + *Attachment 2*: Self-assessment grid (*Task 4*).

**Attachment 1 (*Task 2. Following an Erasmus ‘reporter’*)**

Watch the video portrait by Erasmus student Perrine (Leuven, Belgium) of her host university and fill the table, focusing on the elements of culture the video highlights and ignores.

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|  | Highlighted elements of culture | Ignored elements of culture |
| Portugal and the Portuguese in general |  |  |
| Coimbra and university life |  |  |
| The Erasmus students in Coimbra |  |  |

The following table is meant for teachers and should not be distributed to the students. It reports some elements teachers can suggest if students do not mention them in their own tables.

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|  | Highlighted elements of culture | Ignored elements of culture |
| Portugal and the Portuguese in general | * Mentality, spirit: (1) Perrine: open-minded, “sympathique”; (2) Marta: not pessimistic, conscious of the importance of education; (3) Sofia: seize opportunities (e.g. go and work in another country). * Economic crisis, unemployment, the role of education and flexibility in getting out of the crisis. * More implicitly, also the climate (sunny) and natural beauty; great sense of calm or stillness, perhaps even languor. * Public transport. * … | * Sports (soccer). * Religion and religious practices. * Food. * Policy and attitude towards immigrant populations (Brazil, Cape Verde, Eastern Europe). * Poverty, crime (as a result of the economic crisis). * What the Portuguese themselves make of southern European stereotypes, e.g. (un)willingness to work. * ... |
| Coimbra and university life | * History and traditions: one of the oldest universities in the world; the cloak and badges; “a synonym of Coimbra would be the republics”. * Vibrant cultural life: the workshops of the Republics; “international bonds for questioning”; the fado of Coimbra. * Multinational and multicultural: (1) Perrine: You meet many people, cultures, languages; (2) Jorge: 10% is foreign so you can easily learn about cultures and languages; (3) Sofia: International friendships can end the separation between countries. * Mentality, spirit, values: (1) Ricardo: Everything is shared (in the republics); (2) see above. * More implicitly, the combination of the quaint (cobblestones) and artistic (graffiti) with the majestic (law faculty). * ... | * Academic culture: Everything related to study (e.g. course level, student workload, medium of instruction, grading system); relationship between students and teachers; what students think defines academic success (a great group project or high individual grades); study culture (cramming, group or individual study, reading groups?); cost of living, housing, etc. * From what is shown, the university appears to be mainly humanities-oriented. What about science and technology? * Perrine asks Jorge about the positive sides of the international student community at Coimbra, but not for any potential negatives or difficulties. * Coimbra’s fado is defined in opposition to Lisbon’s. What else about Coimbra is defined in opposition to Lisbon (or somewhere else)? * Other forms of non-academic pursuits, besides the arts (sports?) * How do the republics relate to each other, how do these republics define themselves as communities, how loosely or strongly are the conditions for membership enforced? * Mostly the very poor and Erasmus students eat at republics? Is this a marginalisation of the international student community or is it more complex? Jorge says that “the cape is not about rich students now, just about tradition”. So no longer distinctions between rich/ poor students at all? * ... |
| The Erasmus students in Coimbra | * Perrine is the only Erasmus we see. * Ricardo, Jorge, Sofia say that Erasmus students are welcome. * ... | * All other Erasmus student voices besides Perrine’s. * In what ways do Erasmus students come together (outside the republics)? * What institutional processes of accommodating this community, bringing it into contact with others (teachers, other Coimbra students)? * ... |

**Attachment 2 (*Task 4. Watching the interview with a critical eye*)**

This is a self-assessment grid for evaluating what you have learnt throughout this activity and how you learnt it. What do you think you have learnt to do? Taking the expected outcomes as a reference, identify both positive points in your learning, and objectives you believe you still need to reach.

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| **Outcomes** | **I have learnt…**  **I have learnt it thanks to…** | **I still have to learn… because…** |
| 1. Recognise and explain the variety and complexity that exist among individuals in social groups. |  |  |
| 1. Describe ways in which people (re)construct and/or (re)negotiate their own and others’ multiple identities depending on experiences, encounters, contexts, and interlocutors. |  |  |
| 1. Recognize and explain the problematic nature of using certain terms (e.g. ethnicity, race, nation) to frame identity. |  |  |
| 1. Interpret what people say about their culture as a personal observation, and possibly as evidence of what they wish others to see about themselves. |  |  |
| 1. Recognise when misunderstandings may be the result of stereotyping, ethnocentrism, essentialising and prejudice. |  |  |