

Erasmus (+) student mobility: individual and institutional motivations and effects

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Abstract: The Erasmus programme was established in 1987, Erasmus has become the largest international student mobility programme in the world and is seen by Europeans as one of the most positive results achieved by the European Union. The chapter reviews, first, the literature on the motivations of students and institutions to take part in the Erasmus programme and its effects. It then makes use of data from a recent survey of over 700 HE leaders and 3,000 mobile staff to study institutional motivations and effects in greater depth. Finally, the chapter discusses the future of international student mobility within the context of the programme.

Keywords: Erasmus, Erasmus+, International student mobility, European Union, motivations, impact, HE leaders, HE staff, internationalisation, curriculum, governance, survey data.

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1. Introduction

The Erasmus programme was established in 1987, after almost ten years of development of pilot student exchange schemes, underpinned by the view that “a strong educational dimension” was “absolutely vital to the construction of an open and democratic Europe” (Jones 2016). In its more than three decades of existence, Erasmus has become the largest international student mobility programme in the world and is seen by Europeans as one of the most positive results achieved by the European Union (EU) (Kantar 2018). As noted by de Wit et al. (2013:22) “Much more than in other parts of the world, student mobility has been promoted in Europe as an intrinsically positive and desirable development, and has become at many levels a policy goal in itself”.

The Erasmus programme has experienced a number of changes since it was set up. The number of participants has expanded significantly from the original 11 participating countries and 3,244 higher education students travelling abroad for their studies in 1987. This expansion has derived from various enlargements of the EU itself and from the progressive opening of the programme to participants from the rest of the world (non-EU countries within Europe as well as countries from outside Europe). Changes have also entailed the expansion of the programme budget and of the range of activities it supports, to also include traineeships abroad for higher education (HE) students, staff mobility, cooperation projects (focussing mainly on innovation, exchange of good practices, network creation) and support for policy development. Finally, Erasmus has been integrated within increasingly broader “umbrella programmes” that encompass a wider range of activities in education, training, youth and sports, beyond higher education. The name and scope of these umbrella programmes have changed approximately every 6-7 years since the setting up or the original Erasmus, as “programme periods” for EU education programmes matured: the Socrates programme started in 1994, Socrates II in 2000, Lifelong Learning Programme in 2007 and most recently, “Erasmus+”, which has been the label used since 2013, and will continue to be used at least until 2027.

Something that has remained constant since the launch of the original Erasmus is that international mobility continues to be the “flagship activity” in Erasmus+ (European Commission 2021a:4). For the current programming period (2021-2027), the Erasmus+ programme will have a budget in excess of 26 billion Euros. 70% of this budget is allocated to supporting international mobility opportunities across the life cycle and types of education: schools, vocational education and training, higher education and adult education (European Commission 2021a). The mobility of higher education students represents the bulk of all mobility supported by the Erasmus+ programme: around half of the mobility during the 2013-2020 programming period was undertaken by this group (European Commission 2021b). Millions of higher education students have by now participated in Erasmus(+)¹ international student mobility. Erasmus+ projects contracted in 2019 alone funded over 500,000 higher education student and staff mobilities in Europe and the rest of the world (European

¹ In this chapter we sometimes use “Erasmus(+)” to refer to Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes.

Commission 2020a). The large majority of the mobilities funded take place from and to EU countries (European Commission 2021c).

International student mobility can take many different forms. The programme defines international student mobility as an opportunity for learners “to undertake learning and/or professional experience in another country” (European Commission 2021c:14), which is normally referred to as the “host” country for the mobility -whereas the country where the student normally follows their programme of study is referred to as their “home country”. Erasmus+ supports students in any field and cycle of HE (short cycle, bachelor, master and doctoral levels). The mobility abroad is most frequently undertaken at a higher education institution, where the student will typically study for a period between 3 and 12 months following an agreed course of studies. About 70% of all student mobilities for higher education students, in the 2018 Erasmus+ call, was “study mobility” (European Commission 2020a:32). Students pay no additional fees at the host university, receive a grant from the EU (sometimes complemented by other national or regional funding schemes) which aims to cover the additional costs generated by international mobility, and the credits and grades obtained at the host university are recognised by the home institution as part of the students’ degree. The remainder mobilities funded by the programme were traineeships, which can take place at various types of organisations, such as “an enterprise, a research institute, a laboratory, an organisation or any other relevant workplace abroad” (European Commission 2021c:41).

In the next section we review the literature on the motivations of students and institutions to take part in the Erasmus(+) programme -with a focus on study mobility- and the effects of international student mobility, while also discussing the linkages between Erasmus(+) higher education (HE) and internationalisation in higher education more broadly. This review concludes that there is much more information on the motivations and programme effects on students than at the institutional level, where information is very scarce and often covers only a small sample of institutions. In order to address this gap, we present results from a large survey of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): the Erasmus+ HE impact study survey². Section three introduces these data and section four presents the survey results on: the role of international student mobility in HEIs international strategies, the motivations of HEIs to take part in international student mobility and the effects of Erasmus(+) participation at the institutional level, in a range of areas. Section five presents our conclusions.

² The opinions and analysis presented in this chapter are those from the authors. They do not purport to reflect the view of the European Commission, who financed the Erasmus+ impact study survey.

2. Literature review

2.1 Erasmus(+) students: motivations and effects

2.1.1 Motivations

The literature investigating motivations for student mobility has identified a large set of factors that explain students' motivations to spend part of their studies abroad, as done within Erasmus(+) HE. The large majority of studies refer to motivations reported by students and can be grouped in four main categories: Academic learning, other skills development, employability enhancement and personal development/ life experiences.

- Academic learning

Academic learning has been identified as an important motivation to study abroad. Students often wish to gain academic learning experience in another country and to have access to types of learning and knowledge not offered at their home institution (Murphy-Lejeune 2002). Some students also wish to attend world class institutions during their study abroad in order to increase their employability and possibly start an international career (Findlay et al. 2010; González et al. 2011).

- Other skills development

Other skills development is another important motivator for students. This is particularly the case of language learning, which is frequently mentioned by a large share of mobile students across different surveys (González et al. 2011; Souto-Otero et al. 2019). Soft-skills development is also an important reason for studying abroad (Lesjak et al. 2015; Teichler, 2004). Students aim to improve soft skills such as adaptability, taking initiative or proactivity (Souto-Otero et al., 2019) as a result of mobility. Moreover, students also want to learn and experience different cultures and increase their cross-culture awareness (Roy et al. 2019).

- Employability

Employability improvement is an important motivation to study abroad. Students often see mobility experiences abroad and the knowledge and skills acquisition and personal development facilitated by it, to be associated with the improvement of career chances and employability (Souto-Otero et al., 2019). Students view mobility experiences as a way to improve their professional skills (Lesjak et al., 2015; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) and their career prospects, by differentiating them from other applicants (Deakin 2014). Some students expect mobility to be a first step towards specific career pathways, in particular an international career (Findlay et al. 2010): in the views of these students international mobility can increase their chances of employment in a multinational company or in a different country thanks to the language, professional and soft-skills developed during their stay abroad (Beadle et al. 2015).

- Personal development and life experiences

Personal development and life experiences are central motivations for study abroad: living abroad and meeting new people are often amongst the most frequent reasons for Erasmus+ students to go abroad (Brandenburg et al. 2014; Souto-Otero et al. 2019; Ulicna et al. 2017). This has been the case for long decades: Maiworm and Teichler (2002) reported that almost nine in ten Erasmus mobile students were motivated by personal development. Other studies have highlighted the importance of personality maturation (Fombona, Rodríguez, and Sevillano 2013), travelling and adventure/ having a break from usual surroundings (Findlay et al. 2010; González et al., 2011), fun and excitement (Stronkhorst 2005). Simply the wish of spending some time in a different country and experiencing life abroad is one of the strongest reasons for mobility (Keogh and Russel-Roberts 2009; Lesjak et al. 2015). This motivation was mentioned by 70% of students in the Erasmus+ HE impact study (Souto-Otero et al., 2019). Finally, students are also motivated by the possibilities of expanding their social network (Souto-Otero et al., 2019), meeting new people and making new friends (Brandenburg et al. 2014; Ulicna et al. 2017).

2.1.2 Impact on students

The literature identifies four types of impact of Erasmus(+) on participants, most of which are related to students' motivations to become mobile. Specifically: academic learning, other skills development, labour market outcomes and personality and identity. These impacts are likely to be correlated with each other -for example, increased employability is likely to be a result of progress made with regard to the other types of impact. It is also important to bear in mind that while most studies on individual effects are based on empirical analysis, subjective measures of impact (such as perceived improvement on competences, academic development or employability, reported changes in identity) are more often employed than more objective measures (such as salaries, probability of being employed or working abroad, measured changes in identity or behaviour). In this sense, the literature has a tendency to explore experienced/ perceived effects.

- Academic learning

The literature has identified an impact of mobility on academic performance. Teichler (2012) looks at a self-reported measure of academic performance, and found that mobile graduates perceived to have made better academic progress abroad than what they would have made at home during the same time. Other studies use less subjective measures of performance, e.g., graduation marks, time of graduation. d'Hombres and Schnepf (2021), for example find evidence that mobility leads to increases in the take-up of further studies in the case of Italian mobile bachelor degree holders, as they are 8 percentage points more likely to take up further studies -but report no effect for the UK. For some students, study abroad may also entail positive “vertical mobility”, defined in this context as students moving to institutions or countries with higher academic reputation than the home institution or country.

- Other skills development

Study abroad could be expected to have strong effects in terms of language learning. Erasmus alumni surveyed in Teichler and Jason (2007) were found to be three times more confident in foreign language proficiency than their non-mobile peers. Similarly, using a survey of Italian students, Sorrenti (2017) shows how the programme improves self reported hard skills such as the command of foreign languages.

The 2014 Erasmus Impact Study (EIS) (Brandenburg et al. 2014) and Erasmus Impact Study+ (EIS+) (Souto-Otero et al. 2019) provide evidence that mobility helps participants build up their soft skills and develop their personality -see also below. In these studies, personality development is measured through the memo© psychometric tool. This tool records personality, attitudes, and behavioural traits that are highly correlated with career success and employability. Respondents in the EIS+ study were tracked over time and answers from the same individuals were compared before and after their mobility experience. Mobile graduates displayed higher values of memo© scores prior to mobility, which shows that they are a selected group from the general student population. However, and despite starting from higher scores, they still recorded remarkable gains in self-confidence compared to students who remained at home and experienced close to no development over the same time period.

Other effects on personality development concern the ability to interact with foreign cultures and adapt to new situations. According to the EIS+, 9 in 10 mobile graduates perceived an improvement in terms of adaptability, interaction with people from foreign cultures, communication skills and intercultural competences. These findings are confirmed by the literature measuring self-reported competences before and after mobility (Onorati et al. 2016, Stronkhorst 2005) or interrogating students about the importance of these competences in their jobs (Teichler and Jason 2007).

- Labour market outcomes

Assessing the effects of Erasmus(+) participation in employability and earnings is challenging due to endogeneity problems: participants are a selective group and it is difficult to assess whether differences between participants and non-participants are due to participation in the programme or their pre-existing differences (for example in terms of entrepreneurship, motivation, etc.) within the wider student population. The majority of Erasmus(+) alumni surveyed believe that their time abroad helped them secure their first jobs and their careers (Souto-Otero et al. 2019; Teichler and Janson 2007), notably through the emphasis placed in recruitment on academic achievement and personality, and the increasing importance of foreign language skills and international experience. Moreover, they also report higher levels of happiness with their occupation and score higher on job quality measures such as job security and career prospects.

Several econometrics studies find that international mobility increases the probability of being employed (Di Pietro, 2015 for Italy; d'Hombres and Schnepf, 2021 for Italy and the

UK; Iriondo, 2020 for Spain) or of working overseas (Parey and Waldinger, 2011 for Germany; Di Pietro, 2012 for Italy; Pinto, 2020 for Spain). The evidence on the impact of Erasmus(+) mobility on earnings is mixed. Teichler and Janson (2007) report how Erasmus students appear to be sceptical about the impact of stay abroad periods on income. However, some studies that analyse graduates' salaries at different times after graduation point to positive wage premia for Erasmus(+) alumni. There is no consensus over the exact magnitude of such premium, ranging from 3% (Messer and Wolter, 2007 for Switzerland; Rodrigues, 2016 for EU countries) to about 7%-14% (Jahr and Teichler, 2002 for EU countries; Cammelli et al., 2008 for Italy; Iriondo, 2020 for Spain). A significant share of the wage premium is likely to stem from a better command of foreign language skills and the job opportunities this opens. Sorrenti (2017), for example, suggests that foreign language skills are rewarded in the labour market, with a positive wage premium of 6%.

Some studies investigate the role of “vertical mobility” on labour market outcomes. Iriondo (2020) analysed the impact of vertical mobility on employment and salaries for Spanish students. His results show significant premia for Spanish Erasmus graduates going to Germany, France, Nordic countries and the UK while failing to find any effect for other host countries such as Italy and Portugal. The importance of vertical mobility is consistent with the results from the EIS+, which found that mobile graduates from low GDP countries, Eastern and Southern Europe were enjoying the largest benefits from mobility in terms of finding their first job. Respondents from Eastern and Southern Europe were more likely to consider their mobility periods beneficial or highly beneficial (74% for Southern Europe and 73% for Eastern Europe) than individuals from Western (67%) and Northern Europe (67%).

- Personality and identity

The previous discussion on skills development notes a range of personality changes derived from Erasmus(+) mobility. In addition, the EIS+ study found that 95% of the Erasmus+ HE participants surveyed reported having learnt how to better get along in different cultures and 93% felt that they had improved their ability to take cultural instances into consideration.

One particular aspect of interest in the Erasmus(+) related literature has been the effect of international mobility on the European identity of participants. Some studies reported little or no effect (see for example Sigalas 2010), whereas others report a positive effect on the development of EU identity. Evidence in the EIS+ shows that mobile students feel more European than the average students before the Erasmus+ experience, but also that their attachment to the EU grows during their study abroad. Observed changes in European identity are larger among students travelling to non- neighbouring countries and can be surmised to having been exposed to greater cultural differences.

Among mobile students, those who identified themselves the least as Europeans before the Erasmus(+) programme experienced the largest development in their European identity. This is confirmed by regression evidence in the EIS+. This result is also in line with earlier findings in Kuhn (2012), who, using survey data, claims that the largest gains of mobility are

to be expected amongst those who are less likely to be “the winners of European integration who are already likely to be convinced of its benefits and who are already prone to feeling European”.

2.2. Erasmus(+) and higher education institutions: motivations and effects

While an increasing body of research aims to explore the motivations and effects of international student mobility in general and Erasmus(+) students in particular, the institutional level has received much less attention in the literature. In this section, we review extant literature, before we present additional findings on these topics, derived from the HE leadership and HE staff EIS+ surveys in section four.

2.2.1 Motivations

The large majority of European higher education institutions participate in the Erasmus+ programme. By 2019 over 5,700 higher education institutions held the Erasmus University Charter (European Commission 2020a), which contains the fundamental principles that they need to observe when participating in the programme. The large majority of institutions with the Charter are active in sending or receiving students and staff (European Commission 2015). Given widespread participation in the programme, institutional participation seems to have become internalised and assumed as ‘the norm’ by researchers and European HE institutions alike. As a result, the motivations for participation in the programme is a little researched phenomenon.

Given the dearth of studies on institutional motivations to participate in Erasmus(+) and the importance of international student mobility for the internationalisation of HEIs, it is possible to look at motivations for internationalisation to infer motivations for mobility, and expect some alignment between both. The meaning of internationalisation in HE is contested, but a popular definition is provided by Knight (2008:6) as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education”. While we still know little about how internationalisation takes place in practice (Seeber, Meoli and Cattaneo 2020) it is clear that at its core is ‘border-crossing’ (Teichler 2017). Such border crossing could be from home to abroad or from abroad to home: as such, internationalisation activities have been noted to have “at home” and “abroad” components (Knight 2012). Given this, it is not surprising that work on the conceptualisation and classification of internationalisation (Knight 2004; Horn, Hendel and Fry, 2007) often highlights international student and staff mobility as one of its components. In the case of international student mobility this entails the hosting of international students (at home dimension) or the sending of students (abroad dimension). In fact, international student mobility became the most prominent theme in internationalisation debates in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, and the absolute number of foreign or international mobile students the most frequently used indicator for internationalisation (Teichler 2017).

When exploring motivations for internationalisation it is possible to discern a number of core themes (de Wit 2001; Altbach and Knight 2007; Tadaki and Tremewan 2013):

- Socio-cultural and academic factors (e.g. extension of the academic horizon, profile/ status, updating curricula with international content, knowledge acquisition -including foreign language learning- and quality enhancement)
- Economic factors (e.g. economic growth and competitiveness, employability, financial incentives for institutions and governments), and
- Political factors (e.g. foreign policy, security, national and regional identity)

However, some of the motivations outlined above do not apply easily to institutional motivations for mobility. For example, political motivations around foreign policy, security or national/ regional identity may not go a long way in explaining institutional appetite for internationalisation. By contrast, other motivations not captured in the above may exist, for example, HEIs may see an intrinsic value in international network development. As such, we propose four sets of motivations for international student mobility, which we employ in section four:

- Academic related (competence development, which students would be unlikely to acquire otherwise),
- Economic (increase the attractiveness of and demand for study programmes³),
- Social (increase the diversity of the student population) and
- Profiling (increase in institutional visibility, network development, increase national international prestige/ quality assessments/ ranking or reputation).

These different motivations are sometimes considered as contrasting or in tension. As Castro et al. (2016:419) put it: “to polarise and simplify the issue two idealised discourses of internationalisation can be identified. On the one hand, there is the neo-liberal instrumental, economic agenda. On the other hand, there is the educational agenda”. But as we will see, these motivations can also co-exist in the rationalisation of student mobility practices in HEIs.

2.2.2 Impact

The institutional impact of participation in the Erasmus(+) programme identified in the literature (Vossensteyn et al. 2008; Souto-Otero et al. 2019) tend to refer to four main areas: teaching and learning (e.g. improvement in quality in teaching and learning, improvement in the development and recognition of learning outcomes for students, internationalising teaching and learning - e.g. internationalisation of the curriculum -, internationalising the student population), research (e.g. internationalising research, increasing cooperation with

³ We recognise that at least some HEIs may also want to increase the attractiveness of their programmes to be more selective and increase the quality of the student population, rather than increase their recruitment, however we expect that for many institutions economic viability will be the primary concern when thinking about increasing attractiveness.

industry), organisation and governance (e.g. enhancing institutional governance - establishment or development of internationalisation strategies, etc. -, capacity building for information and support services for students -in particular in counselling and in support structures for international student mobility, such as setting up international offices -) and organisational profiling (e.g. increasing institutional visibility, network development, benchmarking, reputation management and learning from quality standards in other institutions).

In general, however, there is scarce research on the extent to which these different effects have been associated and continue to be associated with Erasmus(+) participation. Moreover, not all these types of effects could be expected to result from the international student mobility elements of the Erasmus(+) programme, and in equal measure. Those elements more closely related to student mobility are in the areas of teaching and learning (internationalisation of the student population; internationalisation of the curriculum and development and recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad) and organisation and governance (internationalisation strategies that recognise international student mobility, capacity building). These are the areas that we cover in our analysis in Section four.

3. Data: The Erasmus+ impact study survey

The data that we use in this chapter was gathered as part of the “Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact study” (Souto-Otero et al. 2019). The study collected data through surveys of higher education students, graduates, academic and non-academic staff and leadership between the Spring of 2017 and the summer of 2018, making use of a census database of Erasmus+ participants. In total, 76,893 valid responses to the survey were received -making it one of the largest Erasmus(+) surveys to date. In this chapter we make use of the results from the survey of HE leadership and Erasmus(+) mobile staff. 708 responses were obtained in the survey of higher education institutions, which was directed to management in HEIs (Rector, Vice-Rector, International Relations Officer, other member of the management team of the institution) and which gathered information on the internationalisation strategy of the institution, student and staff mobility, and their impact on the institution as well as the characteristics of the institution. We also make use of over 3,000 responses to a EIS+ survey of mobile teaching staff. The survey collected information on their demographic characteristics, motivations for international mobility and the impact of their mobility at the personal and institutional level.

4. Why do higher education institutions take part in international student mobility? Strategies, motivations and effects

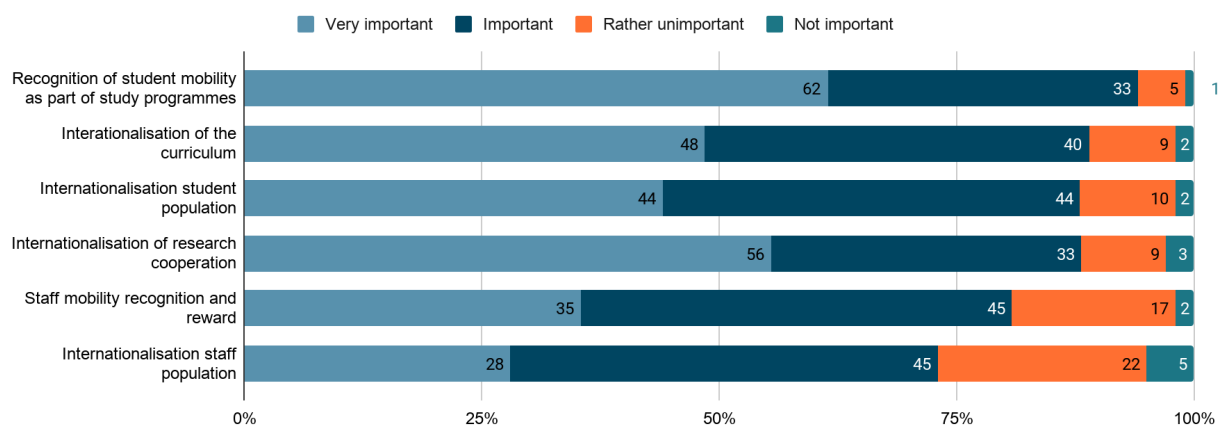
Given the lack of studies on the institutional dimension of international student mobility, compared to the individual dimension, its ramifications are explored in this section making use of data collected through the EIS+ surveys of leadership and HE staff (Souto-Otero et al. 2019). We first contextualise the motivations for international student mobility, then explore those motivations, and conclude exploring its effects at the institutional level. The

data used to explore the first two questions goes beyond the Erasmus+ programme, to expand to international student mobility in general, although it should be noted that Erasmus+ is the main instrument for international student mobility for European institutions (d'Hombres and Schnepf 2021) and the data was collected in the context of surveys on Erasmus+. The exploration of effects refers, specifically, to Erasmus(+) HE international student mobility.

4.1 Contextualising international student mobility motivations: ISM and HEIs' internationalisation strategies

Internationalisation is high on the agenda of the leadership of EU HEIs, and student mobility is considered the most important aspect of this agenda. Indeed, almost 9 in 10 institutions responding to the EIS+ leadership survey (87%) reported to have an internationalisation strategy. Of these, around 95% of reported 'recognition of student mobility as part of study programmes' to be an important or very important element in their strategy -see Figure 1, making it the most important aspect of international strategies -above internationalisation of the curriculum, of research, staff mobility or internationalisation of staff. Internationalisation of research cooperation was especially pronounced among HEIs in Eastern European countries. The internationalisation of the student population, which is related to student mobility, also came high in the responses. This is consistent with suggestions made by previous research, which highlights the importance of international student mobility as part of internationalisation strategies, but confirms this finding in a large sample of leadership and explicitly comparing its importance with other aspects of HEIs' internationalisation strategies.

Figure 1. Importance of selected aspects internationalisation strategy



Source: Erasmus+ impact study (survey of HE leadership) (Souto-Otero et al. 2019). N=561. "What is the relative importance of the following aspects in the internationalisation strategy of your institution?"

This finding is consistent with Seeber, Meoli and Cattaneo (2020), who analysed survey data on the international activities portfolio of 431 institutions in 33 European countries collected in 2013, and found that mobility opportunities had a privileged place in these portfolios: mobility was the most frequent internationalisation activity of HEIs: 96% of HEIs

offered outgoing mobility for students (study abroad, international internships, etc.) and 93% for staff.

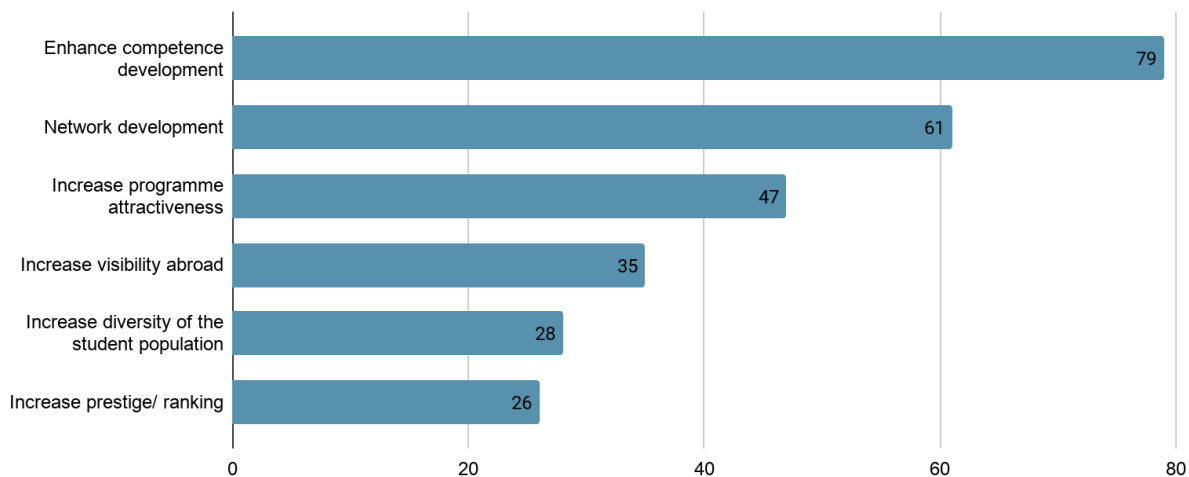
4.2 Why is it important? Institutional motivations for international student mobility

Why is international student mobility so important for HEIs? We approached this question by asking HE leadership about their institutions' objectives for international student mobility. In section 2.2.1 four types of motivations were identified: academic related, economic, social and profiling. Academic-related considerations were reported as the most important by HE leadership: international mobility provided institutions with the possibility to develop competences in their students that they would otherwise be unlikely to develop. This contrasts with a reportedly popular view of study abroad as tourism and a purely consumist act. It also contrasts with the recent focus on international student mobility as a source of income for HEIs competing in global markets for students (Guruz 2011) and more general views about the economic rationale of internationalisation whereby: "Although still present in the rhetoric of international education, traditional values such as cooperation, peace and mutual understanding, human capital development, and solidarity, have been moved to the sidelines as universities strive for competition, revenue, and reputation/branding" (de Wit and Altbach's 2021:35).

To be sure, economic considerations (programme attractiveness) also featured highly, but at a long distance from competence development -see Figure 2. Some aspects of profiling (network development) also featured highly in the response, but the importance of others (visibility, reputation/ ranking) was much more modest, in spite of the purported association between excellence, rankings and mobility (see Souto-Otero and Enders 2017). This may be explained by the emphasis of Erasmus+ on "horizontal" rather than "vertical" mobility (van Mol et al. 2020), whereby the value of mobility is based on reciprocity and mutual exchange rather than being motivated by prestige hierarchies. There are, nevertheless, striking differences by region, with HEIs in Partner and Eastern European countries putting greater emphasis on prestige and visibility. In fact, 50% of the HEIs in Eastern European countries wish to increase their visibility abroad.

Social motivations around diversity featured low, which is surprising given that the diversity brought about by international student mobility is often considered as closely linked to internationalisation (Castro et al. 2016:425) -although it should be noted that respondents were asked to choose the three most important objectives of students mobility for their institution only. The objective of increasing diversity of the student population is more frequently mentioned by HEIs in Western and Northern countries.

Figure 2. Institutional objectives for international student mobility



Source: Erasmus+ impact study (survey of HE leadership) (Souto-Otero et al. 2019). N=619. "What are the main objectives of student mobility for your institution?"

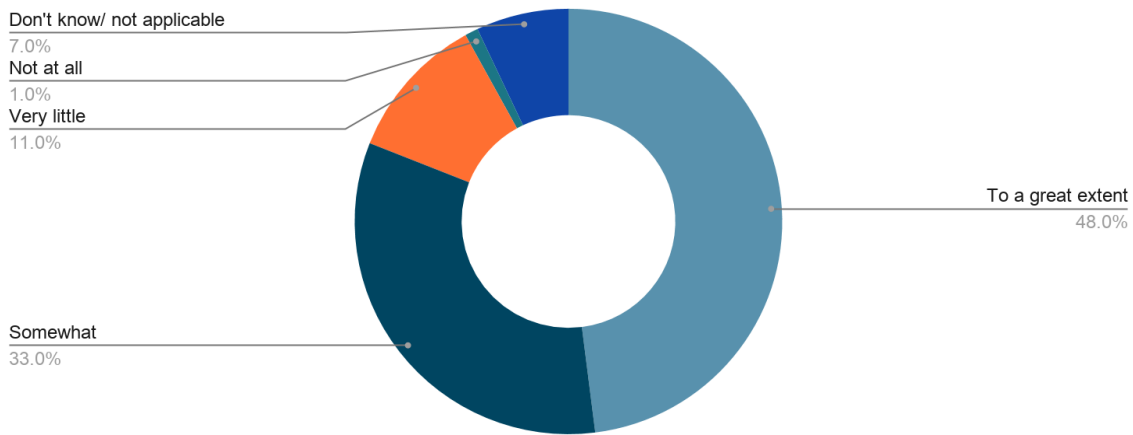
4.3 Institutional effects of Erasmus participation

In this section we report on the views of HE leadership on the effects of participation in the Erasmus(+) in three of the aspects noted in section 2.2.2, which were covered by the EIS+ survey: the internationalisation of the student population, the curriculum and recognition of learning outcomes obtained abroad, and organisation and governance -where we focus on institutional capacity building for mobility.

4.3.1 Internationalisation of the student population

Erasmus(+), like any other mobility programmes, aims to internationalise the student population. Figure 3 shows that almost half of the HE leaders surveyed reported that the programme had had a large impact in this respect at their institution. A further 33% reported a moderate impact. Erasmus+ is not the only tool that HEIs have to internationalise their student population. However, it provides a critical mass of mobile students from a wide range of countries (and arguably in a more balanced way than other tools such as full programme mobility) and remains a key tool for the internationalisation of the student population in European HEIs.

Figure 3. Impact of Erasmus(+) on the internationalisation of the student population over the last decade (2009-2018).

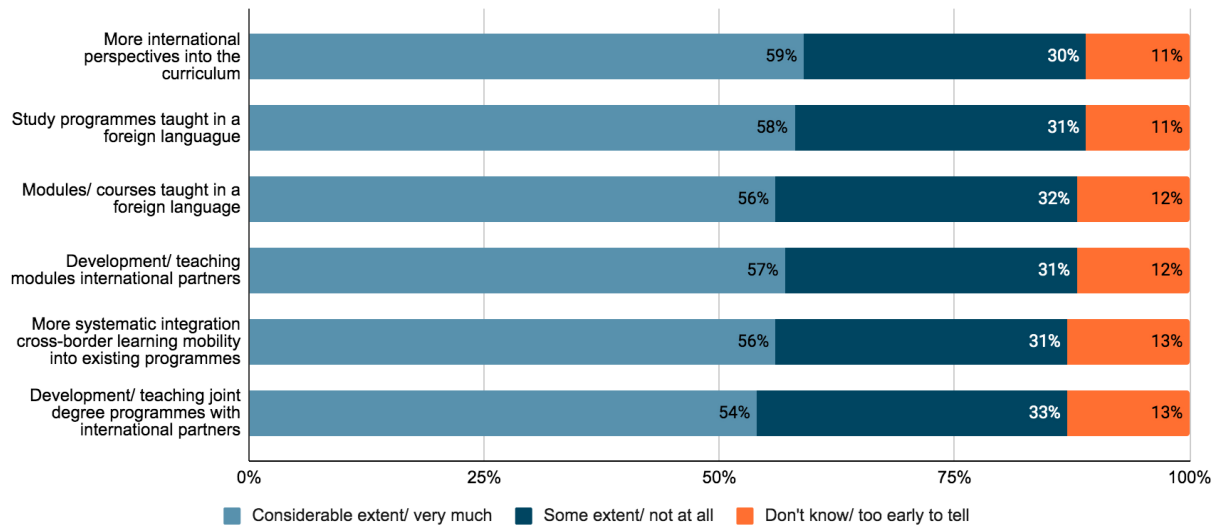


Source: Erasmus+ impact study (survey of HE leadership) (Souto-Otero et al. 2019). N=450. "To what extent has participation in Erasmus+ or predecessor programmes contributed to the internationalisation of the student population in your institution in the past 10 years?"

4.3.3 Curriculum and learning outcomes

Erasmus(+) student mobility has various effects on the curriculum, and on the recognition of learning outcomes. The effects on the curriculum can come from Erasmus(+) cooperation projects too, but international student mobility may also stimulate the systematic integration of mobility into study programmes. Figure 4 shows the impact of participation in Erasmus(+) in staff mobility on a range of curricula-related aspects in the home department of mobile teaching staff, as reported by staff. The results suggest that participation in Erasmus(+) has had widespread effects on the curricula, including the modification of the curricula to integrate mobility into study programmes, thus facilitating the recognition of learning outcomes acquired through international mobility experiences.

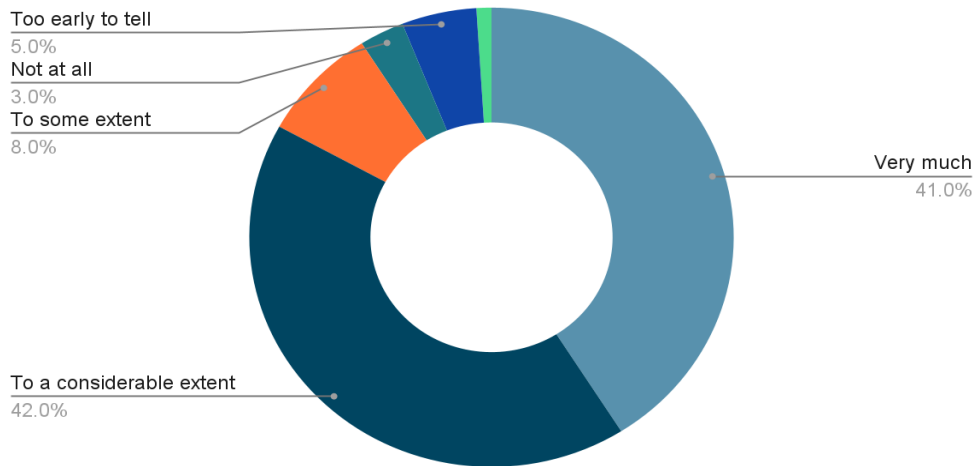
Figure 4: Impact of Erasmus(+) staff mobility on curricula in the home department



Source: Erasmus+ impact study (survey of mobile staff) (Souto-Otero et al. 2019). N= 2,512-3,408 depending on the item. "Have the knowledge, competences or contacts acquired by you or other staff during mobility supported by Erasmus+ or predecessor programmes led to improvements in the development and implementation of the following activities in your department?"

HE leadership were asked the extent to which participation in Erasmus(+) had also facilitated the recognition of mobility outside of those programmes where mobility may be mandatory or is explicitly integrated into the curriculum -embedded mobility. Over 40% of HE leaders reported that Erasmus(+) had helped the recognition of mobility outside of embedded mobility in their institution very much, and a further 42% that it had done so to a considerable extent -see Figure 5. Whereas HEIs from Partner countries reported the highest level of impact in this area - more than 50% selected the highest impact category -, HEIs from Northern European countries reported much lower impact – only around 30% selected that category.

Figure 5 Impact of Erasmus(+) in the recognition of mobility outside of embedded mobility



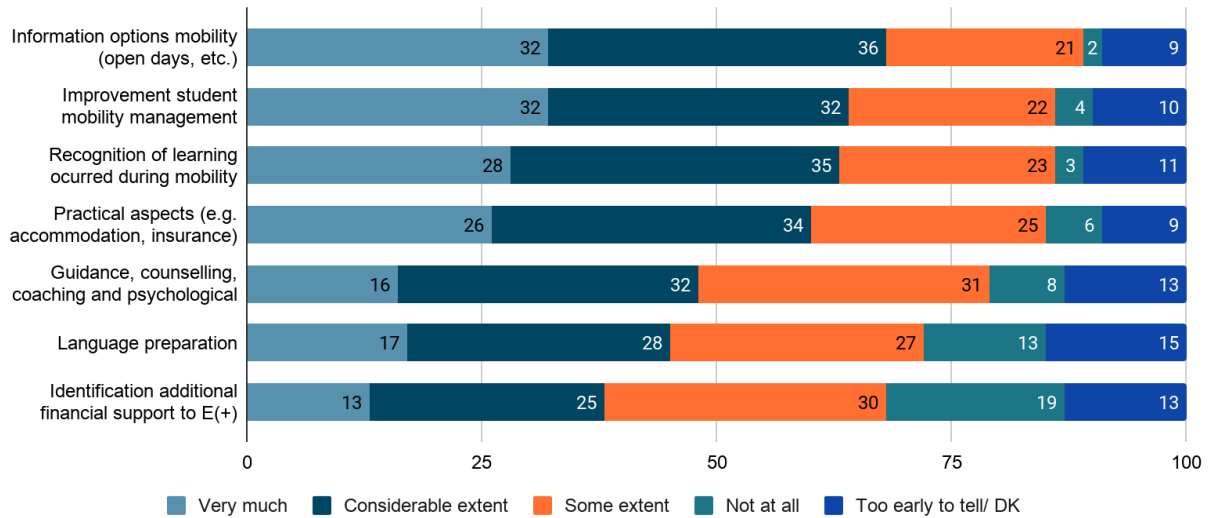
Source: Erasmus+ impact study (survey of HE leadership) (Souto-Otero et al. 2019). N= 459. "Has participation in the Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes led to improvements in the recognition of mobility (outside of embedded mobility) at your institution?"

The next section provides information on the impact of Erasmus(+) on capacity building, including information on the impact on the recognition of learning occurred during mobility periods -regardless of whether this took place within or outside the context of embedded mobility.

4.3.2 Organisation and governance: capacity building

Lack of students' (and staff) preparation for mobility is often seen as a challenge (Castro et al. 2016), and there is, no doubt, room for development in these areas. Yet, it is widely acknowledged that Erasmus(+) also has had widespread impact in relation to organisational and capacity building aspects associated with student mobility. The EIS+ survey asked about seven capacity building aspects that support students in their mobility experiences. The impact of Erasmus(+) on these elements varied quite markedly, but was generally high to very high -see Figure 6. The programme impact was reported as particularly high in increasing information about available options for international mobility (in open days, information days, preparatory sessions, etc.) and in improving the management of student mobility more generally. Impact was lower in relation to the identification of additional sources of financing (showing an important degree of reliance in the programme as a funding source for mobility) and the organisation of language preparation pre-departure, although a still sizeable share of institutions reported impact in these respects. The results also show that over 60% of respondents considered Erasmus(+) to have impacted on the recognition of learning occurred during mobility periods to a considerable or a large extent. HEIs from Eastern and Southern European countries reported higher impact of Erasmus(+) on student mobility and support systems.

Figure 6. Impact of Erasmus(+) on student mobility management and support



Source: Erasmus+ impact study (survey of HE leadership) (Souto-Otero et al. 2019). N=495. "Have the knowledge, competences or contact acquired by staff during participation in Erasmus+ or predecessor programmes led to improvements in the following aspects of student support available to students at your institution?"

5. Conclusions

This chapter has provided an overview of the motivations for and effects of individual and institutional participation in the Erasmus(+), the largest international student mobility programme in the world. In this concluding section we offer some reflections on the past, present and future of international student mobility.

The review of the literature on motivations and effects of student mobility at the individual level showed an alignment between the expectations and effects of student mobility through Erasmus(+). The literature identifies four main factors that motivate students to take part in mobility: academic learning, other skills development, employability enhancement and personal development/ life experiences. Among them, language learning and life experiences such as travelling and getting to know a new country appeared to be particularly important motivators. The literature has explored the effects of Erasmus(+) in, primarily, four areas, which are closely related to the motivations previously identified: academic learning, other skills development, labour market outcomes and personality and identity. Available evidence points towards the existence of Erasmus(+) effects across these areas, with effects being connected to each other and often mutually supportive, implying that improvement in one area is often connected to advancement in other areas as well.

The review of the literature has also highlighted that the majority of studies that examine the effects on students focus on single countries and use different methodologies, hindering the possibility of drawing international comparisons. Results from cross-country analysis, however, seem to point to heterogeneous effects with stronger impacts for Southern

(d'Hombres and Schnepf 2021) and Eastern European countries (Rodrigues 2016). There is also some evidence that the country of origin and country of destination can matter, with students moving vertically to countries with more prestigious educational systems and stronger labour markets benefiting more from their mobility (Iriando 2020). In the absence of such vertical mobility benefits are more uncertain (Van Mol et al. 2020).

Information on motivations and effects at the institutional level is harder to come by. To address this gap, the chapter used data from two Erasmus(+) impact study surveys, covering over 700 HE leaders and over 3,000 mobile teaching staff. The analysis revealed the central role that international student mobility has in the internationalisation strategies of HEIs in Europe. The importance of this student mobility for institutions is primarily associated with its role in the improvement of the academic experience, and the development of competences that would otherwise be difficult to develop in students. Economic considerations are also relevant, as institutions are aware of the popularity of study abroad options amongst prospective students. Mobility also helps institutions to project specific profiles through network development and, somewhat less importantly for leadership, by increasing the visibility and reputation of their institutions. The social elements of international student mobility (increasing the diversity of the student population) seem to be less of a priority for institutional leadership in comparison to economic and internationalisation motivations. This may be because HEIs may consider themselves to be already diverse institutions, because they have other ways to increase the diversity of their student population and because Erasmus(+) has traditionally not been particularly designed as a programme that aimed to promote diversity in the student population -beyond national diversity. The inclusion theme within mobility itself (making mobility more inclusive along socio-demographic characteristics) has been in the Erasmus(+) agenda for some time (Souto-Otero et al. 2013; Souto-Otero 2008; Bunescu 2020) and it is being given particular attention in the new 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programming period.

In terms of effects, the results show rather widespread and large effects of the programme when it comes to the internationalisation of the student population and the curriculum, the recognition of learning outcomes obtained abroad, and organisation and governance. At this point, the impact on the internationalisation of the student population and recognition of learning outcomes abroad seems somewhat higher than the impact on organisation and governance. Organisation and governance are the aspects where institutions may have already established systems and may rely less on the programme. Akin to the case of students, effects on institutions have been also found to vary by region (Souto-Otero et al. 2019).

Where next for mobility? After more than three decades of existence, the programme continues to grow, and has ambitious participation targets for the future. Internationalisation continues to have a prominent role in the mission of HEIs, which seems to have resisted contrary movements in recent years in politics and other areas of social life in several European countries and in the USA. Physical international student mobility within the programme may change in the future: patterns of mobility will be affected by the UK exit

from the EU (Brexit) as well as other political moves, for as Teichler (2017:210) noted “international mobility and cooperation is certainly one of the most “political” themes in higher education” -see also França et al. 2018. de Wit and Altbach (2021) note that it is too early to tell the effects that the rise of nationalist-populist movements, bans on migration and anti-integration trends can have on HE internationalisation and student mobility. International student mobility is part of a broader political and economic EU project, and has both pragmatic and ideological rationales. While these are in constant evolution (Dvir and Yemini 2017; Shields 2016; Sigalas 2010), student mobility (like the development of university networks and partnerships) has a dual role as a tool to promote economic competitiveness and in forging support for the European Union project, and is likely to continue to be a central element of European education policy. But mobility is also being affected by other factors. These include public health issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns with HE sustainable practices and ‘the green university’, which are being scrutinised in more detail than in the past, although existing analyses have given international student mobility a small role in emissions compared to staff mobility (ETH Zurich 2020).

The types of student mobility supported by the programme have evolved taking some of the above considerations in mind. In particular environmental concerns and “virtual mobility” has become more central. Since 2018 Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange enables participants in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean to “engage in meaningful intercultural experiences online as part of their formal or non-formal education” (...) that “can form part of a higher education degree or a youth project” through “online-facilitated activities, Interactive Open Online Courses (IOOCs) and online debates” and has had a significant take-up (European Commission 2020a:24 and 69-70). Blended mobility, combining physical and virtual mobility has also been on the rise (European Commission 2020a:56). The Commission communication on Achieving the European Education Area promised an Erasmus+ programme that “will be greener and more digital. Virtual and blended mobility could complement physical mobility” (European Commission 2020b:18).

Some stakeholders, however, have raised concerns with such conceptualisations of international student mobility. The student-led Erasmus Student Network, for example, has been emphatic in its critical assessment of the cited communication and of the idea of virtual mobility, which it contends: “is the wrong approach” and “is in our view not a form of mobility, even though the term has unfortunately entered into the public discourse”, “it cannot be a substitute for a mobility period abroad (...) an easy way to reach higher numbers of mobility participants” compromising funding for future physical mobilities (ESN 2020:6-7). How these debates resolve, the definition, shape and size of student mobility within the programme, in turn, will affect the motivations of stakeholders to engage in it, and the effects Erasmus+ mobility will continue to produce on students and institutions in the future.

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