

ESSAY : Erasmus and Solidarity



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"Not necessary to turn off the light on the other, to get ours shine. » Mahatma Gandhi

Solidarity is a concept of positive mutual aid between members of a community, people who share the same interests, in order to pursue their goals. Through this essay, we explore the profound concept of Erasmus solidarity, looking at the transformative impact it will have on individuals and communities. The thread running through this essay will be the quote, "Not necessary to turn off the light on the other, to get ours shine.", by Mahatma Gandhi. In my opinion, solidarity is a fundamental principle of the Erasmus exchange program. We could divide this principle into four parts: first we'll explore the importance of solidarity between Europeans during a mobility program, then we'll look at solidarity with the host family, then the place of solidarity between myself and my pen pal, and finally we'll finish with solidarity between French people.

My name is Chloé, I'm 16 years old and from November 16 to December 14 2023, I took part in a one-month mobility program in Plock, Poland. I decided to choose "Solidarity" as the most significant value of this exchange program. Through the diverse experiences of Erasmus exchange participants, personal stories and case studies, the way in which diversity fosters the unity and collectivity of the Erasmus community is notable. Gandhi's quote is a constant reminder that the unique light of each participant contributes to the overall brilliance. Indeed, solidarity can be observed on an international scale: during an Erasmus exchange, we're led to share with foreigners, especially at school. Some of us have already experienced this, arriving in a foreign country, a foreign school, not knowing anyone, and feeling a little lost. The solidarity that keeps this Erasmus community alive has led many young people to help each other, guiding foreign students, helping them discover places and words, or simply answering a question. What's more, this mutual support also takes

the form of work: group work, for example, where everyone pitches in to help, brings this solidarity to the fore. Here at Jagiellonka High School, group work is a regular feature. For example, we had to prepare a presentation in geography, in which everyone had to answer a few questions. The questions were difficult, so instead of dividing them up between us, we decided to answer each question together, in order to provide more complete answers and help those who didn't understand the question.

Secondly, solidarity also plays an important role with the host family. In any field, solidarity is present, whether from the host family to the foreigner, or from the foreigner to the host family. In an Erasmus host family, solidarity is of particular importance, as it creates a warm and welcoming environment for the foreign exchange student. This solidarity manifests itself through various aspects of daily life and the intercultural experience. Firstly, there is often a significant sharing of cultural experiences. Members of the host family and the foreign student have the opportunity to exchange views on their respective traditions, customs and lifestyles. This sharing fosters mutual understanding and strengthens the bonds within the family. At the same time, mutual aid plays a crucial role. Whether helping students find their way around the city, understand the local education system or master the language, the host family offers invaluable support. This mutual support creates a sense of security and encourages foreign students to fully immerse themselves in their new life. What's more, solidarity often manifests itself in more delicate situations, such as moments of loneliness. Host family members can provide emotional support, a sympathetic ear and kind advice. This creates an environment where the foreign student feels truly integrated and supported. In short, solidarity in an Erasmus host family goes beyond simple day-to-day interactions. It encompasses enriching cultural exchange, practical mutual aid and emotional support, creating an environment conducive to a positive and memorable study abroad experience. Personally, my Polish host family was more than just a host family; they helped, supported and guided me, and every member of the

family treated me as if I were one of them. I wasn't just a guest, I was an integral part of the family. They shared their culture and way of life with me, but also gave me everything I needed. Monika and Robert, my pen pal's parents, organized a weekend in Krakow for us, and it was one of the best weekends I've ever spent here in Poland. The city was beautiful, so were the activities, and I had a great time with them. During my mobility, I also did my best to share some of the specifics of my French culture with my family, food, customs...

Thirdly, the solidarity between a person and his or her pen pal during a month-long Erasmus exchange is often expressed by a mutual desire to facilitate the other's experience. This can manifest itself in the sharing of local knowledge, where the pen pal helps to familiarize the foreign student with daily life, key places and local customs. Similarly, the exchange student can bring a different perspective and enrich the life of his or her pen pal through cultural exchanges. Solidarity is also reflected in practical mutual assistance, whether it's navigating public transport, solving problems or adapting to new situations. This cooperation strengthens the bond between the two people. Finally, emotional solidarity can play an important role. This emotional connection helps to make the exchange experience more meaningful and enjoyable for both parties. For me, the exchange with my Polish pen pal Dorota was a real pleasure, and we shared good and bad times together that I'll remember for the rest of my life. Right from the start, we became very close, she's now more than just a stranger with whom I've lived for a month, she's become my friend, we've laughed, cried, consoled each other, but above all, the simple fact of knowing she's close to me reassures me, I know I can count on her, trust her and this relationship goes both ways. I'll never forget her or all she's done for me, to make me feel good and ensure that I don't lack anything.

Finally, solidarity among French people on an Erasmus exchange, both between exchange participants and with those remaining in France, can manifest itself in many ways. French exchange students can forge strong bonds by sharing similar experiences, helping each other overcome

challenges and forging friendships. Solidarity between them can manifest itself through joint activities, events and collaboration within their exchange group. Whether it's helping each other at work, or sharing moments of relaxation and enjoyment together. Solidarity can also come from those back home in France. Their support can take the form of advice on daily life abroad, help with catching up on courses in France, encouragement during difficult times, and sometimes even exchanges of news and experiences to stay connected despite the distance. Solidarity between French people during an Erasmus exchange helps create a strong support network, and makes the overall experience more rewarding. For example, I was able to count on many French people during my exchange in Poland. In the front line were, of course, the three other girls (my friends) who went with me, with whom solidarity was a way of uplifting each other (as the Gandhi quote reminds us, solidarity brings much to each person than "every man for himself »). And, of course, the friends and classmates I left behind in France, without whom this month in Poland would not have been possible. Thanks to them, I was able to attend classes, and they all did their best to make my life easier, and I'll be doing the same for them during their mobility.

To conclude, the concept of solidarity in the Erasmus exchange program is essential on several levels. From the international scale to the individual relationship with the host family and the personal connection with the pen pal, solidarity shapes a rich and transformative exchange experience. Mahatma Gandhi's quote, "It is not necessary to extinguish another's light for our own to shine", resonates particularly in the context of Erasmus, underlining the importance of collaboration, mutual aid and sharing in creating a united and enlightened community.