ESNsurvey 2016

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INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE
ERASMUS STUDENT NETWORK

The International -Friendliness of Universities

Research Report of the ESNsurvey 2016

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PREFACE

The experience of studying abroad is not limited only to the interaction between professors and peers in the classroom, when we talk about student experience today, we refer to the surrounding measures; accommodation, career advice, buddy and peer-to-peer support, campus area and integration in the local city. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus mobility programme and although the programme has benefited over 4 million students it still has improvements to make.

For the past 27 years, the Erasmus Student Network has worked along-side the Erasmus mobility programme to ensure that students have a quality experience abroad. The choice to explore the topic of *international friendliness of universities* therefore comes as a great occasion to evaluate the expanding concept of student services and how we and other stakeholders of the programme can improve. This edition marks the 10th edition of the ESNsurvey, a great milestone for our organisation in the representation of international students across Europe. Through our research we continue to innovate in the way we approach our target group and advocate to make Erasmus accessible to all.

I am proud to see the way that our organisation continues to contribute to important policy developments. With a fast-changing Europe it is important that we show the benefits of an international experience, raise the opinions of students and contribute to create effective and impactful change.

Safi Sabuni
President ESN AISBL 2015/2017

INTRODUCTION

An average number of respondents in a cross-cultural study doesn't usually go into thousands. So how could a research project done by volunteers of the Erasmus Student Network get 25,000 responses? A simple answer would be, it's a large student network, one of the biggest in Europe with more than 500 local associations in 40 European countries. Indeed, spreading a questionnaire through such a network makes you expect a great amount of answers, but it's not just any questionnaire that can be sent through the Network and expected to receive the same outreach. ESN's network has a memory, certain projects work longer and although research isn't the top activity in terms of popularity, the fact that the ESNsurvey project has existed for 11 years, gained recognition amongst stakeholders and supported ESN in its claims, makes many of the volunteers commit to it. And in a volunteer organisation, commitment is what it's all about.

This year's topic is "international-friendliness of universities" and the aim is to explore the role of mobility flows, host-university services, academic adaptation, social adaptation and home-country reintegration in the resulting satisfaction with the study abroad experience.

The dissemination through a snowball research strategy gets a totally new twist today with social networks in play. Click join, share or like, add a hashtag, support it by a video, create a profile picture template and you're on to reaching out to thousands of people. Although disseminating a questionnaire online makes it impossible to calculate a return rate, it makes it possible to get a return that counts.

It's understandable that volunteers of ESN help in promoting the questionnaire, because they know the project and the people behind it. For them, participating in such a project even helps the cooperation with their university, as it shows that they take the problems international students might face seriously.

But how about the Erasmus students that the survey targets? What convinces them to take 20 minutes of their free time and voluntarily bite through a questionnaire of 67 questions? Well, the Erasmus experience. It's such a powerful life experience that most of the people upon return have a certain need to talk about it and to express what they experienced. The emotions connected with spending a study period abroad are simply a driving force that raises attention to anything connected to Erasmus, even a questionnaire.

Going abroad, leaving your relatives and friends behind, jumping into something totally unknown, and doing this all on your own isn't easy. But if you're welcomed by a local buddy, who helps you to cope with the first days, introduces you to other friends and takes you to some of the first events at your new campus, it makes the whole experience less stressful. Many of the buddies are members of ESN and many of the activities are organised by local ESN associations. Homecoming students might recall the help they received and might see that by spending 20 minutes of their time to fill in a questionnaire, they could actually help future students to have an even better experience. Also, the fact that it's students who are asking the questions somehow raises the motivation to participate. It's not a company, not your school, not the national agency, nor the European Union, it's people of the same generation, the Erasmus generation, asking about your Erasmus. It's easier to imagine who's behind the project as the questions come from people who lived a similar experience.

The questions are sometimes tricky to design. Although homecoming students are expected to understand the survey in English, keeping the formulations short and understandable is a must. Some standardised scales with academically formulated questions that were initially planned to be used, simply didn't make it through the pilot study. Other questions didn't make the cut, because they weren't relevant for all countries involved or would mean something else in a different context.

For the first time, the ESNsurvey project succeeded with reaching the target group of local non-mobile students, who have never been abroad. In order to collect answers even from this group, which might lack foreign language skills, the questionnaire had only 29 questions and was translated into 9 other languages.

The weird and shivering beauty of the Erasmus experience is that although Europe is so diverse in all its countries, ethnic groups and languages, which generally makes the creation of a cross-cultural survey difficult, the core of the experience is similar. It seems like it doesn't depend on where someone spends their Erasmus, because they can always end up with people from all around the world, who are all on the same journey. This "unity in diversity" bonds people together regardless of their differences.

Mikuláš Josek
ESNsurvey Coordinator 2015/2016

METHODOLOGY

The ESNsurvey 2016 Project

The ESNsurvey is a Europe-wide research project covering different topics concerning mobility and education. It is the largest project of this kind carried out solely by volunteers. Every year since the establishment of the project in 2005, the ESNsurvey team develops an online questionnaire and disseminates it among students at European Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to collect information about students' experiences from their exchange period abroad. Many associations, s tudents, teachers, academics and various European institutions collaborate with ESN on this project. For the 11 years of existence of the project, over 150,000 responses have been collected. These, on average 14,000 answers per year are compiled in an annual publication called the ESNsurvey Report. ESN shares this report with the main stakeholders in higher education and mobility programmes: the European Commission, National Agencies of the Erasmus+ Programme, HEIs and many other associations dealing with higher education and student mobility.

The ESNsurvey 2016 topic is "*international-friendliness of universities*" and the aim is to explore the role of host-university services, academic support, intercultural contact and friendship networks in the resulting satisfaction with the study abroad experience. We want to explore which conditions and interventions at universities contribute to a friendlier atmosphere on campuses and how a university can improve its intercultural relations between local and international students.

Data collection procedure

As outlined above, the data used in this report were collected through an online questionnaire entitled "ESNsurvey 2016 Questionnaire" placed at www.esn.org/esnsurvey/2016. The data collection period lasted from 16th of October 2015 to 8th of January 2016. The link was distributed through local associations of one of the largest student networks in Europe; the Erasmus Student Network (ESN). Its 500+ branches located at universities around Europe shared the link to the questionnaire with university students through various channels (e.g. social media, email, printed posters, etc.). The university international relations offices supported many of the local associations of ESN in spreading the link through university communication channels. Additionally, thanks to cooperating with the European Commission, the National Agencies for the Erasmus+ Programme and other institutional partners in the field of higher education, the questionnaire reached even to universities outside ESN.

Commercial partners of ESN such as Uniplaces and Hostelling International shared the link through their communication channels by which they helped the survey to obtain a larger number of responses. StudyPortals supported the collection of data by providing prizes worth €500 as incentives to participate in the survey. After submitting the anonymous online questionnaire, the participants were re-directed to a separate competition-survey that required an email address in order to enter the prize draw. 3 winners were drawn from the participants and received (1.) a city trip for two anywhere in Europe with TravelBird, (2.) an underwater photo camera, or (3.) an open Amazon voucher.

In addition, every respondent was asked to share the link with other potential participants. Disseminating the questionnaire through a "snowball" technique enables to reach a very large number of potential participants, but it does not allow calculating the return rate. Since the willingness to respond or not is subject to the questions being asked, the sample of respondents can not be considered as fully representative, and therefore the results can not be generalised to the entire population.

ESNsurvey Questionnaire

The main questionnaire, which is added to the appendix of this report, was designed to target **homecoming exchange students**, those who have completed a short-term study abroad (one to two semesters). The exchange students questionnaire was piloted face-to-face on approximately 20 students and then again online on approximately 50 students. The exchange students questionnaire contained 67 questions, and we received **12,365** valid responses.

Apart from demographics and identification variables, the areas explored were:

- **European student mobility flows**
- **Host university support**
- **Academic adaptation**
- **Social adaptation**
- **Home university reintegration**

When mentioning the term 'home university' throughout the text, we refer to the sending institution of the mobility programme, and similarly, the term 'host university' refers to the receiving institution.

A general target of the number of responses was set and also targets for each of the countries where ESN is present were determined. The targets were based on the number of responses from the previous editions of the ESNsurvey project and on the official numbers provided by the European Commission about the amount of exchange students in these countries. The reason of having targets was to collect a representative sample from each participating country that would reflect the number of incoming and outgoing students. The promotional campaign was continuously adjusted based on monitoring the amount of responses.

We expected that the promotional campaign would reach also other target groups apart from the homecoming exchange students. Therefore, three additional (shorter) questionnaires were developed to take advantage of this opportunity and to collect supplementary data that could be used for comparisons or potential future studies. The biggest additional target group was **local students with no mobility experience**[1]. The local questionnaire was developed and piloted in English and then translated into 9 other languages (Spanish, Portuguese, German, French, Dutch, Czech, Finnish, Bulgarian and Serbian). It had 29 questions, and we received **9,454** valid responses.

Apart from demographics and identification variables, the areas explored were:

- **Barriers and expectations about migration**
- **Cross-cultural in-class interaction**
- **Cross-cultural out-of-class interaction**
- **Attitudes towards a multicultural society**

The additional questionnaires were targeted at **current exchange students** who were at the moment studying abroad (n=2,176) and at **homecoming trainees**, who finished their internship abroad (n=537). Altogether, the ESNsurvey project collected **24,532** responses in the 2016 edition.

[1] The mobility experience was described as a study/work/volunteer period abroad that lasted longer than three months.

Data analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire are used to analyse students' experiences and satisfaction with their exchange period abroad. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the individual chapters. A statistical analysis with help of the IBM SPSS Statistics 24 software is used to verify whether certain relationships among variables are significant and whether observed differences between various groups are significant. Since most of the data are qualitative, non-parametric tests are applied for analysing group differences, relationships between variables and the strength of such relationships. The results are interpreted in the context of student mobility in Europe.

The areas we studied are European student mobility flows, host university support services, academic adaptation, social adaptation and home university reintegration. We aim to explore the relationships between each of these areas and to understand their importance in the process of international student adjustment and international students' satisfaction. Additionally, by gathering information about demographics and the study abroad context, such as nationality, country of study abroad, length of study abroad, finances, accommodation, and other university context variables, we seek to discover their effect on the resulting level of integration in order to derive recommendations on the European, national and institutional level.

Basic characteristics of the sample of homecoming students

Looking at the gender distribution, out of the total number of valid responses, 67% are female respondents and 33% male respondents. The predominance of female respondents is present in the total group of all mobile students participating in the Erasmus+ programme[2]. Additionally, the female predominance corresponds to a general trend in social science research when using the questionnaire method for data collection (Kwak and Radler, 2002).

Graph 1 - Gender distribution

67% Female   33% Male
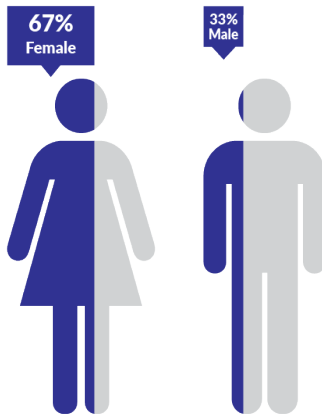
The average **age** of the respondents is 23 years[3] . Respondents above the age of 33 years have been identified as outliers[4] and removed from further analysis.

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[2] According to European Commission (2015) *Erasmus Facts, Figures & Trends*, the male:female ratio for mobility students is 40:60.

[3] According to European Commission (2015) *Erasmus Facts, Figures & Trends*, the average age of students in the "studies" type of mobility is 23,4 years.

[4] The identification of outliers was done by a Box-and-Whisker Plot analysis.

Nearly three quarters of the sample (74%) are on the Bachelor **level of studies**, the rest (26%) are Master level students. Students who have selected PhD or Other in the questionnaire have been excluded from further analysis to maintain a more homogeneous sample of respondents.
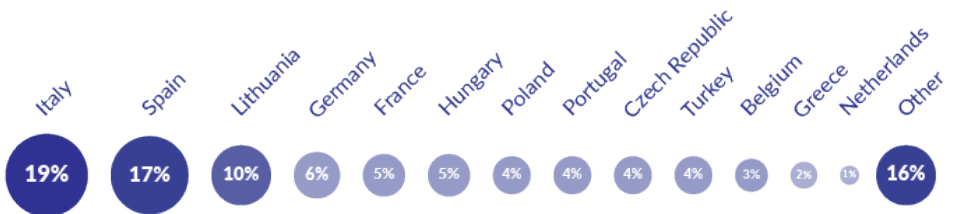
Regarding **study disciplines / subject areas**, the highest amount of respondents has selected economy and business sciences (25%), humanities (23%) and social sciences (18%). Other study disciplines follow in Graph 2.

Graph 2 - Study disciplines / subject areas

Economy and Business — 25%
Humanities — 23%
Social Sciences — 18%
Engineering — 17%
Natural Sciences — 7%
Medicine — 6%
Other — 4%
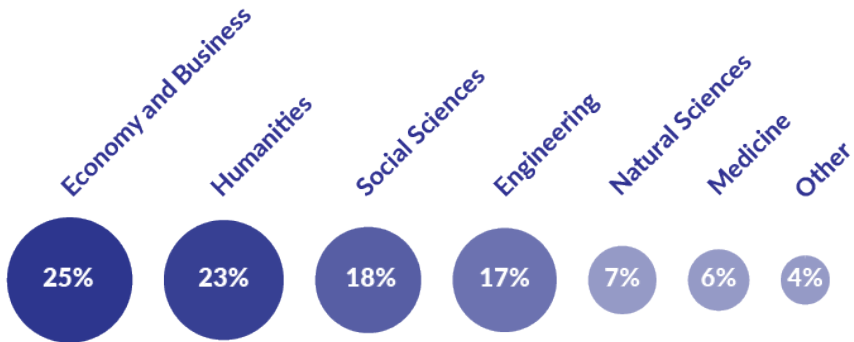
Thanks to heavy promotion through the Erasmus Student Network AISBL and its partners in higher education, the survey reached out to students from all parts of the world (106 countries). However, the focus of our study is on the European Higher Education Area. The highest amount of respondents came from Italy (2,230), Spain (2,041) and Germany (1,145). You can find the division of our respondents by their **home countries** (asked as the country of home university) in Graph 3. It has to be emphasised that those are the countries where the home universities of the students are located, i.e. it is not the nationality or place of birth of the respondents but the country of the university where they are normally enrolled and from which they were sent for their studies abroad. The sample roughly corresponds to the general population of students going abroad with the Erasmus+ programme, having the main countries Italy, Spain and Germany at the top[5].

Graph 3 - Home countries (Sending countries)

Italy — 19%
Spain — 17%
Lithuania — 10%
Germany — 6%
France — 5%
Hungary — 5%
Poland — 4%
Portugal — 4%
Czech Republic — 4%
Turkey — 4%
Belgium — 3%
Greece — 2%
Netherlands — 1%
Other — 16%

[5]According to European Commission (2015) Erasmus Facts, Figures & Trends, the overall number for Erasmus student mobility in the years 2013/2014 was 272,497. The main "home countries" of Erasmus students were: Spain (14%), France (13%), Germany (13%) and Italy (10%).

The socio-economic status of respondents was explored through a question about defining one's family income. In Graph 4, it can be seen that the majority of students (63%) perceived their family's income as average.

Graph 4 - Socio-economic status (Perceived family income)
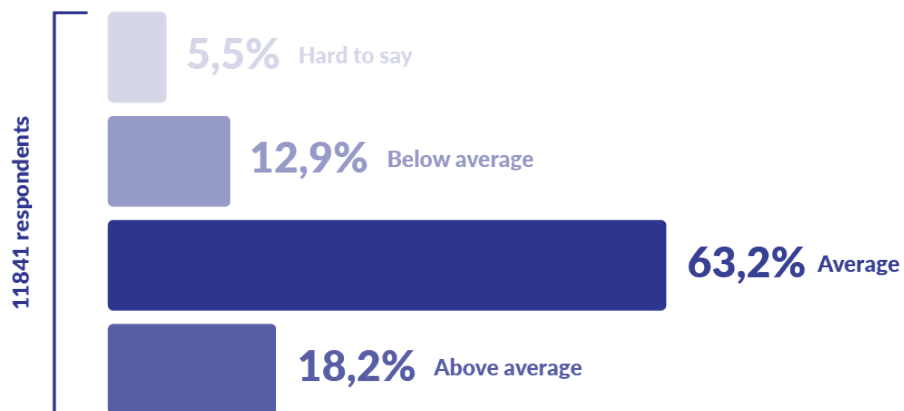
KEY FINDINGS

Chapter 1: Who goes where (Student migration in Europe)

Length of stay

In accordance with the previous editions of the ESNsurvey, there seems to be a positive influence of longer stays on the improvement of perceived foreign language skills, knowledge of the host country's culture and employability. Longer stays lead to more social interactions with members of the local community and therefore to better local integration.

Destination country

Regarding the importance of going to the country or institution of first preference, the level of satisfaction of those who went to their preferred destination didn't significantly differ from the level of satisfaction of those who did not. This suggests the destination itself doesn't play an important role in students' satisfaction.

Amount of expenses covered by the mobility grant

Only 10.2% of students considered that 80% or more of their expenses were covered. Therefore, higher grants would make mobility easier. However, people with special needs, people from disadvantaged backgrounds and people from a lower socio-economic background seem to have a higher part of their expenses covered, so the *top-up grants* introduced in the Erasmus+ programme seem to have a positive influence.

Interest in pursuing a Master's degree abroad

Our results agree with the idea that mobility triggers more mobility, as 70% of the respondents were interested in pursuing a Master's degree abroad after their exchange experience. From those interested, 84% see financial limitations as an issue and almost half of them would consider taking a loan.

Chapter 2: What's on offer (Services for international students at host universities)

Host university support services

The most common support service for incoming exchange students is an *introductory / welcome presentation* upon arrival, it was available for 87% of respondents. The vast majority (83%) was also offered a *course on the local language*. International students appreciate the support services that are available at host universities, the more the better, as a higher number of services relates to a higher level of satisfaction.

Need for more research

The *buddy programme*, *assistance with accommodation* and a *course about cultural differences* were the least offered support services and the findings suggest that they deserve more research. Our results show that only 48% of the total number of respondents were actually assigned a buddy and that the usefulness of the service is rather questionable. Out of the 51% of respondents (5,984 students) who were offered *assistance with accommodation*, 14% (1,657 students) were offered a possibility to live with co-nationals (students from their home country), 15% (1,798 students) to live with locals (students from the host country) and 32% (3,840 students) to live with other internationals (students from other foreign countries). Whether students lived with other internationals, locals or alone was found to be related with the type and number of friends they made.

Potential problems at host universities

International students don't seem to experience many major problems with the offered services. The everlasting difficulties consider the area of finances, courses & exams schedules and enrolment to courses. Generally, the more difficulties the students experienced, the less satisfied they were.

Chapter 3: How hard is it (Academic adaptation of international students)

Discrimination

We asked students about their experience of discrimination; if they were treated differently or unfairly, treated as less intelligent, if they heard insulting remarks or didn't have equal opportunities. An overwhelming majority, around 80% of respondents, had not been treated in such a negative way. However, for the few that have experienced discrimination, being subject to discrimination is linked with many negative aspects of the exchange experience (e.g. being less satisfied with their studies and stay abroad).

Host professors' support

The vast majority, almost 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that professors tried to understand their difficulties, that they felt comfortable discussing with professors and that professors were willing to give them helpful advice. We found a positive relationship between host professors' support and satisfaction with studies abroad.

In-class composition

43% of respondents said they were in classes mostly with local students and more than 55% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that professors supported intercultural interaction. Our findings indicate that the overall satisfaction with studies abroad was higher when respondents agreed that professors supported the interaction of students from different countries.

Language of instruction

Most students studied either in the local language (38%) or in another language (46%), only 16 % studied in both the local and another language. In the case when the language of instruction was not the local language, the predominant foreign language of instruction was English (for 95% of our respondents).

Two sides of studying in the local language

Studying in the local language might bring some benefits in terms of host-country integration, it can lead to improving the local language skills, having more local friends and gaining more knowledge about the local culture. It also seems to lead to students being less satisfied with their study abroad experience and with host university services. However, a lower level of students' satisfaction can be potentially explained by the fact that the Higher Education Institutions that don't propose courses in English usually offer less quality services for international students.

Satisfaction with studies abroad

Our findings show that creating an international-friendly environment is very important for a positive exchange experience. An international-friendly environment is non-discriminative, supportive and culturally-diverse. Most students were overall satisfied with the approach and teaching methods, with their studies as an exchange student and with their stay abroad as an exchange student.

Chapter 4: Who meets who (Social adaptation of international students)

Social programme and Friendship Networks

Different types of social activities are available for and attended by exchange students (e.g. entertainment, language, sports…). When taking a look at who precisely attends these activities, it is very clear that it's mostly international students (65%). Only a very small number of activities is attended by an equal number of local and international students (17%) or by mostly local students (6%). There is a positive relationship between the number of activities attended and the number of friends created. Exchange students whose host-universities offered more social activities made more friends in all the possible

social groups: local (friends from the host country), multinational (international students) and co-nationals (friends from the same country of origin. All three types of friendships were found to positively contribute to the overall satisfaction with the stay abroad.

Friendship networks

Exchange students can develop three types of friendships: local (friends from the visiting foreign country), multinational (friends from other foreign countries) and co-national (friends from their country of origin). All three types of friendships were found to positively contribute to the overall satisfaction with the stay abroad.

Local integration

The findings suggest that exchange students expected to make more local friends than they actually did during their stay abroad. As this unfulfilled desire could be a reason for lower satisfaction with the study abroad experience, we examined the potential barriers as well as the potential facilitators.

Accommodation

As international students are often accommodated together with other international students or a mix of local and international students, we researched if there was a correlation between this aspect and the number and different types of friendships they made. We found that international students who were accommodated with locals had more local friends than students who were not. Generally, it seems beneficial to mix students together. This way they would have the opportunity to develop friendships more easily even with students from other nationalities, which could enrich the cultural understanding, personal development and experience of an international student.

Intercultural understanding

We found a positive relationship between the development of friendship networks and the gained knowledge about cultures. Students who developed more local and multinational friends claim to have learned more about the host country's culture and about other cultures. Additionally, learning about other cultures also appears to help better understand one's own culture.

Barriers of cross-cultural interaction

When investigating the integration and interaction between exchange students and local students we found that exchange student perceive that *local students are not interested in interaction* (40%). When asking the local students they believe *they lack self-confidence to initiate the contact* (24%). Both groups believe that there *are not enough opportunities for interaction* (Exchange 33%, Local 35%) while some exchange students think that a *different lifestyle* (23%) and the fact that they are *leaving after one semester* (20%) is a barrier to integrate into the local community of students.

Local students also recognize language as a barrier and that they themselves *don't have enough language skills* (17%) to interact with exchange students.

Local students mostly believed that there are not enough opportunities for interaction (35%). Secondly, local students perceived they lack self-confidence to initiate the contact (24%), and that they themselves don't have enough language skills (17%).

Several factors such as a longer stay abroad, participation in the social programme and being accommodated with local students can be seen as facilitators of interaction between local and international students.

Satisfaction with the social programme

International students that are more satisfied with the social programme, rate higher the satisfaction level of their overall stay abroad. International students need out-of-class opportunities where they can interact with each other, discover the local culture and develop local, multinational and co-national friendships.

Chapter 5: What happens next (Re-integration at home university and the after mobility experience)

Availability of re-entry services at home universities upon return

Respondents were asked whether the university offered re-entry services and whether they participated in any of the services upon their return. Overall, 15% of the respondents haven't been offered any re-entry services, but usually they had the chance to participate in three of the services, for example *to help outgoing students* (e.g. by telling them about experiences at the host university), *to help incoming students* (e.g. by becoming their buddy/mentor), or *to join a student group/organisation/association* (such as an ESN section). Students frequently reported not being offered *to keep up the language skills acquired abroad* (e.g. by attending an additional language course) or *to consult their career perspectives / future job opportunities.*

Close to 70% of the respondents believe that re-entry services should be offered to students after their return from abroad. The findings suggest that Higher Education Institutions don't offer enough re-entry services to returning students.

Expectations

Respondents had the chance to indicate their expectations about certain aspects of a study abroad experience and whether these expectations were fulfilled. The results of the survey suggest that returned exchange students felt that their *work and career perspectives* improved less than they expected them to improve. Similarly, it appears that students expected more than they actually gained in terms of *learning the local language (of the visiting country)* and *improving education by gaining academic knowledge (through visited courses).* In contrast, students learned more than they expected about the local culture, about other foreign cultures and mostly about their own culture.

Willingness to migrate abroad

By comparing the answers given by homecoming (mobile) and local (non-mobile) respondents, it appears that 93% of the former exchange students would be interested in migrating abroad for work in the future, while 86% of those who haven't spent a period abroad would be willing to migrate. The estimated work abroad locations of graduates were also explored. Overall, students without a study abroad experience show a greater tendency to stay after their studies in their home country and students with a study abroad experience tend to subsequently migrate mainly within Europe.

WHO GOES WHERE?
- Student migration in Europe

by Jaume Alonso i Fernández

Introduction

Student migration can have a strong impact on the whole European region. Despite the fact that in recent decades the number of international exchange students has increased almost four times faster than total international migration (International Organization for Migration, 2008: 105), to date International Student Mobility (ISM) still remains little studied in the scientific literature compared to other types of migration (Findlay, 2011; King and Raghuram, 2013). Student mobility flows should be of major interest to those seeking to understand today's globalising world. Findlay et al (2006: 291) point out that *'student flows are usually temporary in duration, but global in reach'*, meaning that the consequences of such exchanges usually extend in time after the end of the migration and reach other people besides the migrant himself. On a broader frame, international student mobility flows can also be understood as a proxy for knowledge flows. Maggioni and Uberti (2009) say that knowledge creates relations that connect people, regions and institutions, and in particular it is 'embedded' in the student that returns to his home institution after a stay abroad, so a high volume of international student mobility between two particular regions or institutions can be a sign for strong knowledge flows between them.

The ESNsurvey focuses on the so-called European Student Mobility (ESM), which has some specific characteristics when compared to other migration flows. First, it is fostered by institutional programmes, like the Erasmus+ programme by the European Commission. Such programmes facilitate migration flows by setting specific channels to accelerate administrative requirements by local, national and academic authorities and also direct mobility towards concrete goals like enhancing students' careers and building a European identity. Second, as Van Mol (2013: 210) points out, ESM is a migration *'generally not originating from the lower strata of society and disposing of sufficient economical capital to finance a study period abroad'*, so it constitutes a migration elite. Third, it is mostly centred around credit mobility. The probable return after the end of the mobility process affects the motivation for moving, which is less driven by academic prestige or employment reasons and more by an individual rationale, i.e. looking for a new personal experience or life challenge (Van Mol, 2013; Carlson, 2012).

When it comes to the reasons for taking part in a mobility programme, a previous edition of the ESNsurvey by Alfranseder et al (2011) shows "meeting new people", "learning about a different culture" and "developing as a person" as being the most common ones. Carlson (2012) also points out that since ESM is not triggered by traditional migration factors such as financial or employment reasons, it should not be studied *why* students become mobile but *how* they become mobile, i.e. understanding becoming mobile as a process that extends in time, triggered by previous mobility experiences of oneself, relatives, friends, workmates, etc.

Another important concept when it comes to the study of ESM is the mobility capital, defined in (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 51) as the "*subcomponent of human capital enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad*". The skills gained through student mobility experiences, such as foreign language competences and the ability to work in intercultural groups or environments, are well identified and recognised by employers, as established in the ESNsurvey by Alfranseder *et al* (2012). This is one of the key points why student mobility is promoted by governments and academic institutions: even though the student mobility extends usually over a limited period of time, its effects can be much more long lasting.

Aim

The aim of this chapter is to establish how the parameters of student mobility flows, such as the origin, the destination, the duration, previous mobility experiences or the financial coverage, affect certain outcomes of the stay abroad, such as perceived improvement, number of created friends or students' satisfaction with their stay abroad. We also discuss how these aspects could potentially affect future mobility flows.

In line with the other research on ESM, we can establish our hypotheses. We do not expect a significant difference in the level of satisfaction with the stay abroad between the respondents that went to their preferred destination country or university and those who did not. The characteristics of ESM and its benefits for the participants, such as gaining intercultural skills or adapting to a foreign environment, should be independent of the geographical, financial and linguistic situation of the destination and only related to going on exchange in general. We do not expect a significant difference in the satisfaction with the stay abroad depending on the length of the stay abroad, as the mentioned benefits should be obtained quite quickly.

Nonetheless, we do expect that the length of stay has a positive impact on the level of integration into the host country. A longer stay will likely provide a better opportunity for the student to get to know the host country's culture, language and habits, which is already a benefit by itself and may also lead to more interaction with the local community, in line with the findings of Van Mol and Michielsen (2015). On the contrary, when it comes to interaction with other international students, we do not expect a strong influence as these interactions seem to occur fairly fast and at the beginning of the stay (Gill and Bialski, 2011).

Finally, we do expect that the additional top-up grants for people with disabilities and for people from disadvantaged backgrounds will have a significant effect on the grant coverage, i.e. the amount of expenses that were covered by the grant.

Results

This part will characterise the ESM flows in terms of geographical and economical terms. Thus, we will use the data from the main questionnaire of the ESNsurvey project, which focused on the respondents that *did* have a study experience abroad (n=12,365).

Length of exchange

The academic stays abroad do not always have the same duration. As mentioned in the methodology, the ESNsurvey focuses on credit mobility, a temporary study abroad period. Credit mobility shares some characteristics with longer types of student mobility, but it also has some specific features. For example, Waters and Brooks (2010: 84) mention that students are less motivated by the prestige or the employment-related aspects of the destination university and Gordon and Jallade (1996) say that credit mobility comes usually through 'organised' mobility patterns with structural financing and support, such as the Erasmus+ programme. This programme, for example, allows stays between 3 and 12 months per study cycle.

In Graph 5 we can see the length of the respondents' stay grouped in two categories: up to one semester and up to one academic year. 69% of respondents went for a one-semester exchange and 31% spent two semesters abroad. The respondents whose stay was shorter than 3 months or longer than 12 months have been excluded[6] because their stay is not under the typical parameters of European credit mobility.

Graph 5 - Length of stay

**3-6 months
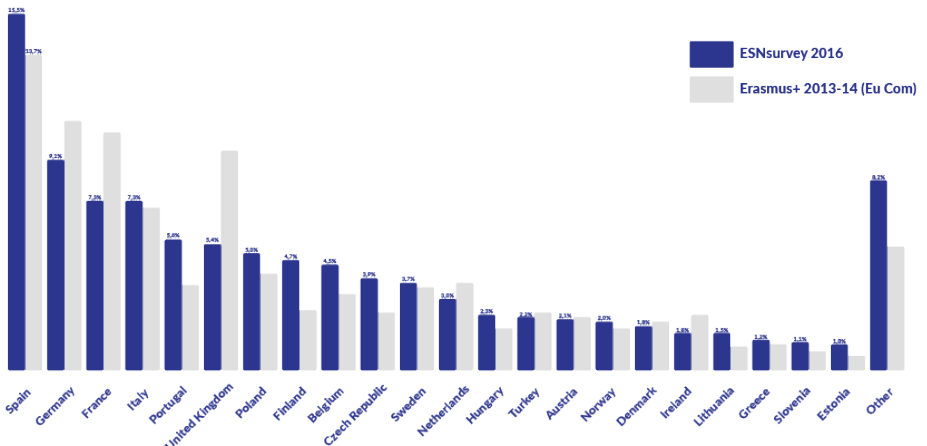(1 semester)**　　**6-12 months
(2 semesters)**

69%　　31%
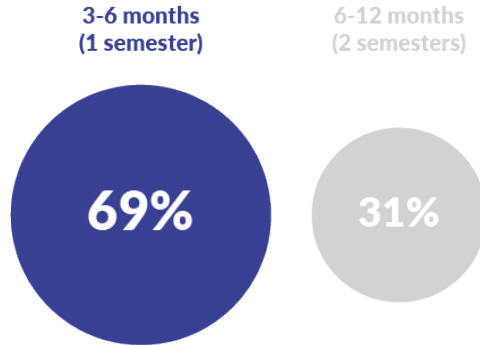
Countries represented by the number of incoming students

The three most frequent study abroad destinations of our respondents are Spain (1,836 students), Germany (1,081 students) and France (870 students). The following destination countries can be seen in Graph 6. We also introduce for comparison the last available official statistics provided by the European Commission on the Erasmus+ programme (European Commission, 2015). As we can see, the country distribution is roughly similar to that of our respondents.

There are two reasons that can explain the small differences between the two distributions. The ESNsurvey 2016 took place in Europe but we did not exclude respondents whose either *home country* or *host country* was outside Europe, while the data of the European Commission contains only academic exchanges whose both origin and destination are in Europe. Moreover, the data of the European Commission corresponds exclusively to the academic year 2013-14, while our respondents went on exchange in different periods, as can be seen in Graph 9.

Graph 6 - Comparison of host country distributions (ESNsurvey 2016 and European Commission data)

■ ESNsurvey 2016
□ Erasmus+ 2013-14 (Eu Com)

Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Portugal, United Kingdom, Poland, Finland, Belgium, Czech Republic, Sweden, Netherlands, Hungary, Turkey, Austria, Norway, Denmark, Ireland, Lithuania, Greece, Slovenia, Estonia, Other
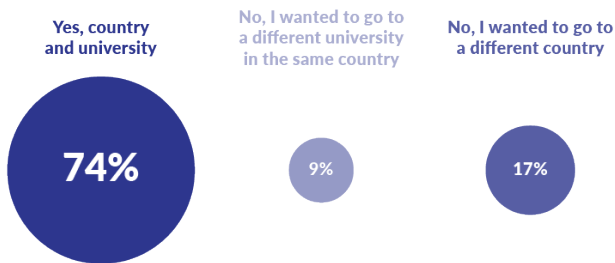
[6]The mentioned number of respondents (n=12,365) already excludes these participants.

Destination countries and institutions of preference

In student mobility schemes such as the Erasmus+ programme, the number of available spots for a stay abroad is determined by a series of bilateral agreements between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Therefore, students are asked to fill in a preference list of destinations in case there are more students with an interest in going abroad to a particular destination than spots available for that institution. In such a case, it is the home (sending) institution –often with different criteria depending on the faculty or the degree- that decides who gets to go to their first option and the rest of students are given the choice to either go to their second or third preference, to another available destination or to try again in the next selection.

The table below gives an overview of the modus category regarding the chance to study abroad at a preferred country of choice. In Graph 7 we can see that 74% of the respondents who went on exchange could go to their first preference. Another 9% were able to go to the same country but to another institution and 17% went to another country.

Graph 7 - Chance to study at a preferred destination country and institution

Yes, country and university

No, I wanted to go to a different university in the same country

No, I wanted to go to a different country

74%

9%

17%

The respondents belonging to this last category were asked to also fill in the country that was their preferred destination. Most European countries got a similar result, between 5 and 7%, with the single exception of the United Kingdom that was selected as an unfulfilled destination three times more often than the rest of the countries. This can be possibly explained by the use of English language and its position of reference in the European academic world.

Table 1 - Unfulfilled destinations (n=2,023)

Top 5 unfulfilled destination countries	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
United Kingdom	361	17,8%
Spain	155	7,7%
Netherlands	133	6,6%
Sweden	126	6,2%
Denmark	113	5,6%

Previous study abroad experience

Carlson (2012) suggests that one of the factors that makes students become mobile is their previous academic experience abroad, i.e. that student mobility triggers more student mobility. In Graph 8, we can see that for 80% of the respondents it was their first academic stay abroad. From the other 21%, almost all of them had an experience in another country.

Graph 8 - Previous study abroad experience
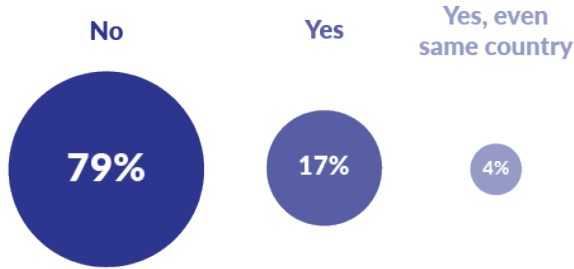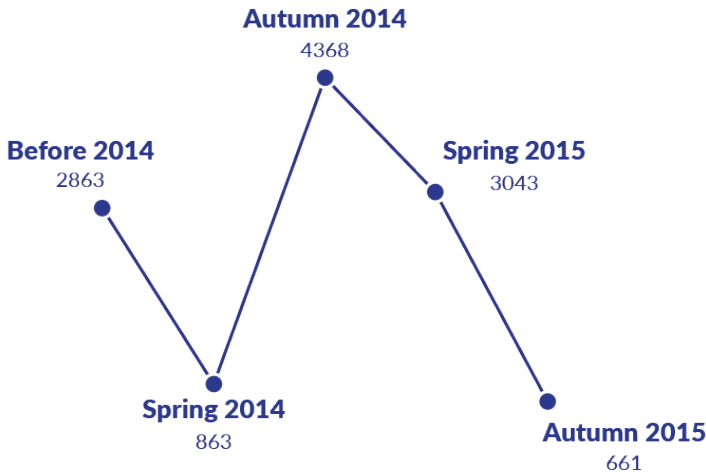

Start of studies abroad

Regarding the commencement of students' study abroad, we can see that our data are more recent than in other studies about ESM. 75%, which is 8,967 respondents, went already with the Erasmus+ Programme and the rest (25%, 2,946 respondents) went abroad before 2014. The semesters can be seen in Graph 9.
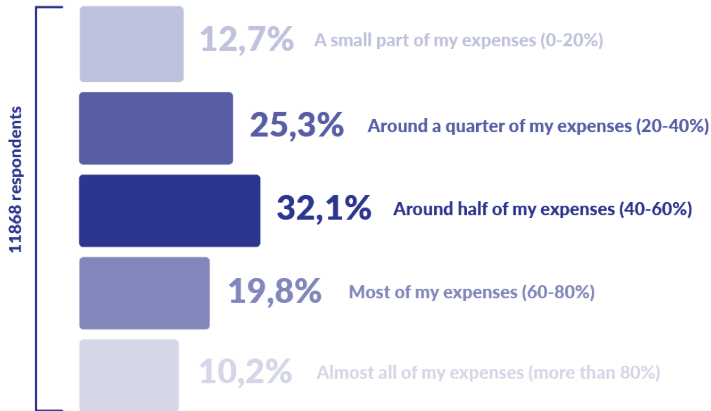
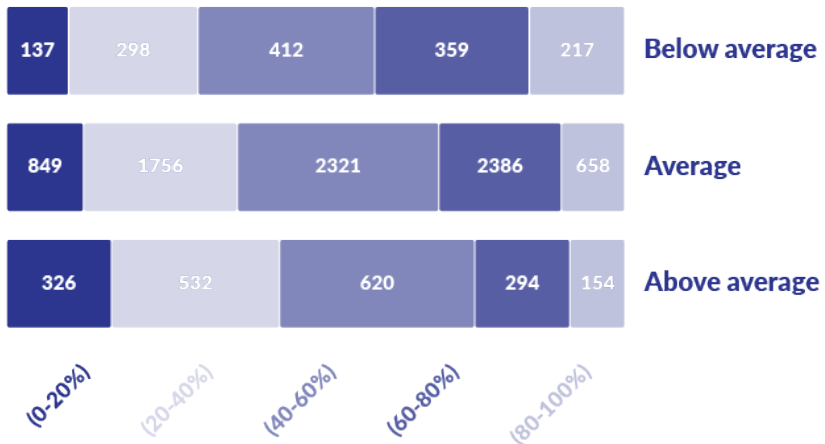*Graph 9 - Start of studies abroad by semesters*

Grants

One of the main obstacles for students to engage in a study abroad experience is being able to finance its costs, as appeared in the ESNsurvey by Escrivá Muñoz (2014). Nearly all students (92%) received a study grant for their stay (financed by the European Commission or national and/or regional authorities), but in most cases these grants only partially cover the student expenses abroad (see Graph 10 below for the modus category of responses).

Graph 10 - Expenses covered by grant

12,7% A small part of my expenses (0-20%)

25,3% Around a quarter of my expenses (20-40%)

32,1% Around half of my expenses (40-60%)

19,8% Most of my expenses (60-80%)

10,2% Almost all of my expenses (more than 80%)

11868 respondents

In Graph 11, we compared the expenses covered depending on the different level of family income. While the distribution is more or less similar for all three groups, for those students who identify their family income as below average the grant covers more expenses, while for those who locate their family income above average, the grant covers a lower amount of overall expenses.

Graph 11 - Grant coverage in different family income groups

(0-20%)	(20-40%)	(40-60%)	(60-80%)	(80-100%)	
137	298	412	359	217	**Below average**
849	1756	2321	2386	658	**Average**
326	532	620	294	154	**Above average**

Particularly vulnerable to financial obstacles are students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with special needs. In the Erasmus+ programme, special *top-ups* to the mobility grants have been implemented for these two student populations. Among our respondents, we have about 1000 respondents who received the top-ups, because they belong to one of these groups.
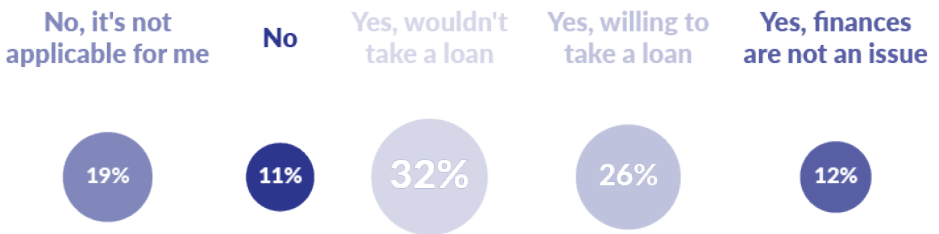
Graph 12 - Top-ups to mobility grants received (n=8,270, only Erasmus+ students)

Yes, specific needs	Yes, disadvantaged background	No	Doesn't know
6%	6%	79%	9%
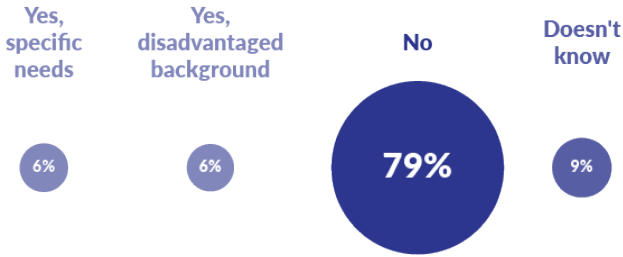
Interest in pursuing a Master's degree abroad

A study abroad experience in credit mobility might increase the willingness to have another experience abroad. Particularly important is the case in which a student goes abroad during his or her first cycle of higher education and then decides to pursue a Master's degree abroad. The Erasmus+ programme considers this possibility and includes a master loan scheme for such situations (European Commission, 2016). Among our respondents, 70% state that they are interested in this possibility. Nonetheless, 84% of them point out financial limitations as an issue to pursue further higher education studies abroad. From those, almost one half would be interested in taking a loan in advantageous conditions.

Graph 13 - Interest in pursuing a Master's degree abroad

No, it's not applicable for me	No	Yes, wouldn't take a loan	Yes, willing to take a loan	Yes, finances are not an issue
19%	11%	32%	26%	12%

Discussion

After describing the aspects of mobility flows of the respondents of the ESNsurvey 2016 questionnaire, we want to explore possible connections between the different variables characterised above. To do so, we checked for potential rank correlations between certain variables using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient.

Length of exchange

When it comes to individual outcomes, the length of stay has the strongest positive relationship with the improvement of the knowledge of the local language. Another positive but weak link is between the length of stay and the belief that they improved their future work, employability and career perspectives by going on an exchange. The length of stay also seems to have a positive influence in how much respondents consider that they have learnt about the local host-country's culture and about their own culture.

Table 2 - Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between length of exchange and perceived improvement

	Perceived improvement in the local language	Perceived improvement in employability	Perceived improvement in the knowledge of host culture	Perceived improvement in the knowledge of own culture
Length of exchange	.204**	.111**	.108**	.111**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

When it comes to social outcomes, a longer stay seams to lead to a higher number of friends made during the stay abroad, possibly due to more time for social interactions. Particularly interesting is that the link between the length of stay and the increase of local and co-national[7] friends seems to be two times stronger than the one with international friends. In other words, on the one hand, longer stays seem to make the student spend less time in the *"Erasmus bubble"*, i.e. with international friends, and to facilitate a better integration with the local community. On the other hand, longer stays also seem to trigger a certain homesickness effect which might explain the stronger interaction with co-national friends in the host country.

Table 3 - Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between length of exchange and number of friends

	Number of local friends	Number of international friends	Number of co-national friends
Length of exchange	.186**	.095**	.222**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

[7]Co-national friends are those who come from the respondent's home country (having the same nationality). Friendship networks are described and analysed in the chapter on Social adaptation ("Who meets who").

Destination countries and institutions of preference

We found no link between having been able to do the stay abroad in the country and/or at the institution of first preference and the satisfaction with the studies and with the stay abroad. It appears that students who were not able to go to their first preference destination experience the same level of satisfaction as those who did. Therefore, this factor does not have a major role in the students' experience.

Grants

First, we measured the effectiveness of the top-up grants for people with special needs and people from a disadvantaged background. We considered only Erasmus+ students and we compared those who did receive a top-up grant with those who did not. According to the answers of our respondents, there is no link between having received a top-up or not and the level of satisfaction with the studies or with the stay abroad. However, there is a weak but significant rank correlation (.158**)[8] between having received a top-up grant and the amount of expenses that the grant covered. Therefore, it seems that top-up grants fulfil their purpose by allowing people with special needs and people from a disadvantaged background to have an equally satisfactory academic experience abroad by covering a higher part of their expenses.

Secondly, we measured the effect of the perceived family income. We found no link with the satisfaction with the studies or the stay abroad, but we did find a weak but negative rank correlation (-.110**) with the grant coverage, i.e. respondents whose family income level is lower tend to have more expenses covered by the received mobility grant than those whose family income level is higher. Nonetheless, we found no difference between the three family income groups when it comes to satisfaction with the studies or the stay abroad.

[8]Spearman's rho correlation coefficient; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Conclusions and Recommendations

From our analysis of the mobility flow of the ESNsurvey 2016 respondents we can extract a few conclusions. When it comes to the length of stay, in accordance with the previous editions of the ESNsurvey, there seems to be a positive influence of longer stays on the improvement of perceived foreign language skills, knowledge of the host country's culture and employability. Longer stays lead to more social interactions with members of the local community and therefore to better integration. Regarding the importance of going to the country or institution of first preference, students do not seem to have any difference in the level of satisfaction of their stay once they have finished their experience, so it is a factor that does not play an important role.

When it comes to the amount of expenses covered by the mobility grant, only 10.2% of students considered that 80% or more of their expenses were covered. Therefore, higher grants would make mobility easier. However, people with special needs, disadvantage background and lower family income seem to have a higher part of their expenses covered, so the top-up grants introduced in the Erasmus+ programme seem to have a positive influence.

Regarding the possibility of studying a Master's degree abroad, our results agree with Carlson's (2012) idea that mobility triggers mobility, as 70% of the respondents are interested in pursuing a Master's abroad after their exchange experience. From those interested, 84% see financial limitations as an issue and almost half of them would consider taking a loan.

Recommendations for the European Commission

- Promote the benefits of longer stays among National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions.
- Since financial issues are still one of the most important obstacles to mobility and our findings suggest that top-up grants had a positive effect on the targeted group, we recommend investigating other ways to further adapt the funding to more parameters, possibly regional or social, so that more young people can overcome the financial obstacles to mobility.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

- When presenting exchange programmes to students, mention that the preferred country or institution of destination does not play any role in terms of satisfaction with the experience abroad, so that students do not get discouraged by thinking that they might not make it to the country or university which is their first preference.
- Encourage longer exchange stays (up to 12 months) and support students who wish to extend their stay from 1 to 2 semesters once they are abroad.

Recommendations for local student associations (such as the Erasmus Student Network)

- Provide enough information about the existence of the top-up grants for people with special needs or from a disadvantaged background in projects such as ExchangeAbility.
- Explain the benefits of longer stays and the possibilities to extend them when already abroad to prospective exchange students in projects such as Mov'in Europe.
- Mention the lack of importance of the choice of the preferred institution or country to prospective exchange students, possibly through sharing personal mobility experiences, in projects such as Mov'in Europe.

WHAT'S ON OFFER?
- Services for international students at host universities

by Adriana Perez-Encinas

Introduction

Due to the growing numbers of mobile students in the last years, the provision of student services is becoming a key topic in the internationalisation process of higher education. Providing support services and integration activities by and for staff, faculty and students will increase the internationalisation of the campus and moreover enhance their attractiveness among other institutions.

International student enrolment rates are growing in higher education institutions, which represents an expansion of tertiary education systems worldwide (OECD, 2013). In fact, we moved from 1.3 million in 1990 to nearly 5 million in 2015 (OECD, 2015). According to the Erasmus Impact Study (Brandenburg et al. 2014: 164), the increasing number of incoming (and outgoing) students through the Erasmus programme led to a rising awareness of the necessity of support services and the streamlining of administrative procedures. Due to the growth of mobility, universities are starting to focus their efforts on providing a good service provision not only for local but also for international students. Kelo et al. (2010) recognise that the "student support" and "student services" are considered to be highly equivalent, and refer to a wide variety of services that may be on offer to students. Student services can thus range from practical amenities such as accommodation and dining halls, to information provision and welcome activities, and even to academic or linguistic support.

The presence of international students on university campuses can be seen as a major benefit in providing campuses with diversity, pluralism and opportunities for cross-cultural learning and engagement (Willer, 1992). Despite the aforementioned increasing sense that student services matter, very little research has shed light on exactly what international students desire and expect in the way of support services (see Kelo, Roberts & Rumbley 2010 on non-European students).

International students go through different stages related to their student life at the host institution. If we take into consideration the International Student Lifecycle (Higher Education Academy, 2015) and relate it to literature such as the report done by Kelo, Roberts and Rumbley (2010), we can mainly identify three main stages in this process that affect the international student experience. The first one is related to the services needed before arriving to the host institution, the second covers those services provided once the international student arrives to the institution, and the last one is related to services during their period abroad. An additional stage can be added to the lifecycle of international students: re-integration. This stage has not been studied very much but we offer an analysis of re-entry services in the last chapter (What happens next?) of our report.

International students might have different needs depending on the stage of their study abroad period, as shown in the UK International Higher Education Unit report (Archer, Jones & Davidson, 2010), and therefore services might be different in each stage.

We focus this chapter mainly on those services provided once the international student arrives to the institution. As host university support services we chose seven areas: accommodation assistance, buddy programme, welcome presentation, orientation week, student associations, local language course and cultural adaptation course.

One of the major obstacles identified by international students when they go abroad is to find a place to live in the host country. Offering assistance with searching for accommodation is an essential service that international students appreciate before departure as well as upon arrival.

Buddy programmes are established in many cases to provide host students with a practical and meaningful experience in intercultural communication that, in the process, would help them to understand concepts and theories covered in class and develop an understanding of their own intercultural communication competence (Campbell, 2011). They also serve as a pathway for international

students' transition and adaptation to a new environment. Many universities have created and established buddy programmes in their international relations office by their own. Students joining the buddy programmes generally agree on learning more about both of the cultures involved, the culture and values of local buddies (mentors) as well as incoming international students (mentees). Therefore, buddy programmes can be seen as a platform for establishing connections between local and international students, helping them make their first friendships in the new environment.

Orientation week and welcome presentation have been identified by Kelo et al. (2010) as one of the most important support services for international students to integrate better into a new environment. These two services normally include information, orientation and integration activities with local students, the institution and/or surrounding community. Therefore, they represent a great benefit for the international students' first days on campus.

The presence and contact with a student association can also help in the adaptation and integration process. The previous ESNsurveys[9] have explored international students' satisfaction with student associations and they have shown that more than half of the respondents completely agree or rather agree that ESN activities helped them integrate with local students (Escrivá Muñoz, 2015) making the presence of a student association such as ESN at the university a benefit for international students.

Finally, we analyse the provision of a local language course and an intercultural course[10]. Through learning the local language, students get a chance to improve their ability to communicate with the local community and therefore better understand the host culture. Language courses are often complemented by intercultural courses, which help students to understand the cultural differences, the intercultural environment and aspects of cross-cultural communication. Both of these types of courses can impact and influence the international students' experience in the host culture.

In the next part we explain the methodology used to analyse the offer of university services through international students' eyes.

[9]Alfranseder, E. et al. (2010, 2011, 2012), , Escrivá Muñoz, J. et al. (2013, 2014, 2015) and other ESNsurveys can be found at https://esn.org/esnsurvey/)

[10]An intercultural course is understood as a subject involving areas of intercultural learning, cross-cultural communication, cultural differences, etc. The questionnaire explained it as a "specific subject/course related to intercultural differences or intercultural communication".
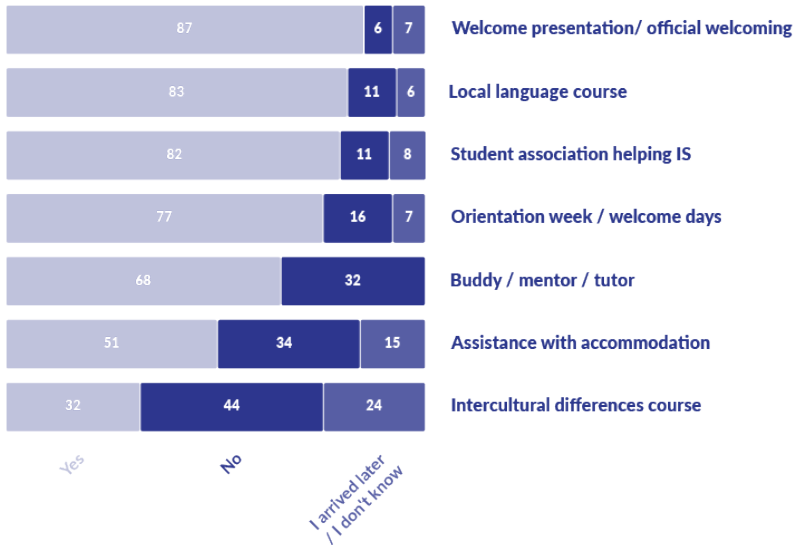
Aim and methodology

For a better understanding of the provision of host university support services for international students, the questionnaire asked about the availability of services, about certain aspects of the services, about major problems international students faced abroad and about students' satisfaction. Our main research objective in this chapter is to explore the services offered to international students and their relationship with students' satisfaction.

We have chosen seven main services that we aimed to explore in relation to the adaptation process of international students at host universities. The results of this chapter are divided in two parts; the first one is rather quantitative and uses mainly descriptive statistics to present the frequencies of particular responses. The second part focuses more on qualitative data gathered from an open question that asked international students their opinions regarding major problems they experienced abroad. Here, the methodology is called *topic-modeling algorithms* and it is usually used with big data to discover the main latent themes in a set of words. A probabilistic model has been used to analyse 2,012 comments of international students and to cluster them into categories. The huge number of texts published recently forces researchers to employ new techniques looking for the hidden structures built upon a set of core ideas (Kirschenbaum, 2007).

Results

We focus this part mainly on services provided to international students once they arrive to the institution. As **host university support services**, we chose seven main areas: *accommodation assistance, buddy programme, welcome presentation, orientation week, student associations, local language course and cultural adaptation course.* Graph 14 shows the availability of these services.

Graph 14 - Availability of host university support services

Yes	No	I arrived later / I don't know	
87	6	7	Welcome presentation/ official welcoming
83	11	6	Local language course
82	11	8	Student association helping IS
77	16	7	Orientation week / welcome days
68	32		Buddy / mentor / tutor
51	34	15	Assistance with accommodation
32	44	24	Intercultural differences course

The most common support service for incoming exchange students is an *introductory / welcome presentation* upon arrival (87%). The vast majority (83%) was also offered a *course on the local language*. Although the availability of a *student association that helps international students was very high* (82%), it might be biased due to the methodology of spreading the questionnaire through a network of student associations. On the other hand, *the buddy programme, assistance with accommodation and a course about cultural differences* were the least offered services.
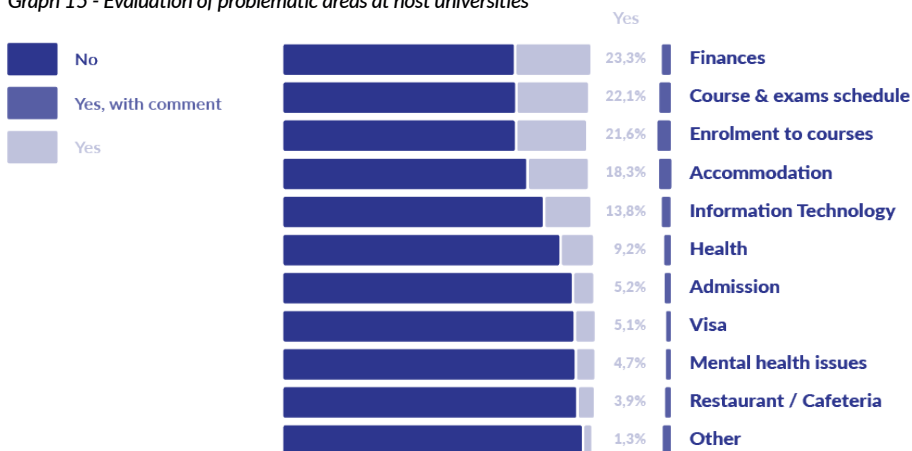
Out of the 68% of respondents (8,019 students) who have participated in the **buddy programme**, 29% (2,322 students) eventually weren't assigned a local buddy to help them with the first days. The students who have received a buddy (5,697) weren't sure about his/her true usefulness as they evaluated the buddy service with an average 4.53 out of a 10-point scale (1=not useful at all to 10=extremely useful).

Out of the 51% of respondents (5,984 students) who were offered **accommodation assistance**, 14% (1,657 students) were offered a possibility to live with co-nationals (students from their home country), 15% (1,798 students) to live with locals (students from the host country) and 32% (3,840 students) to live with other internationals (students from other foreign countries). Eventually, the majority (61%) ended up living with other internationals, followed by co-nationals (29%) and locals (29%) as flatmates. Whether students lived with other internationals, locals or alone was found to be related with the type of friends they made. This is discussed in the chapter on Social adaptation called "Who meets who". Additionally, about a half of the respondents lived at a facility of the university (e.g. dormitory or residence) and the rest lived at a facility independent to the university (e.g. a shared flat or relative's house).

Out of the 32% of respondents (3,852 students) who had the choice to take an **intercultural course**, 71% (2,739 students) actually took it. This support service was found to be the least offered one.

In the graph below, we can see a representation of areas of services of host institutions in which international students might have experienced some problems. Students responded to the question: *Did you have major problems with any of the following topics at your host university?* It is quite clear from Graph 15 that students in general don't experience many **major problems**, because *finances*, the most problematic area, as indicated by our respondents, received 23%. *Course & exams schedules* (22%) together with *enrolment to courses* (21%) were the next biggest concerns. Results do not show major problems for international students with services such as: *restaurants/cafeteria, mental health issues, visa or admission.*

Graph 15 - Evaluation of problematic areas at host universities

		Yes	
No		23,3%	Finances
Yes, with comment		22,1%	Course & exams schedule
Yes		21,6%	Enrolment to courses
		18,3%	Accommodation
		13,8%	Information Technology
		9,2%	Health
		5,2%	Admission
		5,1%	Visa
		4,7%	Mental health issues
		3,9%	Restaurant / Cafeteria
		1,3%	Other

Due to the importance of gathering international students' opinions in the most comprehensive way, we gave respondents an open question to comment on the above-mentioned problems. With the help of a basic text-mining programme **Voyant** a word cloud was created. We can see the most frequent words mentioned by international students when they were asked about major problems at their host university:

Picture 1 – Word cloud of most frequently mentioned problems of international students

These results can be compared with the results of analysing 2,012 comments thanks to *topic modelling*. Our main research objective of the qualitative part is to identify through international students' comments on their major problems at the host institution. After running MALLET, an open source software designed to enable text classification and information extraction, we select five topics. Then we issued a descriptive label for each topic. These five topics are identified to be the ones that cause major problems for international students. These are: *enrolment to courses*, *accommodation & living expenses*, *admission & arrival issues*, *finances and IT connection*. In the conclusions and recommendations part, we present a series of suggested actions for HEIs, in order to enhance international students' experience.

After indicating the availability of the services, certain aspects of the services and the major problems students could have faced while being abroad, respondents evaluated their **satisfaction with host university services**. Overall, students positively perceive the support services host universities provide; 32% was very satisfied and 31% rather satisfied, however, 15% was rather dissatisfied and 11% was very dissatisfied.

Graph 16 – Satisfaction with host university services

Discussion

In the study launched by Studyportals about "Key influencers in student's satisfaction in Europe" (Van der Beek, 2013), the authors recommend a series of actions to integrate local and international students. Many of these recommendations directly relate to the results of our study.

Van der Beek (2013) for example suggests implementing the buddy programme and using buddies or mentors as contact persons for every international student. However, our results show that only 48% of the total number of respondents actually received a buddy and that the usefulness of the service is rather questionable. We explored its link with other variables that we analysed. Unfortunately, the relationships we found were very weak (as can be seen in Table 4), but suggest a positive effect of obtaining a local buddy on the satisfaction of international students. A weak negative relationship (-.122**[11]) was also found between the *perceived usefulness of the buddy* and the *perceived improvement of the local language*. This might be explained by the general fact that buddies' motivation to participate in the Buddy programme is to practice a foreign language, but the potential desire of the visiting student to improve in the local language.

Table 4 – Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between obtaining local buddy and satisfaction and improvement

	Satisfaction with host university SERVICES	Satisfaction with STUDIES abroad	Satisfaction with STAY abroad	Perceived improvement in the local language
Obtaining a local buddy (mentor)	.042**	.025**	.043**	-.062**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)., *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Another recommendation by Van der Beek (2013) has a direct relation with the approach of the international office; to have a well-organised and welcoming office that offers students an orientation week. These welcoming services were found to be available at most of the host universities. The Studyportal's report also suggests to universities to promote and support student associations as the level of support from the institution often determines how active student associations can be. In fact, our research shows that in nine out of ten cases, there was a student association available to help the incoming students, which is very positive. However, as has been mentioned in the methodological part, the survey has been spread through a network of student organisations, which might have biased this finding. Nevertheless, student organisations, through their activities, network and services, positively contribute to student satisfaction.

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[11]Spearman's rho correlation coefficient; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Some universities also offer incoming students a possibility to take a course/subject on intercultural communication. The aim is to help them understand cultural differences and the specifics of the local culture. In an attempt to test whether this is the case, we explored the relationships between participating in such a course and gaining certain benefits from the study abroad experience. Although we found only very weak relationships (as can be seen in Table 5), their direction points in a positive way in terms of local integration.

Table 5 – Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between participation in an intercultural communication course and perceived improvement

	Perceived improvement in the local language	Perceived improvement in the knowledge of local culture	Perceived improvement in the knowledge of different cultures	Number of local friends
Attending an intercultural communication course	.038**	.067**	.049**	.058**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The statistical analysis also identified a significant relationship between the number of support services offered and the satisfaction of international students. It is relevant to mention that international students were more satisfied as more services were provided. In relation to that, international students are less satisfied the more major problems they experience.

Table 6 – Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between the number of major problems faced by students and students' satisfaction

	Total number of major problems	Satisfaction with host university SERVICES	Satisfaction with STAY abroad
Total number of major problems	1.000	-.223*	.193**
Satisfaction with host university SERVICES	-.223**	1000	.344**
Satisfaction with STAY abroad	-.193**	.344**	1000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 7 – Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between the number of support services provided to students and satisfaction

	Total number of support services	Satisfaction with host university SERVICES	Satisfaction with STAY abroad
Total number of support services	1.000	.194**	.159**
Satisfaction with host university SERVICES	.194**	1000	.344**
Satisfaction with STAY abroad	.159**	.344**	1000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

There is a set of problems and needs that international students go through when they go abroad. According to Li and Kaye (2006), a series of factors influence overseas students' perceptions of their learning environment and learning experience. These factors are divided in different categories: student's academic progress, teaching and tutoring, student services and support and student's English language. The aforementioned study identified that the five most common problems experienced by international students are: *financial problems*, *integration problems when mixing with local students*, *academic progress*, *English proficiency and accommodation*. This partly agrees with our results that major problems that international students face at universities have been identified to be *enrolment to courses, accommodation & living expenses, admission & arrival issues, finances and IT connection*. Few respondents agree on finding problems with services such as: *restaurants /cafeteria, mental health issues, visa and admission*.

Conclusions and Recommendations

According to the last report from i-graduate (2015), student satisfaction is not necessarily correlative with the quality of the programmes being taught. Our findings (e.g. in Table 6) show that student satisfaction can be related to service provision. Therefore, it is important to emphasise the importance of support services in the satisfaction of international students. Students are not only influenced by their academic or learning experience in the classroom, but also by a range of support services that universities provide to enhance the international students' experience.

Due to the fact that there is an increasing competition to attract international students in the global higher education to national university systems (OECD, 2013), it is advisable for higher education institutions to focus not only on the academic aspects of the student experience but also on the needs that international students might have concerning services and matters related to their stay and comfort in the host country.

Concluding the findings about host university services from our survey, we found that:
- International students appreciate the support services that are available at host universities, the more the better, as a higher number of services relates to a higher level of satisfaction.
- The services that are not offered as often as others and that should deserve more research are: the Buddy programme, Assistance with accommodation and Cultural adaptation courses.
- International students don't seem to experience many major problems with the offered services. The everlasting difficulties consider the area of finances, courses & exams schedules and enrolment to courses. Generally, the more difficulties the students experience, the less satisfied they are.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

● Identify how support services for international students relate to your institution's internationalisation strategy.
● Take into account the whole process of a study abroad experience and the international students' needs associated with it (as for example explained in the *International Student Lifecycle*).
● Keep offering the usual support services to international students such as, welcoming and orientation activities and courses of the local language.
● Keep cooperating with local students associations (such as ESN) on the services and tasks related to international students as the close contact between these volunteers and international students can facilitate the management of such services and tasks.
● Keep offering or start offering the less usual support services such as, the Buddy programme, assistance with accommodation and courses of cultural adaptation.
● Further explore the role of the Buddy programme in the adaptation process of international students[12] , but generally to place the focus on training the local students for the tasks of becoming a useful buddy (e.g. explaining the local customs, help in learning the local language, etc.).

● Continue in preventing the potential problems that international students might encounter during their stay (e.g. provide accurate information about costs, courses and exams prior to departure and upon arrival, facilitate enrolment to courses, etc.).

Recommendations for local student associations (such as the Erasmus Student Network)

● Maintain a good relationship with your institution by providing help with the usual international student support services (e.g. welcoming and orientation activities).

● Use your expertise and the close relationship with international students in continuously improving the provision of support services.

● Explore ways to help your institution with providing the less usual support services for international students such as, the Buddy programme, assistance with accommodation and courses of cultural adaptation.

● Use the best practices of other student associations (ESN sections) in providing these less usual support services.

● Train local buddies to understand the needs of the international students and the issues they go through while arriving and adapting to a new environment (For example, if international students want to integrate in the local community, learn or improve the local language and find local friends, advise your buddies to help them with that by introducing them to their own friends, helping with the local language and explaining the local customs).

● In order to prevent misunderstandings and false expectations of incoming international students, student associations should clearly explain to international students that their members, who provide the support services, are volunteers.

[12]Although our results don't show a clear usefulness of the Buddy programme as a service, its aspects should be further researched as other studies (Van der Beek, 2013; Campbell, 2011) point to its benefits in terms of adaptation of international students to a new academic and social environment.

HOW HARD IS IT?
- Academic adaptation of International Students

by Bojana Zimonjić

Introduction

International students bring cultural diversity to universities that host them, and they face a variety of challenges in the process of adjustment. Misra, Crist, and Burant (2003) identified three major areas of challenges that international students encounter—academic, emotional and social difficulties. This chapter will focus on the academic challenges. Students' ability to adjust does not simply depend on the individual, but also the environment students are in, as indicated by Poyrazli and Grahame (2007). Institutions (primarily universities) play a very important role in international students' adjustment by providing them with assistance and support throughout their mobility period, but also before and after it.

With constantly increasing numbers of international students at universities across Europe, it has become essential that their mobility period becomes as academically beneficial as possible. Additionally, universities are exploring how a multicultural academic surrounding can help with the internationalisation process of their university. It is universally accepted that a culturally diverse environment can bring benefits to the university, to university students and to international students as well. Students have recognised the advantages of learning in such an environment as Smart, Volet, and Ang (2000) reported. Additionally, Summers and Volet (2008) provide support for the view that interventions aimed at increasing local students' willingness to work on group assignments with international students are required to enhance students' intercultural competence. Besides that, these interventions provide international students, who aim to maximise their intercultural experiences at university, with more opportunities to fulfil their goal.

The fact that students see the group assignment work as a medium for intercultural contact was noted by international student interview participants, who reported that doing assignments in the culturally mixed groups fosters interaction between local and international students (Smart, Volet, and Ang 2000). Additionally, some participants suggested an intervention to ensure that group assignments were done in culturally mixed groups.

Aim

This part will focus on the **in-class experience** of international students by exploring the academic aspects of a stay abroad with a focus on students' perceptions and satisfaction related to it. We also investigate **the interpersonal approach**. Under the interpersonal approach, we study the attitude and openness that local students, professors and staff at the university show towards the international students. This includes international students' discrimination experiences and staff's, professors' and local students' approach towards international students.

Results

To introduce the context in which short-term study exchange students function, we first describe one of the key aspects of the study abroad experience – language, and after that we describe the interpersonal context by the proportion of international and local students in class and the amount of interaction.

38% of respondents had classes in the local language of the host country. The most common local languages were Spanish (23%), English (15%), German (14%) and French (14 %). However, the more usual scenario was that international students had classes in another foreign language (46% of respondents). In this case, the predominant foreign language of instruction was English (95%). Some students (16% of respondents) indicated having classes in local as well as foreign language.

Graph 17 – Language of instruction

Local language (of host country)   **Foreign language**   **Both, local and foreign**

38%   46%   16%
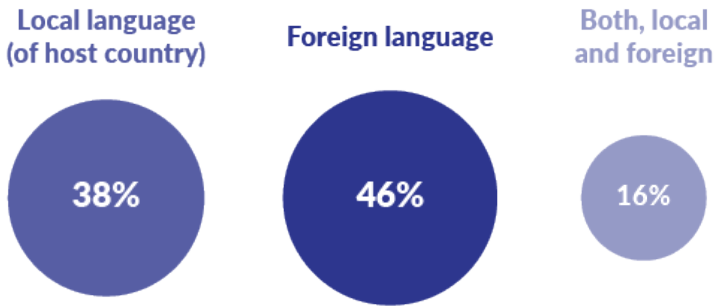
We explored the **proportion of international students in class**. 43% of respondents said they were in classes mostly with local students and 8% had classes only with local students. On the other hand, 21% of the respondents were mostly with other international students and 9% had classes only with international students. The rest (18 %) had classes with about the same proportion of local and international students.

Graph 18 – Proportion of local and international students in class

9,1%   Only international students

21,1%   **Mostly international students**

18,4%   About the same proportion

43,2%   **Mostly local students**

8,1%   Only local students
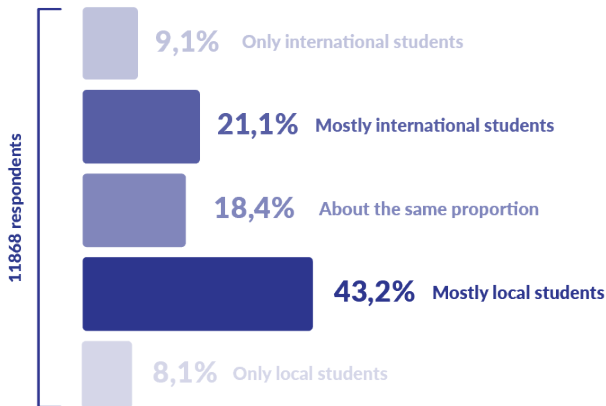
11868 respondents

Except for the respondents who were in class only with local students (962 students), participants indicated whether they agree that professors supported interaction between students from different countries. More than 55 % of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that **professors supported intercultural interaction**. On the other side of the spectrum, around 16% strongly disagreed or disagreed that professors supported such interaction.

Graph 19 – Professors' support for intercultural interaction

5,2% Strongly disagree

10,8% Disagree

26,9% Neither agree nor disagree

35,9% Agree

21,3% Strongly agree

11868 respondents
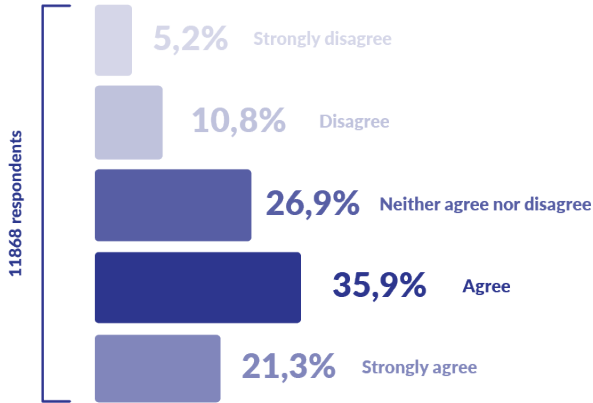
We also asked students to rate their **academic achievements** in comparison to their peers. Only 5% found it hard to assess their academic achievement. Among the others, almost 50% rated their academic achievements as average and around 36% as above the average. Only 9% of students perceived their academic achievements as below the average.

Graph 20 – Perceived academic achievement

4,9% Hard to say

9,5% Below the average

49,8% Average

35,8% Above the average

11868 respondents
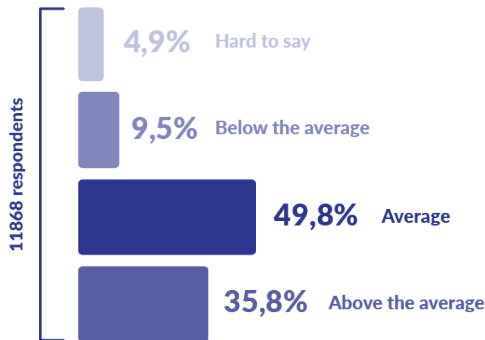
Finally, we investigated if students were subject to discriminatory behaviour at their host campus. We adopted items from the *International Friendly Campus Scale* (Wang et al., 2014) and asked students about their discrimination experiences; if they were treated differently or unfairly, treated as less intelligent, if they heard insulting remarks or didn't have equal opportunities. Moreover, we asked about the support they received from host university professors, and about the approach that staff, local students and professors had towards international students. As Graph 21 below shows, an overwhelming majority, around 80% of respondents, strongly disagreed or disagreed that they were treated in such a negative way.

Graph 21 – Host campus discrimination experiences

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

Treated differently or unfairly
53% | 28% | 11% | 6% | 1%

Treated as less intelligent
58% | 25% | 10% | 6% | 1%

Heard insulting remarks
62% | 24% | 8% | 4% | 1%

Not equal opportunities
51% | 27% | 12% | 8% | 2%
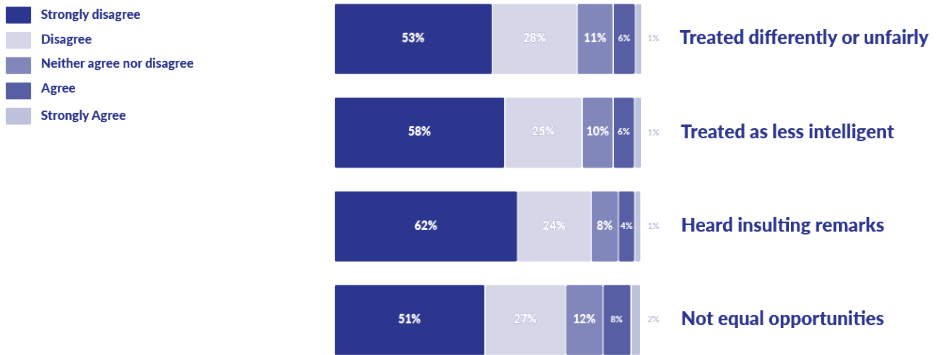
Regarding **support from host professors**, whose items were also adopted from Wang et al. (2014), the vast majority, almost 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that professors tried to understand their difficulties, that they felt comfortable discussing with professors and that professors were willing to give them helpful advice.

Graph 22 – Support from host professors

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

Prof's willing to give helpful advice
28% | 42% | 18% | 7% | 5%

Felt comfortable discussing with profs
28% | 44% | 17% | 7% | 4%

Prof's tried to understood stud. difficulties
24% | 36% | 26% | 10% | 5%
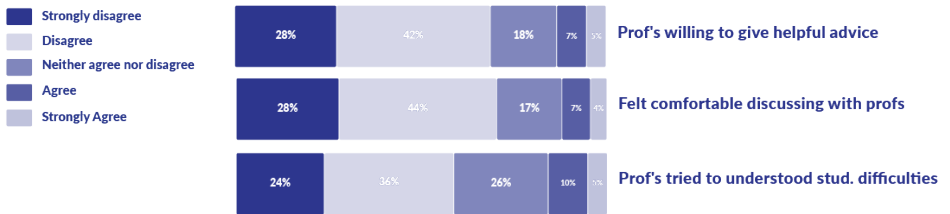
Our results again show a very positive finding in terms of an interpersonal approach. A considerably high percentage (around 70%) of our respondents has never experienced a **negative approach** towards them from professors, staff members or students.

Graph 23 – Frequency of a negative approach towards exchange students
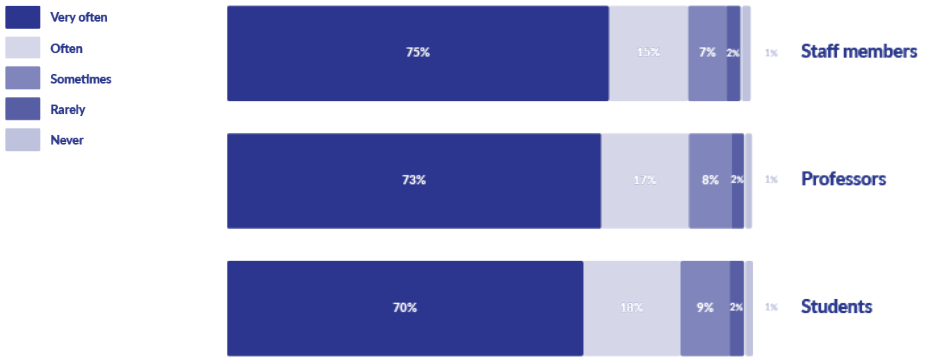
Most students were overall **satisfied with** the **approach and teaching methods**, with their **studies as an exchange student** and with their **stay abroad as an exchange student**.

Graph 24 – Students' satisfaction
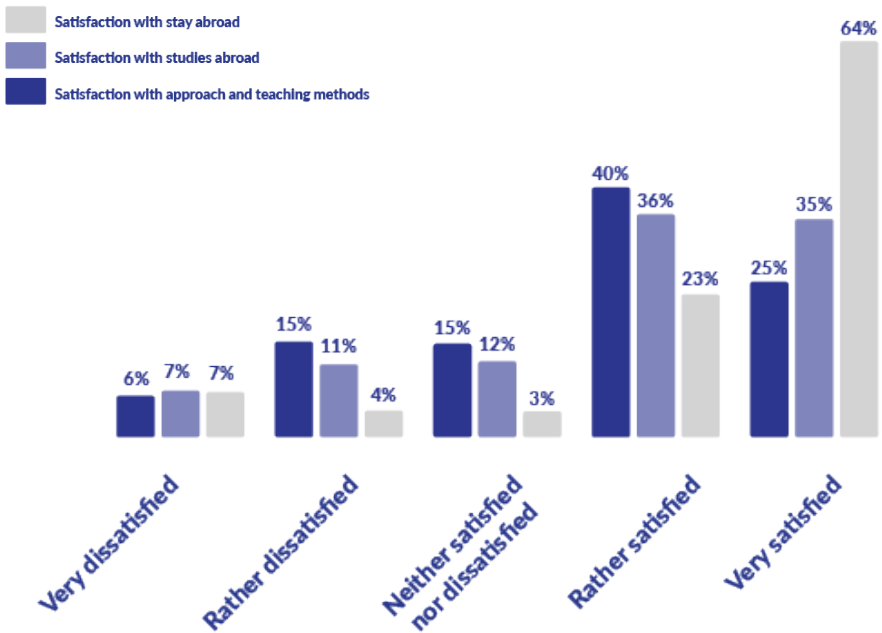
Discussion

It is very hard to identify the factors of a study abroad experience that affect satisfaction. Additionally, those factors are hard to measure. However, some factors can be seen as positive indicators of a friendly campus environment for international students. In this part, we will focus on the aspects of a stay abroad that we believe influence students' overall satisfaction; **the interpersonal approach.**

Under the interpersonal approach, we mean the approach of the surrounding people towards international students'. It includes:
A) Host campus discrimination experiences
B) Support from host professors
C) Frequency of a negative approach towards exchange students
D) In-class interaction

Less discrimination experiences, more support from host professors and a positive approach towards exchange students by local students, staff and professors are positive indicators of a friendly campus environment for international students. Such an international-friendly environment is the one that seems to lead towards higher overall satisfaction with being abroad.

A) **Discrimination** is negatively related with students' perceptions and experiences with the campus environment (Vaccaro, 2010; Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008). Discrimination at an institutional level can be understood as one that produces negative behaviours that prevent disfavoured groups from accessing the same privileges afforded to others (Hanassab, 2006). As shown in Graph 21 above, an overwhelming majority did not experience discrimination on campus.

However, for the few that have experienced discrimination, being subject to discrimination is linked with many negative aspects of the exchange experience (as can be seen in the Table of correlations below). Those international students who experienced discrimination tend to be less satisfied with their studies and stay abroad.

Table 8 – Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between host campus discrimination experiences (agreement likert scale) and level of satisfaction with studies and stay abroad

	I was treated differently or unfairly at my host university because of being an international student	I feel as though I was treated as less intelligent at my host university because of being an international student	I heard people at my host university make insensitive or degrading or insulting remarks about international students	Compared to local students, I didn't have equal access to resources and opportunities at my host university
Satisfaction with STUDIES as an exchange student	-.255**	-.243**	-.188**	-.236**
Satisfaction with STAY abroad	-.206**	-.208**	-.186**	-.205**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

B) **Host professors' support** of international students is relevant for an international-friendly campus climate. Graph 22 shows that host professors give such support. Additionally, we found a positive relationship (as shown in the Table 9 of correlations below) between host professors' support and satisfaction with studies abroad and stay abroad.

Table 9 – Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between host professors' support and level of satisfaction with studies and stay abroad

	Professors were willing to give helpful academic advice to international students	I felt comfortable discussing academic issues with professors there when needed	Professors made a real effort to understand difficulties international students could have had with their academic work
Satisfaction with STUDIES as an exchange student	.279**	.299**	.272**
Satisfaction with STAY abroad	.183**	.214**	.188**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

C) Regarding the **frequency of a negative approach** towards exchange students, we found a negative relationship (-.254**[13]) between the frequency of an unfair treatment of an exchange student by the host university **professors** and satisfaction with studies. This connection was stronger than the same negative treatment from host university **students** (-.149**) and host university **staff** (-.183**). The more often students perceived such negative treatment the less satisfied they were also with the stay abroad. These relationships clearly show a negative effect on the student experience.

Table 10 – Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between negative approach towards exchange students and level of satisfaction with studies and stay abroad

	Frequency of unfair or negative treatment from students of host university to exchange students	Frequency of unfair or negative treatment from professors of host university to exchange students	Frequency of unfair or negative treatment from staff of host university to exchange students
Satisfaction with STUDIES as an exchange student	-.149**	-.254**	-.183**
Satisfaction with STAY abroad	-.173**	-.182**	-.162**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

D) Santos, Ortiz, Morales, and Rosales (2007) suggested that **interactions and relationships with diverse peers** contribute to students' positive experiences with campus environment. Our findings (as shown in Table 10) also indicate that the overall *satisfaction with studies abroad* and *stay abroad* was higher (.286** for studies and .184** for stay) when respondents agreed that professors supported the interaction of students from different countries. This support from professors seems to have a higher effect on the studies than on the stay. Also respondents who said their professors supported the interaction of students from different countries during classes reported having more local (.115**) and international (.093**) friends.

[13]Spearman's rho correlation coefficient; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 11 − Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between professors support for interaction of students from different countries and level of satisfaction and number of friends

	Agreement likert scale - Professors supported the interaction of students from different countries (e.g. by assigning mixed nationality teamwork)
Satisfaction with STUDIES as an exchange student	.286**
Satisfaction with STAY abroad	.184**
Number of LOCAL HOST COUNTRY friends	.115**
Number of INTERNATIONAL friends	.093**
Number of CO-NATIONAL friends	.017**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As a conclusion to the interpersonal approach we can say that:

1) **Discrimination** is a factor that is significantly and negatively related to students' perceptions and experiences with campus environment. Even though a majority of students was not subject to discrimination, our results show that those who have, have also reported a lower level of satisfaction with their study and stay abroad.

2) **Host professors' support** of international students is indeed relevant for an international friendly campus climate. We found a connection between professors' supportive behavior and students' satisfaction with studies and stay abroad.

3) **Negative approach** from professors, staff and students of the host university is associated with lower levels of satisfaction.

4) **In-class interaction** also relates to students' positive experiences with the campus environment. In-class interaction relates positively with the number of local friends an international student makes, but also satisfaction with studies and stay abroad.

Language

Some more interesting findings are connected to the language of instruction. Most students studied either in the local language or in another language, only 16% studied in both the local and another other language. In the case when the language of instruction was not the local language, the predominant foreign language of instruction was English (in 95% of our respondents).

Although the following relationships are very weak, the reasons for their direction might have some interesting background that we'll try to interpret.

Studying in the local language seems to be more difficult and might bring more difficulties. We found that people who studied in the local language seem to be less satisfied with the host university services, with the social programme, with their studies and their stay as an exchange student.

Table 12 – Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between satisfaction and the language of instruction

	Studying in the local host country language	Studying in a different language
Satisfaction with the host university SERVICES	-.086**	.085**
Satisfaction with the SOCIAL PROGRAMME	-.072**	.080**
Satisfaction with STUDIES as an exchange student	-.070**	.071**
Satisfaction with STAY abroad	-.039**	.046**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Despite being less satisfying, studying in the local language might bring some benefits in terms of host-country integration. Our findings suggest that those who studied in the local host country language made more local friends. On the other hand, those who studied in a different foreign language seem to have made more international friends.

Table 13 – Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between number of friends and the language of instruction

	Studying in the local host country language	Studying in a different language
Number of LOCAL HOST COUNTRY friends	.132**	-.093**
Number of INTERNATIONAL friends	-.090**	.100**
Number of CO-NATIONAL friends	-.048**	.064**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Compared to the previous relationships, which were very weak, we found a strong correlation between studying in the local language and an improvement of the local language skills (.512**) as can be seen in Table 14. Taking classes in the local host country language clearly helps to improve local language skills. On the contrary, taking classes in a different language (mainly in English) has a hampering effect (-.441**). Additionally, studying in the local host language is positively related to improved knowledge about the local host culture (.097**) and studying in another foreign language is negatively related (-.064**) to it.

Table 14 – Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between perceived improvement and the language of instruction

	Studying in the local host country language	Studying in a different language
Perceived improvement in the local language	.512**	-.441**
Perceived improvement in the knowledge of local culture	.097**	-.064**
Perceived improvement in the knowledge of different cultures	-.017**	.029**
Perceived improvement in the knowledge of different cultures	.054**	-.055**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on our findings we can state that language plays an important role in the exchange experience and seems to influence the following areas:

1) level of satisfaction with the university services, with the social programme offered to international students, and with the studies and stay abroad

2) type of friendships that students create (local, international or co-national),

3) improvement of local language skills and knowledge about host country's culture

Although the strengths of the relationships aren't convincing, we can suggest that studying in the local language can lead to improving the local language skills, having more local friends and gaining more knowledge about the local culture. However, a lower level of students' satisfaction can be potentially explained by the fact that the Higher Education Institutions that don't propose courses in English usually offer less quality services for international students.

Conclusions and recommendations

Students' satisfaction with their **studies and stay** abroad was found to be shaped by the following factors:

1) Discrimination (whether students feel discriminated by the professors, staff or local students)

2) Host professors' support (whether or not they experience supportive behaviour regarding their academic life from host professors)

3) In-class composition (proportion of local and international students) and in class interaction (whether professors supported interaction)

4) Language of instruction (whether students study in the local language or another)

Finally it is important to state that academic adaptation, the type of adaptation that we investigated in this chapter, is closely linked to cultural integration (i.e. number of local friends, command of the local language and knowledge about the local host country's culture) and influences the overall satisfaction from the mobility period.

Our findings show that creating **an international-friendly environment** is very important for a positive exchange experience. An international-friendly environment is **non-discriminative, supportive** and **culturally-diverse**. Our recommendation is to nurture such an environment at higher education institutions. Living and learning in this type of environment leads towards greater satisfaction with the study and stay abroad experience of international students.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

● A non-discriminatory environment is where students won't feel discriminated by the professors', academic staff's and students' actions and behaviours. Try to offer the same possibilities to both international as well as local students and to treat them both equally.

● A supportive environment is where students feel safe to approach professors with their problems. Encourage professors to create a more supportive relationship with their exchange students, so students feel they can approach professors with any academic or personal difficulty they might have.

● An inter-culturally-diverse environment is where classes are composed of international and local students and in which intercultural contact is supported by professors. Avoid creating classes comprising of only international students. The classes should be a mix of international and local students. In such classes, encourage professors to support and create opportunities for in-class interaction between local and international students.

● Finally, even though students studying in the local language can be less satisfied with their study abroad experience and services, studying in the local language also seems to lead to improving local language skills, having more local friends and gaining more knowledge about the local culture. Offer more local language courses, especially for those students who don't study in the local language.

Recommendations for local student organisations (such as the Erasmus Student Network)

Academic adaptation is mostly the domain of universities. However, ESN sections can have a complementary role in providing non-formal and informal ways of education on campus.

● Offer more opportunities for students to learn about the local host country's culture (e.g. by organising country nights, nation presentations, international dinners and other cultural events)

● Offer more opportunities for learning the local language (e.g. by organising language tandems)

● Support your members in interacting with internationals (in and/or outside class), ESN members should represent positive role-models for other students, which might motivate local students to interact more with internationals.

WHO MEETS WHO?
- Social adaptation
of international students

by Laura De Vocht

Introduction

While the various academic benefits of studying abroad are widely known (Alfranseder et al., 2011; Brandenburg et al., 2014; Fellinger et al., 2013), the importance of developing friendship networks is still somehow uncovered. Intercultural friendship networks however are an important aspect of an international student's stay abroad as they positively contribute to improved foreign language proficiency, better emotional well-being, better sociocultural adjustment, and increased intercultural learning and understanding (Van Mol et al., 2015: 424). Friendship networks are essential for the general satisfaction from the exchange period as friendships satisfy the need for belonging that international students have (Hendrickson et al., 2011: 282).

This chapter will focus on the out-of-class experience of international students by exploring the social activities available, their popularity among students, the friendship networks students created and students' perceptions and satisfaction related to the area of social adaptation.

However, a limitation is the vagueness of the term "friend" as there is no universal definition of the term and certain differences exist in its meaning among cultures. For certain people only a close relationship is considered a friendship, while for others even acquaintances are considered friends. Despite these limitations with the term 'friend', Bochner et al. (1977) divided the social groups that international students can create during their stay abroad into three different types of friendship networks: local (students from the host/visiting country), multinational (students from other foreign countries) and co-national (students from the same country of origin) friendship networks. Scholars generally follow this division (e.g. Dervin, 2009; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Murphy-Lejeune, 2003; Sakurai et al., 2010; Van Mol, 2012). The development of those friendship networks is influenced by students' preferences and by the opportunities that are created (Van Mol, 2015: 425). As students still more easily develop friendships with co-national and international students than with local students, we will look into the factors that positively influence the development of friendships with local students[14].

Aim

The aim of this chapter is to explore the friendship networks, social interaction and socio-cultural adaptation of exchange students. We will test whether the length of the study abroad, the number of social activities being organised and the students' participation in these activities relate to the students' experience. Furthermore, we will research if there is a relationship between the types of friendships and the different types of accommodation where international students can be hosted. Furthermore, we will try to see if there is a relationship between the friendship networks international students have developed and their satisfaction with their stay abroad, as well as with their intercultural understanding. Finally, we will assess the barriers to cross-cultural interaction for international as well as for local students.

We expect that a longer stay will lead to the development of more friendship networks and that international students will mostly develop multi-national and co-national friendship networks as it is not always easy to interact with locals outside of the classroom setting. Local students tend to function and socialise in other places than international students (Sakurai et al., 2010: 181; Van Mol, 2015: 436-439). Yet, participation in a multicultural social programme tends to be beneficial for the development of friendships networks (Sakurai et al., 2010: 178). Therefore, we expect exchange students who participate in the social programme activities to develop a higher number of friendships. Furthermore, we expect that being accommodated with local students will be positively related with the number of local friendships one develops, as suggested by Van Mol (2015: 436-439).

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[14]We will use the data collected by the shorter questionnaire aimed at local students with no mobility experience, as explained in the project's methodology.

Moreover, we expect that international students who developed more local friendships will be more satisfied with their stay abroad as suggested by Hendrickson et al. (2011). Finally, we expect to see several barriers of the development of friendships between international and local students, the lack of opportunities being an important one (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Sakurai et al., 2010; Van Mol, 2015).

Results

Taking a look at the different types of **social activities** available for and attended by exchange students, we see that *entertainment activities* such as parties or informal gatherings are the ones available the most often (90% of respondents chose this option). *Leisure activities* such as trips or visiting tours are the second most organised types of activities (87%), followed by *international activities* such as international dinners or international fairs (73%) and *language activities* such as language tandems or language cafés (66%). *Sports activities* such as sports days or Erasmus games are the least often organised (62%) together with *social activities* involving the local community such as SocialErasmus[15] or Erasmus in Schools (45%). Graph 25 also indicates that the most available activities - entertainment, leisure and international activities – are also the most attended activities, and that the least organised activities - language, sport and social activities – are the least attended ones.

Graph 25 - Availability of and participation in social activities
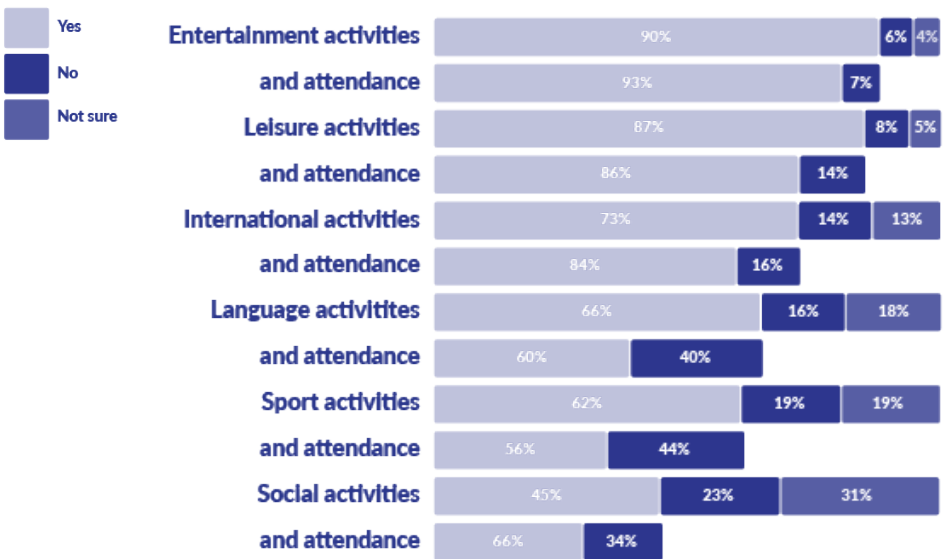
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When taking a look at who precisely attends these activities, it is very clear that **students attending these activities** are mostly international students (65%). Only a very small number of activities is attended by an equal number of local and international students (17%) or by mostly local students (6%).

Graph 26 - Proportion of students during social activities (with reference to coursework activities)
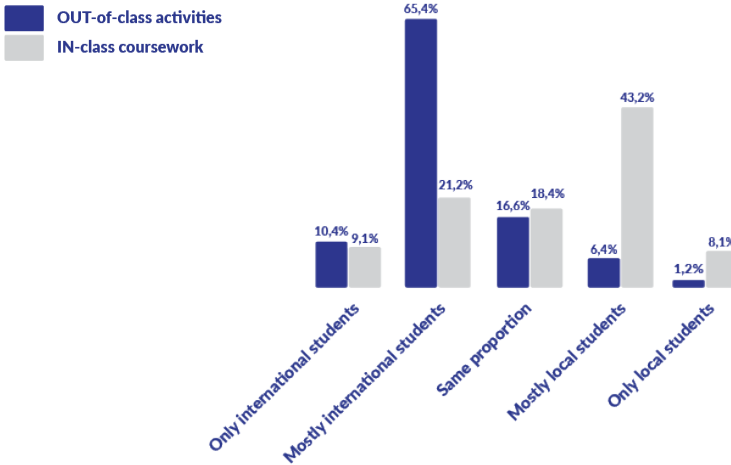
When taking a look at the satisfaction with the social programme being organised, we see an overall satisfaction of exchange students (33% rather satisfied and 28% very satisfied). Nonetheless, we can see that certain students were rather dissatisfied (11%) and even very dissatisfied (7%) with the social programme. For reference, we added the previous variables of students' satisfaction to Graph 27.

Graph 27 - Satisfaction with the social programme (compared)
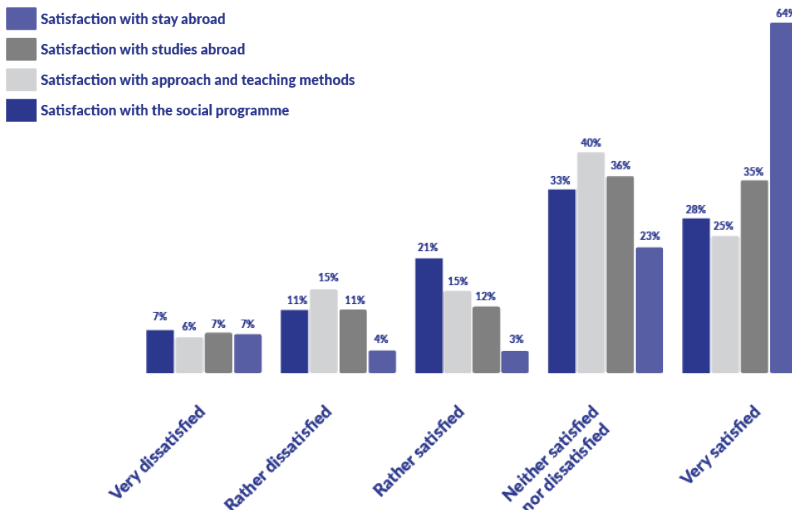
Friendship networks

It is mostly during these social activities that exchange students develop their friendships. As mentioned in the introduction, there are three different types of social groups an exchange student can develop: local (friends from the visiting foreign country), multinational (friends from other foreign countries) and co-national (friends from their country of origin).

Almost half of the exchange students (47%) developed two to five **local friendships** during their stay abroad and one fourth of the exchange students (26%) developed six to fifteen local friendships. Only a small group (11%) developed more than sixteen local friendships. On the other hand, some students developed no (7%) or only one (10%) local friendship during their stay abroad.

Graph 28 - Number of LOCAL friends created

0 friends	1 friend	2-5 friends	6-15 friends	16+ friends
7,1%	9,7%	**46,6%**	26,0%	10,6%
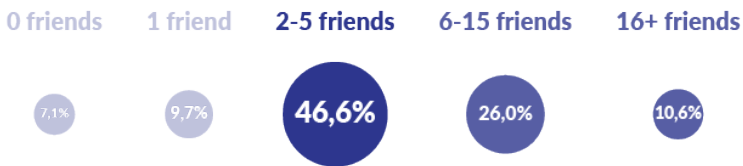
In Graph 29, we can see that exchange students planned to make more local friends than they actually made during their stay abroad. Over a half of the exchange students expected to develop a high number of local friendships, while only about one third did so. Similarly, about a fifth of the respondents thought that they would develop only a small number of local friendships, while more than that (about four out of ten) actually ended up creating only a few local friendships.

Graph 29 - Expectations and reality in forming friendships with LOCALS

Legend:
- Succeeded in making local friends
- Planned to make local friends

	Not at all	Very little	Little	Moderate	Much	Very much	Exceptionally
Planned to make local friends	408	779	1167	3483	2720	2723	524
Succeeded in making local friends	676	1966	2023	3063	1830	1631	582
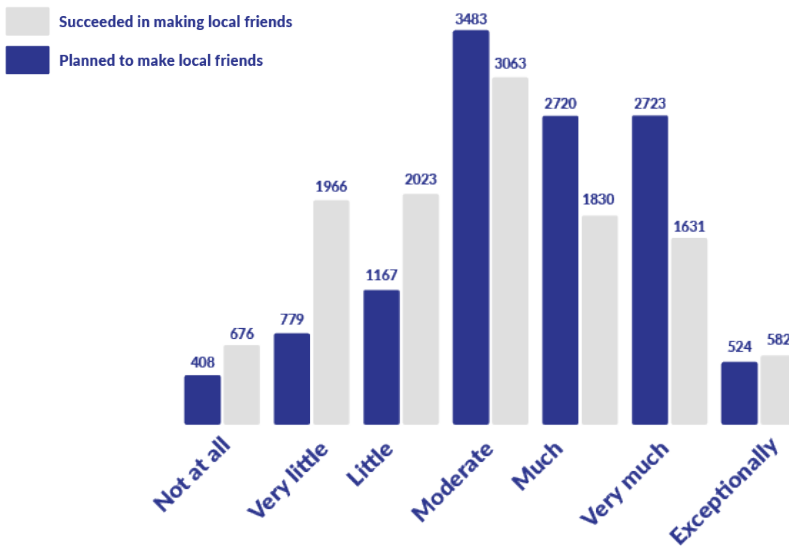
Now we take a look at the **multinational friendships** that exchange students made during their stay abroad. By comparing Graph 28 and 30, we can see that the number of multinational friendships created is higher than the number of local friendships made abroad. Nearly half of the exchange students (48%) made more than sixteen multinational friends and one third (33%) made between six and fifteen multinational friends. Just a few students made no or only one multinational friend.

Graph 30 - Number of MULTINATIONAL friends created

0 friends	1 friend	2-5 friends	6-15 friends	16+ friends
1,3%	1,5%	16,1%	32,5%	48,5%
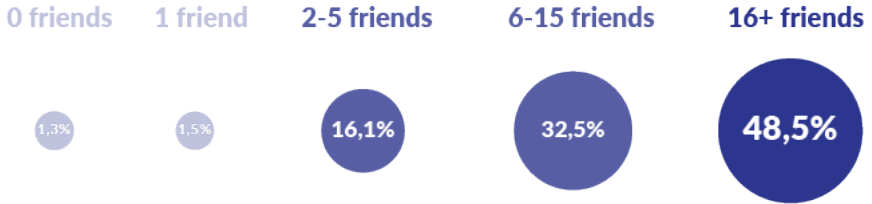
In the graph below, we can see that exchange students made many multinational friends as they initially planned to make. Seven out of ten (70%) planned to make many multinational friends and almost eight out of ten (76%) did so. Similarly, a small group of students (11%) planned to create a small amount of multinational friendships and a small group of students actually (8%) did so.

Graph 31 - Expectations and reality in forming friendships with MULTINATIONALS

■ Suceeded in making multinational'
■ Planned to make multinational friends

	Not at all	Very little	Little	Moderate	Much	Very much	Exceptionally
Planned	320	369	609	2210	2784	4168	1320
Suceeded	148	324	499	1863	2570	4097	2232
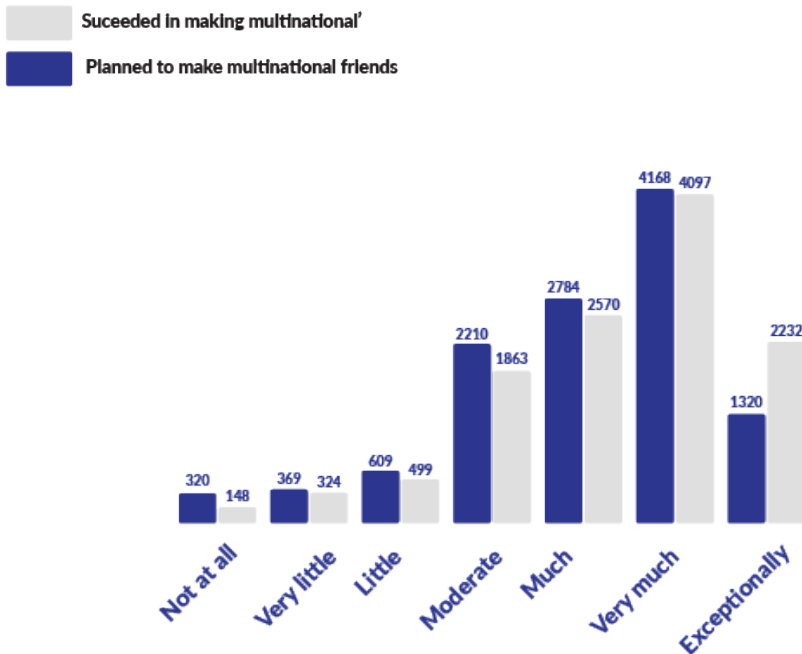
Finally, we take a look at the friendships exchange students developed with **co-nationals**. Four out of ten respondents (42%) developed two to five co-national friendships during their exchange and two out of ten (22%) developed six to fifteen friendships with co-nationals. Compared to multinational friendships, it is a lower number, but it is more or less equal to the number of local friendships.

Graph 32 - Number of CO-NATIONAL friends created

0 friends	1 friend	2-5 friends	6-15 friends	16+ friends
11,7%	13,8%	42,1%	22,3%	10,1%
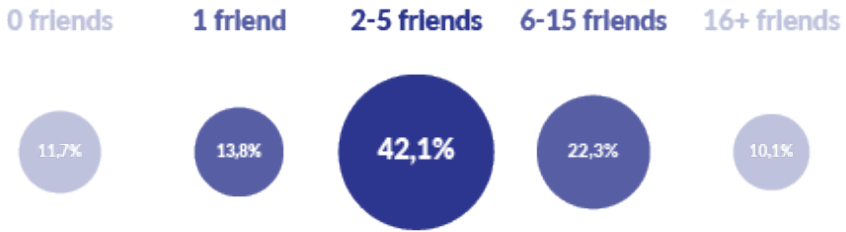
Exchange students developed much more friendships with co-nationals than they expected. According to Graph 33, the majority of respondents expected to develop only a small amount of co-national friendships or even no co-national friendships at all. However, a majority of respondents ended up making a large number of co-national friends.

Graph 33 - Expectations and reality in forming friendships with CO-NATIONALS

Succeeded in making co-national friends

Planned to make co-national friends
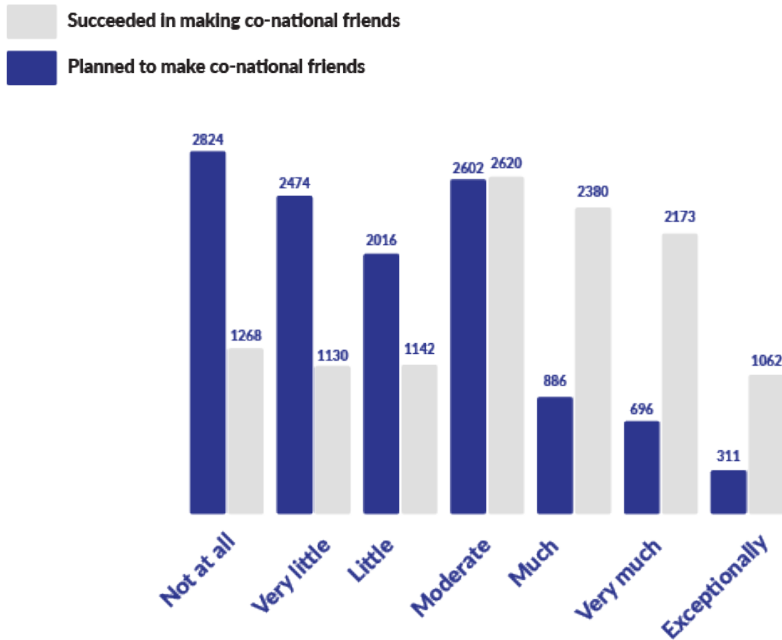
Barriers of interaction

Since we expected that exchange students would develop more friendships with multinational and co-national students than with local students of their host country, we included questions that would reveal the causes of this weak interaction, in other words the potential **barriers to interaction between exchange students and local students**. According to the results (see Graph 34), exchange students perceived that *local students are not interested in interaction* (40%). They also believed that there are *not enough opportunities for interaction* (33%), and to a lesser extent that a *different lifestyle* (23%), or the fact that they are *leaving after one semester* (20%) is a barrier to integrate into the community of local students.

Since a shorter questionnaire within the ESNsurvey 2016 research project also gathered data about the **experiences of local students** (n=9,387 responses), we can compare the barriers to interaction from both sides. First of all, local students mostly believed that there are *not enough opportunities for interaction* (35%). Secondly, local students perceived they *lack self-confidence to initiate the contact* (24%), and that they themselves *don't have enough language skills* (17%). Although many local students indicated that they don't perceive any barriers (23%), the data on the number of international friends that locals made tell us that almost half of the local students (46%) had no international friends at all.

Graph 34 - Barriers of interaction between Local and International students
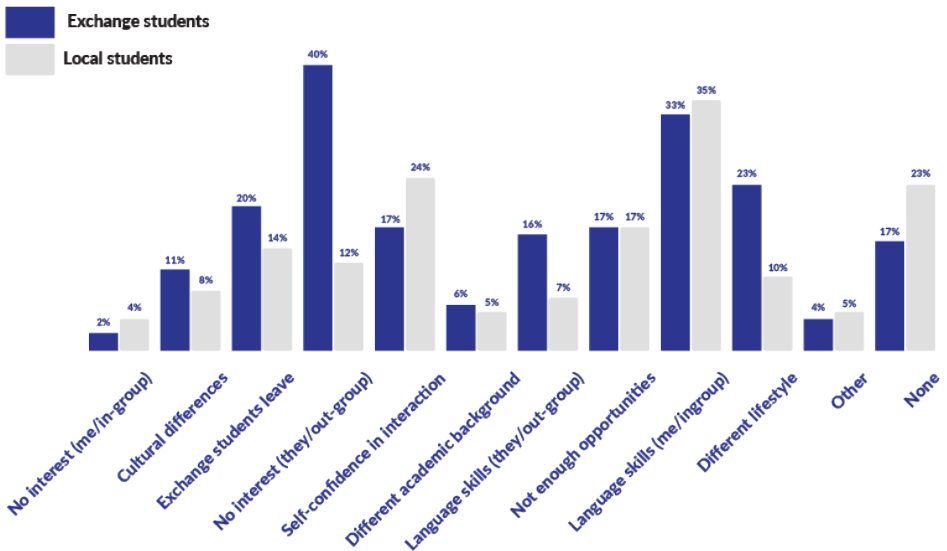
Discussion

Length of stay

When examining the results, we found a significant relationship between the length of the study abroad and the number of local friendships developed. Although the correlation is rather weak (.186**[16]), a longer stay abroad seems to benefit the development of local friendships. A Chi-square test proved that students who go on exchange for two semesters create more friendships with locals than students who only stay one semester[17]. A better command of the local language, a deeper immersion in the local culture and the fact that the exchange student is not leaving after a few months may have a positive influence on intercultural interaction as these are still some of the barriers perceived by both local and exchange students.

Social Programme

From Table 15 we can see that the social programme plays an important role in the development of friendship networks of international students. Exchange students whose host-universities offered more social activities developed more friends in all the possible social groups. The relationship was found to be the strongest between the number of social activities available and the development of multinational friendships (.228**), followed by co-national (.151**) and local (.142**) friendships.

We see that attending such social activities contributes to the development of friendships. There is a positive relationship between the number of activities attended and the number of friends made. The relationship is of a medium strength (.312**) between the attendance and the number of multinational friendships created. The strength of the relationship is similar for both, local friendships (.199**) and co-national friendships (.179**).

Table 15 - Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between social activities and number of friends

	Number of social activities available	Number of social activities attended
Number of social activities available	1.000	.743**
Number of social activities attended	.743**	1.000
Number of local friends	.142**	.199**
Number of international friends	.228**	.312**
Number of co-national friends	.151**	.179**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

[16]Spearman's rho correlation coefficient; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

[17]The Chi-square test rejected the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference in the number of local friends among students with a one-semester and two-semester experience The null hypothesis was rejected on the level of significance less than 0.0005, Kendall's tau-b for the strength of this relationship was 0.171).

Taking a deeper look at the type of social activities being organised, there are differences between the type of activities international students have participated in and the number of local, multinational and co-national friendships they have developed.

Students participating in *entertainment activities* such as parties and informal gatherings also develop more friendships with international students (there is a weak positive correlation of (.214**). Furthermore, there is a similar trend for students that participated in *international* (.201**) and *leisure* (.172**) activities: they also developed more friendships with multinational students than students that did not participate in such activities.

Participation in *social* and *language* activities might lead to developing more local friendships than non-participation. Although the correlation is rather weak for both, *social activities* (.157**) and *language activities* (.155**), those activities can offer a common space for local and international students to interact and develop friendships with each other. While *social activities* such as "SocialErasmus" or "Erasmus in Schools" give international students a direct opportunity to engage with the local community through volunteering, *language activities* such as language cafés or language tandems often attract more local students.

Accommodation

As international students are often accommodated together with other international students or a mix of local and international students, we researched if there is a correlation between this aspect and the number and different types of friendships they develop.

We found that international students who are accommodated with locals have more local friends than students who are not. Although the correlation is rather weak (.113**), it shows the importance of accommodating international students together with local students. This way, they have an additional opportunity to engage with local students, which is important as the number of local friendships developed is often lower than expected. We see a similar but stronger correlation for international students who were accommodated with other internationals (.180**) and co-nationals (.172**).

When analysing the three types of friendship networks together in a correlation matrix, we found that being accommodated with a particular type of friends is positively related only with the number of friends from that particular network. However, it is negatively related with the other types. In this sense, the influence of one's cohabitant on the type of friends someone creates, seems to have an exclusive nature. Hence it seems beneficial to mix students together. This way they would have the opportunity to develop friendships more easily even with students from other nationalities, which could enrich the cultural understanding, personal development and experience of an international student.

Intercultural understanding

We found a positive relationship between the development of friendship networks and the gained knowledge about cultures. Students who developed more local and multinational friends claim to have learned more about the host country's culture (.263**) and about other cultures (.302**). This points out the importance of interacting with people from not only the host country, but also from different countries in order to learn more about these cultures and to get a better cultural understanding.

Learning about other cultures also helps to get a better understanding of one's own culture. Medium strong correlations were found between perceived gained knowledge about cultures (as depicted in Table 16). The connection of friendship networks and "cultural enrichment" addresses the issues of a multicultural society. Our findings support Allport's 1954 *Intercultural contact theory* that increased contact between people from other cultures is also related to an increase of cultural understanding.

Table 16 - Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between perceived cultural learning

	Perceived improvement in the knowledge of host culture	Perceived improvement in the knowledge of other cultures	Perceived improvement in the knowledge of own culture
Perceived improvement in the knowledge of host culture	1.000	.508**	.348**
Perceived improvement in the knowledge of other cultures	.508**	1.000	.415**
Perceived improvement in the knowledge of own culture	.348**	.415**	1.000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Satisfaction with stay abroad

Finally, we found a relationship between *satisfaction with the social programme* and *satisfaction with the stay abroad*. International students who are more satisfied with the social programme, which was available for international students at their host university, rate higher the satisfaction level of their overall stay abroad. This relationship is of substantial strength (.431**) and emphasises the importance of the social aspect of a study exchange. International students need a space where they can interact with each other, discover the local culture and develop both local, multinational and co-national friendships.

Moreover, there is a significant relationship between *satisfaction with the stay abroad* and the number of friendships developed. We see the strongest correlation with the number of multinational (.203**) and local (.159**) friendships developed. Furthermore, there is a relationship between *satisfaction with the social programme* and the number of multinational (.151**) and local (.103**) friends. As friendship networks contribute to the overall satisfaction of the students' stay abroad, it is important that a high quality social programme is available for exchange students.

Table 17 - Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between number of friends and satisfaction

	Number of local friends	Number of international friends	Number of co-national friends	Satisfaction with STAY abroad
Satisfaction with STAY abroad	.159**	.203**	.054**	.431**
Satisfaction with social programme	.103**	.151**	.043**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Conclusions and Recommendations

We can conclude that friendship networks are a very important aspect of the stay abroad for international students. Friendships with local, multinational and co-national students positively contribute to the general satisfaction with the stay abroad.

However, the findings suggest that exchange students expected to make more local friends than they actually did during their stay abroad. As this unfulfilled desire could be a reason for lower satisfaction with the stay abroad experience, we examined the potential barriers as well as the potential facilitators.

A barrier shared by both groups is the lack of opportunities for interaction. Therefore, it is important that current opportunities for interaction are supported and that more opportunities where local and international students can interact with each other are created. This nicely fits in the internationalisation at home[18] strategy (European Parliament, 2015), which all universities should aim to adopt, according to the Study on Internationalisation of Higher Education of the European Parliament. Opportunities should be created both inside as well as outside the classroom (e.g. a rich social programme and mixed accommodation). Since local students perceive the lack of foreign language skills as one of the main barriers, the focus should be to provide opportunities for students to improve their foreign language skills. This could consequently help to tackle another main barrier, which was local students' low level of self-confidence in initiating the interaction.

Several factors such as a longer stay abroad, participation in the social programme and being accommodated with local students can be seen as facilitators of interaction between local and international students.

Stakeholders such as European institutions, National Agencies, Higher Education Institutions and local student associations play an important role in creating an environment that fosters these factors, improves the interaction between local and international students and increases intercultural learning.

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[18] According to the EAIE, internationalisation at home touches upon everything – from the academic curriculum, to he interactions between local students and international students and faculty, to the cultivation of internationally-focused research topics, to innovative uses for digital technology. Most importantly, it focuses on all students reaping the benefits of international higher education, not just those who are mobile.

Recommendations for National Agencies

● Cooperate with the national branches of student associations (e.g. national level of ESN) on activities related to student mobility programmes (e.g. activities of the Mov'in Europe project) as they promote and help to fulfil goals of internationalising higher education in Europe.

● If possible, financially support the student associations in organising national or regional activities (e.g. the celebrations of the 30 years of the Erasmus programme).

● Where possible, help student associations in training their members (either at the national or local level) to support the continuity of these associations.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

● Identify how student activities involving international students relate to your institution's internationalisation strategy.

● Support and cooperate with local student associations (such as ESN) on developing a high quality out-of-class **social programme**, which can help to better integrate international students into the life of local students at the host university and to increase students' satisfaction and cultural understanding.

● Support meaningful activities of student associations such as language tandems, buddy programmes or social activities that foster the interaction between international and local students.

● Support international students in finding mixed **accommodation** with both local and international students in order to create local and multinational friendships.

● Aim to provide more opportunities for cross-cultural interaction and lower the barriers of cross-cultural interaction by supporting sufficient and diverse language opportunities for local and international students to improve their language skills and make them more confident to interact with each other.

Recommendations for local student associations (such as the Erasmus Student Network)

● Keep organising a wide variety of activities to connect and satisfy a broad mix of international and local students.

● Try to involve more local students by re-designing your activities to attract even local students and promote them also through channels reaching local students.

● Focus on local freshmen (first year students), who do not have an established social group and might be more open for interaction.

● Cooperate with your institution to target with your activities local homecoming students and local students with an interest in studying abroad.

● Try to organise activities that increase cross-cultural interaction and help to form multinational friendships.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- Re-integration at home university and the after mobility experience

by Marie-Céline Falisse

Introduction

An often forgotten but not less important part of studying or training abroad is the post-mobility experience and the re-entry process that occur or should occur after students return to their home country. Consequent aspects of the period abroad, such as a higher level of employability after the exchange or the students' willingness to move to another country for work can also be considered as part of the post-mobility experience or even as an outcome of the experience.

Re-integration of students after their mobility experience has been briefly introduced in the *ESNsurvey 2015: Local Integration, Economic Impact and Accompanying Measures in International Mobility* (Escrivá Muñoz, J. et al., 2015). Through that edition of the survey, it appeared that "the vast majority of participants (83%) did not receive any type of counselling after their exchange".

Aim and methodology

In this chapter, results and observations from this year's ESNsurvey in terms of re-entry services will be presented along with recommendations on how to improve the re-integration process of mobile students (e.g. homecoming Erasmus+ programme students).

To increase the accuracy of the results regarding students' participation in re-entry services after their mobility abroad, respondents who returned to their home country one month or less before taking part in the survey (12%, 1,471 respondents) have not been taken into account in the analysis.

Among the other more relevant respondents, a majority of students (61%) returned from their mobility period more than five months before participating in the survey. The rest of the respondents (39%) finished their study exchange between two and five months before submitting their answers to the survey.

In terms of employability, different studies such as *The Erasmus Impact Study: Effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions* (Brandenburg, U. et al., 2014) and the ESNsurvey 2011 (Alfranseder, E. et al., 2012) have demonstrated that exchange students' employability increases after their mobility experience and that these students are more likely to be on the job market five years after graduation than non-mobile students.

In this edition of the survey, the expectations of the students in terms of employability before their exchange and their perception of reality in this regard after their period abroad have been further investigated and will be presented in this chapter. Links between the students' perception of their own employability and the re-entry services that they experienced will also be drawn.

Finally, the survey participants' willingness to move abroad for work and their expected work destination will also be presented. These result will be compared with answers from the survey on non-mobile respondents[19].

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[19] Data collected with a shorter questionnaire aimed at local non-mobile students and disseminated along with the ESNsurvey 2016. The total amount of valid responses was 9,454.

Results

This part focuses on re-entry services that the home university offers to its exchange students after they return from their stay abroad. Respondents were asked whether the university offered such services and whether they participated in any of the services upon their return. The services taken into account in the survey are the following: to help the students keep up their gained language skills after their period abroad, to give them the possibility to consult their career perspectives, to join a student organisation such as ESN, to help incoming students and to help outgoing exchange students.

Graph 35 - Availability of re-entry services at home universities upon return

As Graph 35 shows, the possibility to *help outgoing students (e.g. by telling them about experiences at host university)* appears to be the most commonly offered service. Moreover, the highest amount of returned students (47%, 4,843 respondents) actually participated in helping outgoing students at their home university. The possibility *to help incoming students (e.g. by becoming their buddy/mentor)* was the second most frequently used service/opportunity. 3,164 respondents (31%) have actually helped incoming students (e.g. by participating in the buddy programme). Almost half of the respondents (46%) weren't offered to *join a student group/organisation/association (such as an ESN section) to keep up the contact with international students.* Out of all respondents, 22% (2,235 students) have joined such a student association. The possibility *to consult their career perspectives / future job opportunities* was a service available for only 22% of the respondents. About half of them (10% of the total, 1,192 students) have consequently consulted their career perspectives with someone related to their home university. Finally, the opportunity to *keep up the language skills acquired abroad (e.g. by attending an additional language course)* appears to be both the least offered service (only 17% of the respondents had this opportunity) and the least taken one, as only 925 students (9% of the total) have actually subscribed to such a course. Overall, 15% of the respondents haven't been offered any of these re-integration services. However, returned exchange students usually had the chance to participate in three of these services.

Close to 70% of the respondents believe that re-entry services should be offered to students after their return from abroad, while only 8% of respondents disagreed with such a statement.

Graph 36 - Opinion on the necessity of offering re-entry services
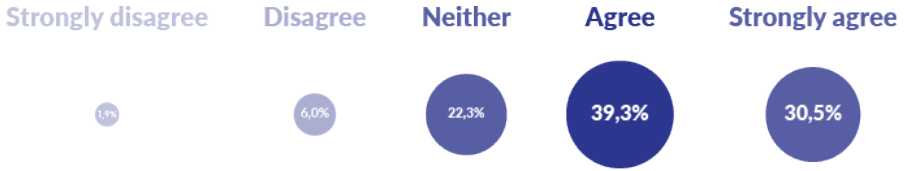
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
1,9%	6,0%	22,3%	39,3%	30,5%

Respondents had the chance to indicate their **expectations** about certain aspects of a study abroad experience (by assigning them a value on a likert scale). Similarly, they had the chance to indicate how these expectations were fulfilled (Graph 37).

Graph 37 - Average expectations and outcomes of study abroad aspects

Legend:
- Plan to Improve / learn / enjoy
- Reality in Improving, learning /enjoying
- Difference

Aspect	Plan to improve / learn / enjoy	Reality in improving, learning /enjoying	Difference
Local language	4,64	4,26	0,38
Language of instruction	4,96	4,95	0,01
Free time	5,08	5,12	-0,05
Education	4,92	4,69	0,23
Employability	4,78	4,64	0,14
Host country's culture	5,04	5,18	-0,13
Foreign countries' cultures	4,74	5,09	-0,35
Home country's culture	3,89	4,69	-0,79

In terms of **employability**, the results of the survey suggest that returned exchange students felt that their *work and career perspectives* improved less than they expected them to improve. Looking at other factors that could be potentially linked to employability, it appears that students expected more than they actually gained in terms of *learning the local language (of the visiting country)* and *improving education and gaining academic knowledge (through visited courses)*. On the other hand, it can be observed that students felt they *learned about foreign cultures* more than they thought they would learn. The difference between expectations and reality in terms of *learning about one's own culture* is even more noticeable. For other factors, such as the *amount of free time* or the improvements made in terms of *learning the language in which the courses were taught*, it appears that reality was close to the expectations of the students (the overview of average expectations and evaluated outcomes can be seen in Graph 37).

By comparing the answers given by homecoming (mobile) and local (non-mobile) respondents, it appears that 93% of the former exchange students would be interested in **migrating abroad for work** in the future, while 86% of those who didn't spent a period abroad would be willing to migrate.

Results from these submissions should, however, be considered carefully as the survey was broadly disseminated through communication channels that are connected with the Erasmus Student Network (a social group with an interest in an international lifestyle), and therefore, respondents might not be representative of the youth's interest in studying or training abroad.

Graph 38 - Exchange students' willingness to migrate abroad for work

Yes   No

93%   7%
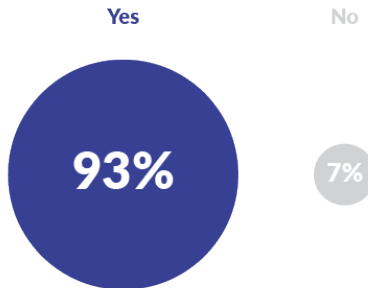
Graph 39 - Local (non-mobile) students' willingness to migrate abroad for work

Yes   No

86%   14%
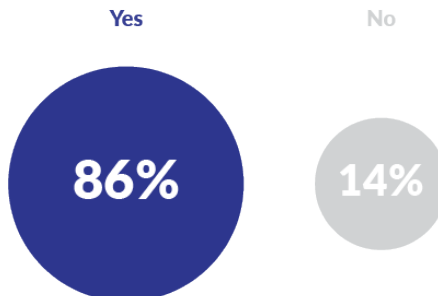
Regarding the **expected future work location**, 21% of homecoming respondents answered that they would stay in their home country for work, 15% would be willing to work in the host country of their exchange, 32% elsewhere in Europe and 15% elsewhere outside Europe.

Looking at the submissions from non-mobile students, it appears that 30% of these respondents would stay in their home country, whereas 29% would be interested in working in another European country and 22% outside of Europe.

Graph 40 - Expected future work location
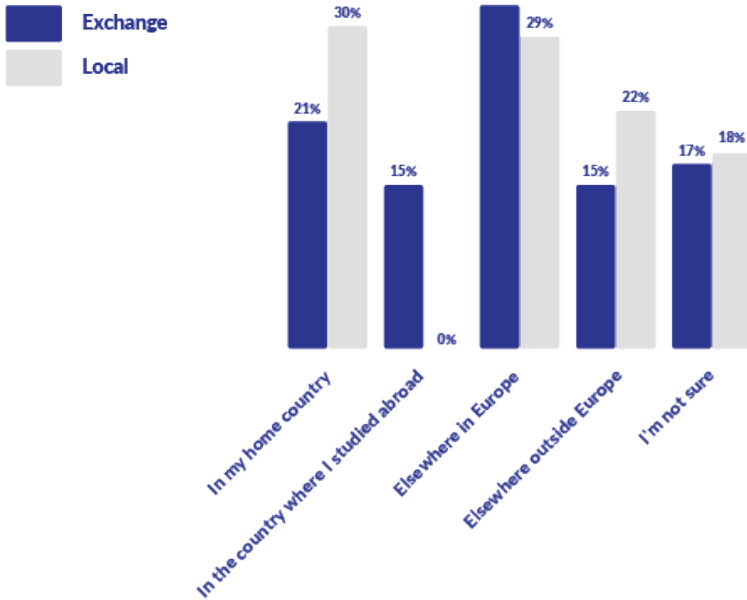
Discussion

Availability of re-entry services and students' interest

When looking at the percentages of students who benefited from re-entry services, it appears that proportionally few of them had the possibility to take part in such services. Additionally, based on the answers given regarding the necessity of offering re-entry services, one can say that a high number of students (close to 70%) think re-entry services should be offered. This first and clear observation can lead to the conclusion that more of these services should be made available by higher education institutions.

Through the answers collected, it also appears that reality didn't always meet the students' expectations. For instance, since students felt that they didn't learn the local language as much as they expected, they could be more interested in having a language course back in their home university. In the same way, since they felt they improved their employability less than they thought, it might be even more beneficial for them to consult their career perspectives after their stay abroad. In any case, students should be offered such services.

Reverse culture shock

Several scholars (e.g. Gaw, K., 1999, Szkudlarek, B., 2009) describe how most returnees encounter what is commonly called the reverse culture shock. Back in their home country, the students can feel disoriented, isolated or quickly bored, miss some of the aspects of their time abroad, and have the feeling that friends and family cannot relate to what they experienced. By offering the returning students more and better re-entry services, reverse culture shock could be better apprehended.

First of all, bringing together people who had a similar experience and encounter the same difficulties after coming back from abroad can help them relate to each others' stories, minimise the impression of loneliness or lack of understanding from relatives and friends, and this way reduce the negative feelings linked to the reverse culture shock.

Secondly, offering returnees the possibility to join a student organisation such as ESN and/or to help incoming students can bring them closer to the international community they have been missing after their return, and at the same time reduce the possible feelings of boredom, isolation or helplessness.

Finally, the returning students could also be given the possibility to share their experience and related advice – not only from their time abroad but also since their return back home – with future outgoing students. As these students are likely to experience the same kind of feelings as their returning peers during and after their exchange, being informed and advised beforehand can also help them to have more realistic expectations, take the best out of their time abroad and anticipate potential negative aspects linked to the reverse culture shock once back home.

From the data collected, it also appears that students who helped outgoing students after their return showed a higher level of satisfaction with their period abroad.

Employability and economic benefits

Through the answers collected via the survey, it appears that mobile students are more interested in migrating abroad for work than their non-mobile peers. However, as former exchange students feel they improved their employability and knowledge of a foreign language less than expected, migrating for work could turn out not to be an easy task.
The correlation matrix in Table 17 shows how perceived improvement in employability is positively related to perceived improvement in education (.390**)[20] and with language improvement.

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[20] Spearman's rho correlation coefficient; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 18 - Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between perceived improvements

	Perceived improvement in employability and career perspectives	Perceived improvement in the local language	Perceived improvement in the language of instruction	Perceived improvement in education and gained academic knowledge
Perceived improvement in employability and career perspectives	1.000	.189**	.280**	.390**
Perceived improvement in the local language	.189**	1.000	.144**	.183**
Perceived improvement in the language of instruction	.280**	.144**	1.000	.333**
Perceived improvement in education and gained academic knowledge	.390**	.183**	.333**	1.000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

After a period abroad, students may know they developed skills during their stay, but have difficulties in identifying and applying them in practice, and in seeing how these skills can help them in their future careers. Offering the returnees the possibility to consult their career perspectives and helping them to clearly identify the skills developed through their exchange abroad can be beneficial for their future employment and contribution to society.

Moreover, the possibility for students to consult their career perspectives and job opportunities, to keep up their language skills and to stay in an international environment can increase their confidence and willingness to go back abroad for work, but also to be hired for the desired job.

Therefore, it appears one more time that the availability of re-entry services can be beneficial for the students, but also for the labour market and to indirectly reduce youth unemployment in today's society.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the above-mentioned observations, tackling the lack of support to returning students by offering them more and better re-entry services appears to be essential for the returnees to reduce the reverse culture shock, fulfil their interest in such services and potentially increase their employability, but it can also be beneficial for the future mobile students and for the labour market.

Higher Education Institutions should offer more re-entry services to returning students. These services can for instance include language courses to help the students keep up their gained language skills after their period abroad, group or individual sessions for the students to consult their career perspectives and job opportunities with an expert in the field, the possibility to join a student organisation such as ESN, and to help incoming and outgoing exchange students.

A good practice is for instance to organise a conference including several forms of support in various fields on a same day for all returning students of the semester.

To go further, re-entry services aiming at enhancing the students' employability could also include ways for the returnees to learn how to use the competences they have acquired through their experience abroad when applying for jobs, preparing a CV or taking part in an interview, and to see how to look for jobs related to what they experienced abroad, or to any other field of expertise and/or interest developed by the students through their exchange.

Informing the students about possible ways to volunteer or take part in community services in an international environment could also help these students take the best out of their experience abroad and keep on developing their related skills.

In any case, HEIs should also make sure that the services they organise take place at times that suit the students, that the availability of these services is well-communicated and that the information itself is accessible to all returnees. If there is an organisation providing services to international students on the campus, such as an ESN section, the possibility to join this organisation should also be communicated to the returnees.

Likewise, ESN sections should try and get in contact with returning students and invite them to join the section and/or to take part in activities and projects, such as Mov'in Europe. Through this project, the ESN sections could work with returning students to promote mobility and inform potential future outgoings, or could also provide information to returnees who would be interested in going back abroad by informing them about the several opportunities available.

In order to enhance the implementation of re-entry services, National Agencies, national Erasmus+ Offices and European institutions could provide support to HEIs and remind International Relations Officers of the necessity and benefits of re-entry services, in addition to the interest of the students in such services as shown through the survey.

Recommendations for National Agencies, national Erasmus+ Offices, European institutions

- Offer support to HEIs in developing and organising re-entry services for returning students.
- Remind International Relations Officers of the necessity and benefits of re-entry services.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

- Make sure all returning students have access to various quality re-entry services after their exchange abroad. These services can include but are not limited to group or individual sessions for the students to consult their career perspectives and job opportunities based on their newly acquired skills and interests, relevant languages courses, the possibility to join a student organisation such as an ESN section, to help incoming and outgoing exchange students, and to share their experience with their returning peers.
- Ensure an effective communication of the services available towards the students.
- Inform the students about possible ways to volunteer or take part in community services in an international environment.

Recommendations for local student organisations (such as ESN sections)

- Get in contact with mobile students from your home HEI at the end of their exchange abroad or shortly after, and inform them about the possibilities to get involved in the section, such as by becoming an active member or buddy.
- Inform mobile students about further possibilities to study, work or volunteer abroad.
- Organise Mov'in Europe activities together with returning students.
- Support your HEI in making services accessible to all students, including students with disabilities through the ExchangeAbility project.

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ABOUT ESN

The **Erasmus Student Network (ESN)** is the biggest inter-disciplinary European student organisation in the field of mobility. ESN is a non-political, non-profit and non-religious organisation with over **14,500 volunteer members from local student groups (so called sections) in more than 850 Higher Education Institutions in 40 countries.** ESN supports educational, social and cultural integration of international students and provides practical information for incoming and outgoing students about various exchange programmes.

Furthermore, ESN provides intercultural experiences to students who cannot access a period abroad (internationalisation at home). The vision of ESN is the enrichment of society through international students – thus, ESN works to foster the mobility of students under the principle of Students Helping Students. ESN provides its services annually to about **220,000 international students** in Europe and beyond. ESN's activities comprise hundreds of projects developed at all levels. The main **international projects** of Erasmus Student Network are:

1. ESNsurvey (https://esn.org/esnsurvey) is a European-wide research project covering different topics concerning mobility and education. It is conducted annually and surveys students at higher education institutions, with an average response rate of 15,000 answers. Starting in 2005, the ESNsurvey is the biggest regular European research project planned and carried out entirely by students for students. So far, the ESNsurvey has investigated upon the following topics – Experience of Studying Abroad (2005), Exchange Students' Rights (2006), Generation Mobility (2007), Exchanging Cultures (2008), Information for Exchange (2009), E-Value-ate Your Exchange (2010), Exchange, Employment and Added Value (2011), Exchange: Creating Ideas, Opportunities and Identity (2013), International Experience and Language Learning (2014) and Local integration, economic impact and accompanying measures in international mobility (2015).

2. PRIME (Problems of Recognition in Making Erasmus, https://esn.org/prime) is a research project addressing the continuing challenges concerning recognition procedures for outgoing exchange students. PRIME has been carried out in 2009 and 2010 following up on the results of the ESNsurveys 2006 and 2007, showing that full recognition is not yet a reality. The aim of PRIME was to collect best practices among participating higher education institutions and through their dissemination contribute to the improvement of the situation. A new study was conducted in 2013.

3. STORY (https://esn.org/story), or Strengthening the Training Opportunities for InteRnational Youth, aims to improve the accessibility and quality of international traineeships and to increase the awareness regarding the existence of such opportunities for youth. The project resulted in the creation of an online platform offering internships abroad, in order to enhance students' international opportunities on the European job market.

4. SocialErasmus (http://socialerasmus.esn.org/) gives international students an opportunity to help local communities in several ways through the interaction between students and local communities. It was the flagship project of ESN in 2011/2012. Projects are mainly carried out in three areas: Charity, Environment and Education. At the same time, international students gain experience, knowledge, openness and discover their love for Europe! Within the framework of SocialErasmus, Erasmus in Schools (EiS) was the flagship project of ESN for 2013. These activities aim to promote mobility at an early age. ESN's local sections organise visits to elementary and secondary schools so that international students can do a wide range of activities that include country and culture presentations, language sessions and mobility promoting activities.

5. Erasmus Voting Assessment (http://erasmusvoting.eu/) is a joint project carried out by ESN, Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe / European Students' Forum (AEGEE) and Generation Europe Foundation (GEF) to measure how the ERASMUS programme influences feelings of European citizenship/identity among European university students, with a special focus on the possible correlation between participation in the ERASMUS programme and voting in the European Parliament elections. The results came out in 2014 claiming that having a previous study abroad experience relates to increased political participation of young people.

6. ExchangeAbility and MappED! (http://exchangeability.esn.org) are complementary projects aimed at improving the conditions for students with disabilities going on an exchange, and making ESN more accessible as an organisation. Sections are encouraged to engage disabled students at their universities in the work for international students. Through participation and involvement in different activities, students with disabilities are given an opportunity to experience the international and intercultural atmosphere associated with the exchange programmes. The long term goal of the project is to encourage an increasing number of disabled students to go on an exchange. MappED! is an EU-funded project which aims at providing equal opportunities to students with disabilities for their participation in the Erasmus+ programme. A follow-up of the MapAbility project, MappED! provides students with information on the accessibility of university facilities as well as surrounding locations, through a web platform supported by a mobile application. ExchangeAbility is the new flagship project of ESN for the year 2016/2017.

7. ESNcard (https://esncard.org/) is the membership and discount card of ESN. ESN sections distribute the card to their volunteers and international students. The card offers a range of discounts at the local, national and international levels. Annually, ESN issues about 100.000 cards.

8. ESNblog is a platform aimed at giving a voice to the Erasmus Generation. The blog covers topics of interest to the international student community, particularly those who have been abroad as part of a mobility programme. This ranges from blog articles offering advice on living abroad, to discussions on how studying and living abroad can improve one's employability.

Erasmus Student Network is a full member of the European Youth Forum since April 2010 and is a member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe. ESN is also a courtesy member of the European Association for International Education, full member of the Informal Forum of International Student Organisations (IFISO), full member of the European Movement International (EMI) and full member of the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP).

Contact

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PREVIOUS RESEARCH REPORT

LOCAL INTEGRATION, ECONOMIC IMPACT AND ACCOMPANYING MEASURES IN INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

Research Report of the ESNSurvey 2015

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Erasmus Student Network AISBL, Brussels 2015

Read the previous research ESNsurvey reports here: https://esn.org/esnsurvey