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EXCHANGE DIPLOMACY IN THE MATTER OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Around the world, cultural and educational events are employed as a component of public diplomacy. Due to cultural and educational activities, there is a growth in mutual understanding between nations and a strengthening of long-term relations. Countries must listen to what others have to say in order to develop and effectively articulate their own interests. This is necessary for exchange programs to be effective public diplomacy tools. People get more connected to one another as they get to know and understand one another, miscommunications are cleared up, and lasting relationships are developed to open doors for various types of partnerships. By assessing virtual Erasmus+ mobility in the framework of exchange diplomacy during the Covid-19 pandemic phase, this study seeks to ascertain the status of making a contribution to public diplomacy. Answers to the research questions posed in the purpose section of the study are sought through structured interviews with international students using descriptive analysis, one of the qualitative research methodologies. This study is the first to evaluate virtual mobility

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within the context of exchange diplomacy, and it shows that programs for virtual exchange will also support public diplomacy.

Keywords: *Exchange diplomacy, exchange experiences, public diplomacy, mutual understanding, virtual mobility*

COVID-19 PANDEMİSİ DÖNEMİNDE KARŞILIKLI ANLAYIŞ BAĞLAMINDA DEĞİŞİM DİPLOMASİSİ

Öz

Kültür ve eğitim faaliyetleri dünya çapında bir kamu diplomasisi unsuru olarak kullanılmaktadır. Kültür ve eğitim faaliyetleri sayesinde milletler arasında karşılıklı anlayış gelişir ve uzun vadeli ilişkiler güçlenir. Değişim programlarının kamu diplomasisinde başarılı bir araç olabilmesi için, ulusların yabancıların söylediklerini dinlemesi, geliştirmesi ve kendi çıkarlarını iletmesi gerekir. İnsanlar birbirini tanıdıça ve anladıça yakınlaşır, yanlış anlaşılmalara giderilir ve uzun vadeli ilişkiler kurulup çeşitli işbirlikleri için fırsatlar yaratılır. Bu çalışma, Covid-19 pandemisi sürecinde değişim diplomasisi bağlamında sanal Erasmus+ hareketliliğini değerlendirerek kamu diplomasisine katkı sağlama durumunu belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden betimsel analiz kullanıldığı bu çalışmada amaç bölümünde sorulan araştırma sorularına Türkiye'ye gelen öğrencilerle yapılan yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla yanıt aranmaktadır. Bu araştırma, sanal hareketliliği değişim diplomasisi çerçevesinde inceleyen ilk çalışma olup, sanal değişim programlarının kamu diplomasisine de katkı sağlayabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Değişim diplomasisi, deneyim değişimi, kamu diplomasisi, karşılıklı anlayış, sanal hareketlilik*

1. INTRODUCTION

Exchange diplomacy enables the development of intention, the improvement of the images of countries, the destruction of mutual prejudices and the building of long-term relations. For exchange programs to be a successful tool for public diplomacy, nations need to listen to what foreign people have to say, as well as develop and communicate their own interests. As people get to know and understand each other, they get closer to each other, misunderstandings are

corrected, and long-term relationships are built to create opportunities for various collaborations.

In the first section, the terms of public diplomacy and exchange diplomacy is defined, and then the interviews with the students who have experienced virtual mobility in Türkiye during the Covid-19 pandemic process are examined within the framework of exchange diplomacy.

Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is generally explained by many scholars that gaining the minds and hearts of the foreign countries public.

An effective public diplomacy should work in cooperation with traditional diplomacy. Traditional diplomacy requires mutual understanding and often compromise. Likewise, public diplomacy should include mutual understanding (Taylor, 2006: 49).

Public diplomacy moves away from focusing only on information activities and gives more importance to long-term cultural exchange activities such as international education exchange programs, language teaching abroad and other international cultural exchanges (Lima Júnior, 2007: 237). Through exchange programs, long-term relationships can be established, and mutual benefits can be achieved. Countries are trying to gain sympathy, prestige, and power by highlighting their national cultural characteristics with exchange diplomacy. It is used by nations as a powerful approach to establish and develop relations with foreign nations in the context of education and culture, as well as to contribute to public diplomacy. Countries should see exchange diplomacy efforts as a type of activity in public diplomacy campaigns (Snow, 2009: 242). While most public diplomacy work involves promotion and image

building, educational exchanges involve the person directly where the relationship with the personality and psychology of the participants is central (Scott-Smith, 2009: 50).

Exchange Diplomacy

Most studies indicate that cultural education exchange programs can help facilitate mutual understanding between different nations and should be implemented within the framework of a strategy to be used as a public diplomacy tool (Kim, 2016: 138). Exchange diplomacy develops mutual understanding between countries and their publics through cultural communication and interaction, and also contributes to the foreign policy of countries. Exchange diplomacy contributes to public diplomacy and its sustainability and countries try to win the hearts and minds of different nations through exchange diplomacy practices and mutual understanding.

According to Waithaka and Maluki (2016: 2-5) exchange programs create a positive public opinion abroad on the basis of mutual understanding and can help reduce possible conflicts by better understanding the perspectives of other nations. Exchange programs increase understanding and trust by creating cultural affinity. Exchange diplomacy generates soft power by using education exchange programs to improve mutual understanding between nations, people, and states from all over the world. Bettie (2020: 213) define exchange programs as bringing together people from different backgrounds to build mutual understanding and heartiness, without a clear political agenda. For academic integrity, it must be applied apolitical.

Educational exchange programs inclined to be efficient tools in preventing barriers in international and intercultural communication. For this reason, those who participate in exchange programs can act as voluntary cultural

ambassadors. Exchange programs tend to be efficient tools because of persuasion, the cultural way and the profile of the participants (Sevin, 2010: 578-579).

Lima Júnior (2007: 241) clearly outlines the objectives of international exchange programs within the scope of public diplomacy:

- a. To deepen the mutual understanding between the strategic public and states,
- b. To create a positive image towards the host country, and
- c. To support foreign policies.

2. METHOD

Answers to the research questions posed in the purpose section are sought in this study, which employs descriptive analysis, one of the qualitative research methodologies, by conducting structured interviews with prospective students at Istanbul Esenyurt University. According to the "Erasmus+ in Turkey in 2021" report created by the European Commission (EC), 6955 participants traveled to Türkiye in the 2020 Fall and Spring semesters for higher education, adult learning, vocational education and training, school education, and youth programs. The number of students traveling to Istanbul in the autumn semester of 2020–2021 could not be established after reports from the EC and Turkish National Agency were reviewed. In the 2019–2020 Fall and Spring semesters, 3489 higher education Erasmus+ exchange students visited Türkiye, according to the EC publication "Erasmus+ 2020 in numbers" (erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu, 2021). Based on this figure, it is predicted that a relatively small number of students will be arriving in Türkiye in 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic will be at its worst. It has been noted that the Covid-19 pandemic's introduction has resulted in a significant drop in the number of mobile people. Accordingly, the

study's sample was restricted to students who arrived at Istanbul Esenyurt University from European nations as part of the KA131 project for higher education students in the area of Erasmus+ Main Action 1 education and training, and interviews with every exchange student were planned. Structured interviews are conducted in order to compare and contrast the material that has been provided by the participants and to highlight any similarities and differences.

Research Questions

By analysing the virtual Erasmus+ exchange mobility that occurs during the Covid-19 epidemic within the context of exchange diplomacy, the research intends to support exchange diplomacy. The following questions are the focus of this investigation.

Q1: Are the prejudices of students coming to Türkiye with the virtual Erasmus+ exchange program being destroyed by mutual communication and persuasion?

Q2: Is a positive image about Türkiye and Turkish culture created, mutual understanding and relationship built through virtual Erasmus+ exchange programs?

Q3: Is there a two-way communication with virtual Erasmus+ exchange programs?

Q4: Do students who return to their home country after the virtual Erasmus+ exchange programs in Türkiye positively affect the relations between the citizens of the two countries and government officials in the long run?

Through the participants, the researcher aims to comprehend particular challenges. During the interview, if the researcher comes across any unique

regions connected to certain topics, they might probe deeply into these areas by asking specific questions. Most of the questions in a structured interview are open-ended (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016: 130).

Four students participated in the Erasmus+ exchange program's one-semester mobility of study at Istanbul Esenyurt University's Faculty of Business and Management during the fall semester of the academic year 2020–2021 as the Covid-19 outbreak situation persisted. While completing the courses online, the four students engaged in virtual mobility at the host institution. The four pupils physically visited the university campus only to complete the papers. Interviews were conducted with four incoming Erasmus+ students at Istanbul Esenyurt University. Two of the students were from Spain, while the other two were from Romania. All of the students participated in online interviews through Zoom. The interviews lasted between thirty and forty minutes. Data from the in-depth interviews was gathered using five-question interview questionnaires. The work of Meltem Ozel was used to produce the organized form for interviews (2021). The forms' questions were examined for clarity and subject coverage with the input of three independent experts, and then the final version of the forms were made available. Data for the study were gathered between January 25, 2023, and February 25, 2023. The descriptive analysis method was applied to the data from the interviews. In a descriptive analysis, the research's findings are condensed and interpreted in light of the identified themes. Direct quotations are usually employed in this method to amply convey the participants' views on the same issue. The reader will receive the material in an ordered and interpreted manner as a result of this analysis. The data collected for this purpose are first regularly and plainly described. The applicable descriptions are then explained and analyzed, the cause-and-effect relationship is looked at, and some conclusions are drawn. The researcher links emerging themes, makes meaning of them, and makes predictions (Yıldırım and

Şimşek, 2016: 239). The goal is to objectively describe the traits and impacts of the stimulus or message components that the person receives (Bilgin, 2014: 12). Themes were identified within the context of the questions crafted in accordance with the hypotheses in order to assess the research findings. The information was organized according to the important themes and was backed up by the appropriate direct quotations.

3. FINDINGS

The results of interviews with four students who travelled to Türkiye as part of the Erasmus+ exchange program for higher education are provided in this section.

Students' Thoughts about Türkiye and Turkish Culture

Participants' opinions of Turkish culture were solicited. This inquiry aims to discover the students' opinions following their exposure to Turkish culture as well as whether or not they had any preconceived notions before to their mobility. After visiting Türkiye, many participants—including students with negative opinions of Turkish culture, social life, and culture—expressed their satisfaction and interest in Türkiye and Turkish culture.

Participants had the opportunity to experience Turkish culture while on the virtual mobility. Participants said Turkish culture was lovely, pleasant, and fascinating. They enjoyed Turkish cuisine. They discovered that Turks are amiable and helpful. The participants' responses make it abundantly evident that they have favourable opinions about Turkish culture and Turks. “Turkish cultural values are very interesting, also customs and traditions are fascinating for me. This religion is different from mine, the mosques and their prayer increase my interest to discover more and more this beautiful Turkish culture. I

like the Turkish culture too much, especially the tea culture which is very important for Turkish people. I like also Turkish foods, desserts, and music. The most interesting thing for me is that neighbours share their food with the other neighbours.” (G), “I have noticed that Türkiye is a little bit similar to my original country, which is Morocco, in terms of bazars and the hospitality of the people. However, I noticed that although it is a Muslim country, there is a lot of diversity which I really enjoy seeing. I found the Turkish culture very interesting, how you have to remove your shoes in order to enter a house. Before coming, people told me not to go to Türkiye because it is dangerous, etc.; but I have never seen it like this. Coming here I have realized that most of them didn’t really know Türkiye. I have lived in Istanbul for 5 months and I really feel like it’s my home. Of course, it has its downsides like any other country which I find normal.” (W), “Turkish people are very nice. Turkish culture is very rich, and I really love it. Food is one of the best and affordable. Also, the history of this country and the architecture are very beautiful. I try to promote my country to every person I met. And my special friends learned a lot about my country during this time. Turkish people are more open and friendly than Romanian people. Türkiye is really international. I did not really know much about Türkiye before coming here. Just very few information or things from the Turkish movies. I had a really bad opinion about Muslim people coming here, however living in Türkiye I realised they are wonderful and very peaceful people. This experience had changed me very much.” (A), “Turkish culture is very different as the Spanish one and I really like it. I had no idea before about Türkiye, I really like the country, culture and food.” (P).

The Situation of Students Telling Their Own Culture and Country

During the Erasmus+ mobility process in Türkiye, the participants were asked how open they were to exchanging knowledge about their own nations and

cultures. With this inquiry, we hope to determine whether there is two-way communication between the students participating in the Erasmus+ mobility program in Türkiye and their Turkish counterparts as well as whether mutual understanding is growing. Even though the training was conducted online, the participants met up with their classmates outside, spoke with students from different colleges, and exchanged messages with other students. Three of the participants were given the chance to introduce and market their respective nations. (A, P, W). “Yes, I get opportunity to describe and promote my country in the daily life.” (A), “On the daily life, I talked about my culture, and we exchange differences.” (W), “In daily life, when I met new friends, I try to explain how different are our lifestyles.” (P).

Students' Benefits from Erasmus+ Mobility

In order to find out the benefits they received from their Erasmus+ mobility in Türkiye, participants were asked to review the Erasmus+ process. After the Erasmus+ program, the participants had different perspectives about themselves, other cultures, and other religions. “Although the education was online, I learned new things and different subjects. Being in a different country changed me as a person and open my eyes and mind. Türkiye is such an amazing country. I made a lot of friends who helped me to feel like at home. Living and studying in Türkiye had really change my perspective about life and I will always be grateful for that.” (A), “After this program, I am more mature, more balanced. I learned to accept the differences between my country and this country.” (G), “The University staff and professors were really helpful. I learned a lot, to live alone and do all the things in spite of being in a worldwide pandemic.” (W), “I have experienced another point of view different as my Spanish University has taught me and more specific subjects. I have experienced

that Muslim religion is different, but the values are more or less the same, based in respect and diversity.” (P).

The Situation of Students Sharing Their Experiences After Returning to Their Country

Participants were asked about their ideas on sharing their experiences after returning to their countries. By asking this question, it was hoped to learn the ideas of the students regarding sharing their experiences in terms of creating relationships in the long run. The four students agreed that when they returned to their home countries, they would tell their friends about Türkiye favorably. Some of the participants had already begun to promote Türkiye to their friends back home before they had even left. “I will share this experience with many people when I return to my country. I will share with my family, my friends, my teachers the people I know and I also promote Turkish culture. I am sure they will be happy to hear my experience.” (G), “I will share my experience with my family and friends.” (W), “I already started to encourage my classmates and friends at Spain to do Erasmus+. Every student should experience this, because it can change their lives.” (A), “I will share my experience with all my family, friends and relatives. This is the best experience I have ever had. I will also share this experience to people that doubt to come as Erasmus+ students.” (P).

Students' Thoughts on Contributing to the Relationships Between the Two Countries

The function of the Erasmus+ programs as a long-term public diplomacy tool on foreign policy was intended to be studied by asking the participating students what they believed about improving relations between Türkiye and their own countries.

Three of the participants would like to share information about the friendships between Türkiye and their own nation. "I would like to change people opinion about Türkiye and Turkish people and open their minds to give a chance to study in Türkiye or at least to come and visit. Because it is a special place each person should visit at least one time in life." (A), "I would like to contribute mutual relations, maybe offering more experiences like this that helps you to understand the culture and appreciate the differences between." (P), "I would like to contribute to the relations between Türkiye and my country. I would like to change the image of this country in their eyes." (G). The other participant thinks that is a big step for International Relations so it could not be achievable for her. "I haven't really thought about it but it would be a big step forward in International Relations." (W).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Exchange opportunities benefit public diplomacy by fostering future cross-cultural understanding across nations, societies, and cultures. Exchange programs can enhance international communication and understanding. Additionally, exchange programs can aid in the dismantling of preconceptions and stereotypes. Long-lasting relationships and opportunities for mutual benefit can be established through exchange programs. Four incoming Erasmus+ students from European nations at Istanbul Esenyurt University were interviewed as part of the KA131 project for higher education students in the field of Erasmus+ Main Action 1 education and training to determine whether similar outcomes could be obtained through virtual mobility.

The findings show that throughout the virtual mobility, the participants had the opportunity for social engagement. Participants said Turkish culture was lovely, pleasant, and fascinating. They discovered that Turks are amiable and helpful.

Even though the training was conducted virtually, the participants met up with their classmates outside, spoke with students from different colleges, and exchanged messages with other students. Three of the contestants were given the chance to introduce and market their respective nations. All of the participants frequently noted that, as a result of the Erasmus+ program, their perspectives on other people, other cultures, and other religions had changed. The four students agreed that when they returned to their home countries, they would tell their friends about Türkiye favorably. Some of the participants had already begun to promote Türkiye to their friends back home before they had even left. Three of the participants would like to share information about the friendships between Türkiye and their own nation. The other participant believes that is a major step for international relations, thus she does not think it is something she could accomplish. We can conclude from the results of the interviews that a virtual exchange program can improve international relations, interactions between nations, and understanding. Stereotypes are dispelled and pupils' comprehension of various cultures advances as a result of virtual mobility. We might also conclude that exchange diplomacy helps maintain international harmony over the long run.

The study also shows that virtual exchange programs will support public diplomacy because it is the first to evaluate virtual mobility within the context of exchange diplomacy.

Despite receiving their education online, the four students who were interviewed travelled to Türkiye and visited with their classmates and Turks outside of their online classes, albeit with certain limitations because of the epidemic procedure. The outcome might have been different if the students had never visited Türkiye and had not met with its citizens. Working with students who engage in virtual mobility and do not travel physically to the

country where they practice mobility will enable future research to analyze the contribution to exchange diplomacy.

Çıkar Çatışması Bildirimi:

Bu makalenin araştırılması, yazarlığı ve / veya yayınlanmasına ilişkin herhangi bir potansiyel çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan ederim.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Giriş

Kamu diplomasisinin önemli unsurlarından olan kültürel ve eğitimsel faaliyetler, dünya çapında bir yumuşak güç unsuru olarak kullanılmaktadır. Kültür ve eğitim faaliyetleri ile ülkeler arasında karşılıklı anlayış gelişir ve uzun vadeli ilişkiler kurulur. Değişim programlarının kamu diplomasisinde başarılı bir araç olabilmesi için, ulusların yabancıların söylediklerini dinlemesi, geliştirmesi ve kendi çıkarlarını iletmesi gerekir. Öğrenci değişim programları kişilerarası ilişkiler yoluyla uluslararası ilişkilere katkı sağlayabilir. İyi niyetin gelişmesini, ülkelerin imajının düzelmesini, karşılıklı önyargıların yıkılmasını ve uzun vadeli ilişkilerin kurulmasını sağlar. İnsanlar birbirini tanıdıkça ve anladıkça yakınlaşır, yanlış anlaşılmalara giderilir ve uzun süreli ilişkiler kurulup çeşitli iş birlikleri için fırsatlar yaratılır.

Çalışmanın birinci bölümde kamu diplomasisi ve değişim diplomasisinin tanımı yapılmış, ardından Covid-19 pandemi sürecinde Türkiye'de sanal hareketlilik yapan öğrencilerle yapılan görüşmeler değişim diplomasisi çerçevesinde incelenmiştir.

Yöntem

Betimsel analiz yönetiminin kullanıldığı bu çalışmada, amaç bölümünde sorulan araştırma sorularına İstanbul Esenyurt Üniversitesi'ne gelen öğrencilerle yapılan yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla yanıt aranmaktadır. Avrupa Komisyonu'nun (AK) hazırladığı "2021'de Türkiye'de Erasmus+" raporuna göre, 2020 Güz ve Bahar dönemlerinde yükseköğretim, mesleki eğitim ve öğretim, okul eğitimi, yetişkin öğrenimi ve gençlik hareketliliği ile 6955 katılımcı Türkiye'ye gelmiştir. AK ve Türkiye Ulusal Ajansı raporları tarandığında yükseköğretim hareketliliğinde 2020-2021 güz döneminde İstanbul'a gelen öğrenci sayısı tespit edilememiştir. AK'nin hazırladığı "Sayılarla Erasmus+ 2020" raporuna göre 2019-2020 Güz ve Bahar dönemlerinde 3489 yükseköğretim erasmus+ değişim öğrencisi Türkiye'ye gelmiştir. Bu rakamdan hareketle, Covid-19 pandemisinin zirve yaptığı 2020 yılında Türkiye'ye gelen öğrenci sayısının oldukça düşük olduğu tahmin edilmektedir. Covid-19 pandemisinin ortaya çıkması nedeniyle hareketlilik sayısının önemli ölçüde azaldığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bu noktadan hareketle çalışmanın örneklemini, Erasmus+ Ana Eylem 1 eğitim ve öğretimi alanında yükseköğretim öğrencilerine yönelik KA131 projesi çerçevesinde program ülkelerinden İstanbul Esenyurt Üniversitesi'ne gelen öğrencilerle sınırlandırılmış ve tüm değişim öğrencileri ile görüşme yapılması planlanmıştır. Yapılandırılmış görüşmelerde amaç, katılımcılardan alınan bilgiler arasındaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları ortaya çıkarmak ve bu doğrultuda karşılaştırmalar

yapmaktır. Araştırma, Covid-19 pandemisi sürecinde sanal olarak gerçekleşen Erasmus+ hareketliliğini değişim diplomasisi çerçevesinde değerlendirerek değişim diplomasisine katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

2020-2021 Eğitim-Öğretim yılı güz döneminde, Covid-19 salgınına bağlı kriz devam ederken, Erasmus+ değişim programı kapsamında dört öğrenci İstanbul Esenyurt Üniversitesi İşletme ve Yönetim Fakültesi'nde bir dönemlik öğrenim hareketliliği gerçekleştirmiştir. Ev sahibi kurumda sanal hareketlilik gerçekleştiren dört öğrenci dersleri çevirim içi olarak takip etmiştir. Dört öğrenci fiziki olarak sadece evrak işlemleri için üniversite kampüsüne gelmiştir. Çalışma kapsamında İstanbul Esenyurt Üniversitesi'nde sanal hareketlilik gerçekleştiren dört Erasmus+ öğrencisiyle görüşülmüştür. İki İspanya'dan, diğer ikisi ise Romanya'dan gelen öğrencilerle online zoom platformu üzerinden derinlemesine görüşme yapılmıştır. Görüşmeler yaklaşık 30-40 dakika sürmüştür. Derinlemesine görüşmelerde veriler, beş sorudan oluşan görüşme formları ile toplanmıştır. Yapılandırılmış form, Meltem Özel'in (2021) çalışmasından yararlanılarak hazırlanmıştır. Formlarda yer alan sorular üç farklı uzmanın görüşü alınarak soruların anlaşılabilirliği ve konunun kapsamı incelenmiş ve formlara son şekli verilmiştir. Araştırmaya ilişkin veriler 25 Ocak 2023 ile 25 Şubat 2023 tarihleri arasında toplanmıştır. Görüşme verileri betimsel analiz yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bu yaklaşımda, katılımcıların aynı soru hakkındaki düşüncelerini net bir şekilde yansıtmak için sıklıkla doğrudan alıntılara başvurulur. Ortaya çıkan temalar araştırmacı tarafından ilişkilendirilir, anlamlandırılır ve tahmin edilir (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2016, s. 239). Araştırmadan elde edilen veriler belirlenen temalara göre özetlenmiş, neden-sonuç ilişkisi içerisinde incelenmiş, bazı sonuçlara varılmış ve yorumlanmıştır.

Bulgular

Bulgular, katılımcıların sanal hareketlilik sırasında sosyal etkileşim şansına sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Katılımcılar Türk kültürünü güzel, hoş ve ilginç bulmuşlardır. Türkleri cana yakın ve yardımsever bulmuştur. Eğitimin sanal olmasına rağmen katılımcılar sınıf arkadaşlarıyla ve çeşitli üniversitelerden öğrencilerle bir araya gelmiş ve diğer öğrencilerle karşılıklı iletişim kurmuşlardır. Katılımcılardan üçü ülkelerini anlatma ve tanıtmaya fırsatı bulmuştur. Tüm katılımcılar Erasmus+ programından sonra kendilerine, diğer kültürlerle ve diğer dinlere bakış açılarının farklı olduğunu sık sık dile getirmiştir. Dört öğrencinin tamamı ülkelere döndükten sonra arkadaşlarına Türkiye hakkında olumlu şeyler söyleyeceklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Katılımcılardan bazıları ülkelere dönmeden önce bile kendi ülkelerindeki arkadaşlarına Türkiye hakkında olumlu sözler söylediklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Katılımcılardan üçü Türkiye ile ülkeleri arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkilere katkıda bulunmak istediğini dile getirmiştir. Diğer

katılımcı bunun Uluslararası İlişkiler için büyük bir adım olduğunu ve bu nedenle kendisi için ulaşılması zor bir hedef olduğunu düşünmektedir.

Sonuç ve Tartışma

Görüşme bulgularına göre, sanal değişim programının uluslar arasında karşılıklı iletişimi, ilişkileri ve anlayışı geliştirebileceğini söyleyebiliriz. Sanal hareketlilikten sonra, öğrencilerin ön yargıları kırılır ve diğer kültürlerle ilişkin anlayışları gelişir. Ve bu da ülkeler arasındaki uzun vadeli barışa katkı sağlayabilir. Bu çalışma, sanal hareketliliği değişim diplomasisi çerçevesinde inceleyen ve sanal değişim programlarının kamu diplomasisine de katkı sağlayacağını ortaya koyan ilk çalışmadır. Görüşme yapılan dört öğrenci, çevrimiçi eğitimlerine rağmen Türkiye'ye gelerek, pandemi sürecinin kısıtlamaları nedeniyle sınırlı da olsa çevrimiçi derslerinin dışında sınıf arkadaşları ve Türk vatandaşlarıyla görüşme imkânı bulmuşlardır. Öğrenciler hiç Türkiye'ye gitmemiş, ülke ve insanlarıyla etkileşime girmemiş olsalardı ortaya çıkan sonuç daha farklı olabilirdi. İleride sanal hareketlilik gerçekleştiren ve hareketlilik gerçekleştirdikleri ülkeye fiziki olarak gitmeyen öğrencilerle çalışma yapılarak değişim diplomasisine katkısı incelenebilir.