

Erasmus Mobility Experience in Manisa, Türkiye: An Academic and Cultural Reflection

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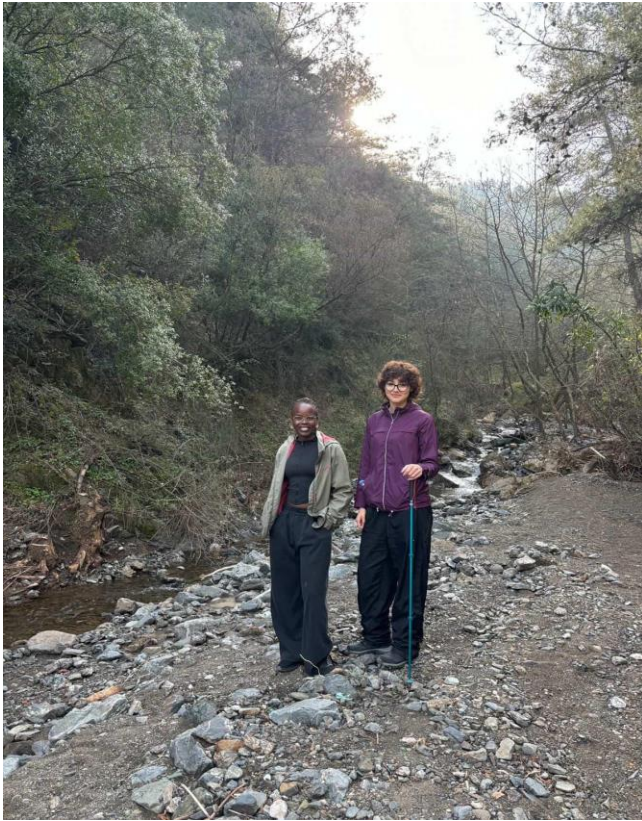
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1. Introduction

International student mobility programs such as Erasmus+ provide an opportunity for students to engage with diverse academic systems and cultural contexts. As a sports science student at Kenyatta University, my decision to study at Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi was informed by its established Physical Education and Sports department.

Beyond academic advancement, this mobility aimed to explore how exercise science is delivered in a different sociocultural environment and to develop intercultural competencies essential in modern sports practice.

2. Institutional and Academic Experience



1A photo of my friend I at mt spil (spil dağı) for an outdoor lesson



2A photo with the Manisa Celal Bayar second year class at the Sultan mosque .



3A photo with the Manisa Celal Bayar recreation and sports science third grade students after an English A1 lesson.



A picture with the dean Prof Dr.Kadir YILDIZ



A photo with the dean of physical education faculty prof .Kadir (left) ,deputy dean ,Dr mehmet ASMA and Dr Tolga Beşikçi (far right)

Upon arrival in Manisa, I was oriented by the Erasmus coordination office, which facilitated my transition into the academic system. During the first week, I interacted with faculty members, adjusted my course units to align with the institutional timetable, and completed registration procedures.

The courses I attended included Method Application in Team Sports Training, Sportive Massage Training, Science and Research Ethics, Health Information and First Aid, Out-of-School Learning, and Summer Camp. These units provided both theoretical and practical insights into sports science education within the Turkish context.

A notable distinction in pedagogy was the predominant use of the Turkish language in instruction. This created an additional layer of complexity, as comprehension required real-time translation through digital tools and occasional lecturer support. While this initially limited full academic engagement, it also highlighted the importance of language in knowledge acquisition and participation.

Interestingly, lecturers demonstrated inclusivity by inviting me into their classes, not only as a participant but also as a means of exposing students to an international perspective. This interaction fostered a dynamic learning environment and encouraged cross-cultural academic exchange.

3. Cultural and Social Experience



4 At the Manisa city centre during Ramadhan .It is a popular holiday in the country.Behind me is Spil mountain .It is near the city centre

Cultural immersion formed a significant component of the Erasmus experience. Living in Manisa provided exposure to everyday Turkish life, characterized by strong community interaction and rich traditions.

Social integration was facilitated through interactions with local and international students. Although many students had limited spoken English proficiency, communication was achieved through patience, translation tools, and mutual willingness to engage. This dynamic revealed a gap between comprehension and expression in second-language acquisition, an observation relevant to educational contexts globally.

Food culture also played a central role in cultural exchange. Through friendships, I was introduced to a variety of Turkish dishes, which enhanced my understanding of cultural identity and social practices surrounding meals.

Participation in a music festival further exposed me to traditional dance and artistic expression, reinforcing the importance of cultural activities in community cohesion.

4. Cultural Exploration and Environmental Engagement



5 I attended the mesir macunu festival ,a famous herbal paste ,and the children festival in the city centre of Manisa.This was a procession people singing and celebrating



6 At the mountain spil national park. It is where the Turkish soldiers fought from in history. They have a museum with the history of the mountain. It is a home of wild horses, wolves and birds.



7A photo of me at a stream in the mountain .I had gone for a trip organized by the government for international students.

Experiential learning extended beyond the classroom through visits to culturally and environmentally significant sites. A visit to a cultural museum provided historical context and deepened my understanding of Turkish heritage.

One of the most impactful experiences was trekking at Spil Dağı National Park alongside fellow Erasmus students. This activity not only promoted physical well-being but also aligned with principles of outdoor and adventure-based learning within sports science.

Additionally, I attended the renowned Mesir Macunu festival, centered around Mesir Macunu, a herbal paste composed of 41 spices. The festival, which involves distributing the paste to the public, represents a blend of historical tradition and communal celebration.

Regular activities such as cycling in public parks and accessing gym facilities reflected the city's emphasis on recreational physical activity, an important aspect of public health and exercise science.

5. Challenges and Adaptation

The primary challenge throughout the mobility period was the language barrier. Operating in a predominantly Turkish-speaking environment required continuous adaptation and reliance on translation technologies.

Academically, this affected the depth of engagement during lectures. However, it also fostered resilience, problem-solving skills, and adaptability—qualities essential in both academic and professional settings.

Another subtle challenge was navigating a different educational culture, including teaching methods and student participation styles. Over time, I adapted by developing alternative strategies for understanding and engagement.

6. Personal and Professional Development

The Erasmus experience significantly contributed to my personal and professional growth. Living independently in a foreign country enhanced my self-reliance and decision-making abilities.

From a professional perspective, exposure to a different sports science curriculum broadened my understanding of global practices in exercise science. It also emphasized the importance of cultural competence when working in diverse environments, particularly in fields related to health, fitness, and community engagement. Furthermore, interacting with students from various countries fostered intercultural communication skills and expanded my global network.

In conclusion, the Erasmus mobility experience at Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi was both academically enriching and personally transformative. Despite challenges, particularly related to language, the experience provided valuable insights into alternative educational systems, cultural practices, and personal adaptability.

The integration of academic learning with cultural immersion created a holistic experience that has contributed significantly to my development as a sports science student. Such mobility programs remain essential in preparing students for global engagement in their respective fields.



8 At the sultan mosque where there is the history of the making of Mesir Macunu. It was a herbal paste used by the soldiers when they were sick. The place also has the history of the ancient medicine and how it developed since.



9 At a recreational park in the outskirts of Manisa. The flowers indicate the beginning of spring as they bloom.