

Erasmus+ Social Entrepreneurship. A New Formula for Exploring the Creativity and Innovation for Young People



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Abstract. *The driving forces behind the redesign of the Erasmus programmes were the EU and the national initiatives in knowledge, innovation, education, digital society, green production, competitiveness, job creation, skill acquisition and in the fight against poverty.*

The European Commission (2014) has stated the great importance of education, training, youth and sport in helping to tackle the key challenges that Europe is facing both now and in the next decade.

Key action 2 of the Erasmus+ Programme “Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of the good practices” promotes innovative actions for enhancing employability and entrepreneurship, namely “Knowledge Alliances” and “Sector Skills Alliances”.

Following the important aspects of the Key Action 2 of the Erasmus+ Programme, the paper aims at identifying the current concerns and partnerships in using a new formula for exploring creativity and innovation in young people: Erasmus+ Social Entrepreneurship.

The arguments for the current research are: firstly, the great focus on the issue of social entrepreneurship and Erasmus+ in educational programmes across Europe (Euclid Network UK – projects of Erasmus for Social Entrepreneurs; Salto Youth network European Commission – training course Using Social Entrepreneurship in Erasmus+); secondly, the great need in identifying innovative solutions for youth employment (the youth unemployment rate reached a new historic high of 23.5% in February 2013, Eurostat, 2013); thirdly, the fact that social entrepreneurship represents one of the most effective and innovative solutions to youth unemployment

and poverty reduction (the “Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs” Programme of the European Commission aims to increase the number of start-ups, to boost their resilience and to create jobs).

*In order to achieve the aim of the paper, **the research methodology** will employ two main sections:*

- *The first section – an empirical study of successful Erasmus stories from within the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania in its cooperation with partner-universities. The objective is to analyse and identify the labour insertion opportunities for Erasmus students after attending this programme. The empirical study will make use of questionnaires completed by former Erasmus students within the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania with partner-universities and statistical data obtained;*
- *The second section – a descriptive analysis of the current initiatives in Erasmus+ and Social Entrepreneurship, connected to the empirical study’s results. The objective is to identify the partnerships and financing opportunities for Erasmus+ and Social Entrepreneurship across Europe. The descriptive analysis will make use of reports and documents at European and national levels.*

Keywords: *innovation, youth, entrepreneurship, Erasmus+*

JEL: L26; L31

1. Introduction

Previously, the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) 2007-2013 had the main goal to stimulate people to learn and train across Europe, with no regard to their age, education or experience of work.

Under this umbrella, Erasmus was the Programme for Union action, addressed to institutions of higher education. Its main objective was to improve the level of education and foster the European dimension of higher education studies, notably through increased learning mobility opportunities, strengthened cooperation between higher education institutions, as well as international student and staff exchange in Europe.

Participation in the European Lifelong Learning programme was notable, unique and inspiring. For many universities participation in the programme was a way to establish or strengthen their international network (Nen, Rădulescu, 2011:4-6). They also wanted to develop their internationalisation policy and increase the professional skills of participants, for example their teachers (Nen, Stoika, Rădulescu, 2011:3).

Currently, **Erasmus+** (2014-2020) brings “an integrated, more accessible programme, a renewed focus on skills for employment, new opportunities for modernizing teaching and learning, new partnerships between education and worlds of work” (European Commission). According to the official website, “the programme is the new 16 billion euro catch-all framework programme for education, training, youth and sport, built on the well-known and respected EU brand of the highly successful Erasmus student exchange programme”.

All previous programmes functioning under the framework of LLP, like Youth in Action, Erasmus or Comenius are included in Erasmus+. The new programme is divided into 3 principal pillars targeting on education and formation, youth, and last, but not least, sport.

The main objective of **Erasmus+** is to improve employability of the youth by acquiring supplementary competences appreciated by employers, as well as improving their language skills and flexibility.

The youth sector part will be based around three different types of projects, known as Key Actions. These three Key Actions are: Key Action 1: *Learning mobility of individuals*, addressed to Staff (teachers, trainers, school leaders and youth workers) and students; Key Action 2: *Co-operation and Innovation for Good Practices*, addressed to universities, international NGOs and youth workers; Key Action 3:

Support for Policy Reform which includes some old action from Youth in Action, the EU presidency events and Council of Europe events.

The causes of this new approach consist of: deep economic crisis + high youth unemployment; existing vacancies in job market contrasts with profound skill gaps and low employability levels of graduates; rising demand for high skill jobs; global competition talent: internationalization of education; broadening of learning offer and potential of ICT; complementary ways of learning: formal, informal, non-formal; and finally, the need to connect with the enterprises.

As new ways to support young people in developing skills to satisfy diverse social needs become more and more necessary, combining *Erasmus+ and social entrepreneurship can represents a new formula to explore the creativity and innovation of young people.*

On one hand, European Commission designed the new Erasmus programme “*to boost skills and employability, as well as modernizing education, training and youth work*”, thus “*reflecting by an increased spending level with 40% the EU’s commitment to investing in the above mentioned areas*”.

On the other hand, social entrepreneurship seeks new ways for developing and implementing sustainable methods for improving the lives of various vulnerable groups. These new ways are represented by: “*a) a type of business or private activity with a social purpose (such as combating social exclusion or unemployment), based on the producing and providing of public goods and services; b) sustainability by reinvesting the surpluses in this activity; c) a high level of social responsibility and a certain participation level of stakeholders.*” (Sandu, 2013)

2. The current initiatives in Erasmus+ and Social Entrepreneurship

Knowledge Alliances are transnational, structured and result-driven projects, notably between higher education and business, getting together partners who share common ideas and goals in order to obtain mutually beneficial results and outcomes (European Commission).

Knowledge Alliances is seen as an efficient tool aiming to strengthen Europe’s innovation capacity and to promote the spirit of innovation in universities, enterprises, and any other socio-economic environment. The main goals tackle the issues of developing “new, innovative and multidisciplinary approaches to teaching

and learning” in response to the business needs; stimulating “entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills of students, academic and company staff”; facilitating “the exchange, flow and co-creation of knowledge” (European Commission).

The key features of Knowledge Alliances are:

Innovation in higher education and innovation through higher education in enterprises and their socioeconomic environment: innovation is considered as state-of-the-art project-specific and related to the partnerships context and analysed needs.

- Sustainability of university-business cooperation. A strong and committed partnership with a balanced participation from enterprises and higher education institutions are pivotal for the success of Knowledge Alliances. The role and contribution of each participating organization and associate partner have to be specific and complementary.
- Impact going beyond the project’s lifetime and beyond the organizations involved in the Alliance. It is expected that partnership and activities persist. Changes in higher education institutions and enterprises have to be measurable. Results and solutions have to be transferable and accessible to a broader audience.

Sector Skills Alliances are created to deliver transnational projects focused on joint vocational training programmes and teaching and training methodologies. “A particular focus is to be put on work-based learning, providing learners with the skills required by the labour market. Sector Skills Alliances also put the EU wide recognition tools into practice” (The European Union Programmes Agency).

The key features of Sector Skills Alliances are:

- Innovation in vocational education and training, in different economic sectors and related occupational profiles (where available ESCO).
- Impact going beyond the project’s lifetime and beyond the organizations involved in the Alliance. It is expected that partnership and activities persist. Changes in VET organizations and in different economic sectors/occupational profiles have to be measurable. Results and solutions have to be transferable and accessible to a broader audience. The results of Sector Skills Alliances should feed into the developments of the European Skills, Competences and Occupations taxonomy and of the European Sector Skills Councils.

At European level, it is clearly stated that Europe needs more entrepreneurs and more innovation. That’s why the focus is on enabling the entrepreneurial mind-sets

of young people and the education; the learning experiences play an important role in promoting this entrepreneurial spirit (European Commission).

Thus, the entrepreneurship competence includes transversal skills and attitudes as well as more specialised knowledge and business skills. Generally speaking, entrepreneurship should be considered as a mind-set that provides a foundation for entrepreneurs establishing a social or commercial activity, in any country. Entrepreneurship is a key competence for lifelong learning, as defined in the 2006 European Framework for Key Competences (Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council)¹

At European level, there are different programmes and activities concerning the education for entrepreneurship. However, there is a need of promoting these initiatives more systematically, as The European Commission is committed to promoting education for entrepreneurship at all levels, from primary school to university and beyond.

3. Empirical study within Faculty of Public Administration

The Faculty of Public Administration started to collaborate with European universities in 2004. Since then, under the framework of the LLP, there were 140 Romanian students benefiting from education and training programmes abroad – outgoing (110 students with study mobility and 30 students with placement mobility) and 56 foreign students – incoming.

Thus, in comparing the numbers one can observe the fact that there is a balance between the outgoing and incoming students.

The international experiences of the Romanian students need to be analysed in terms of labour insertion opportunities after attending the Erasmus programme.

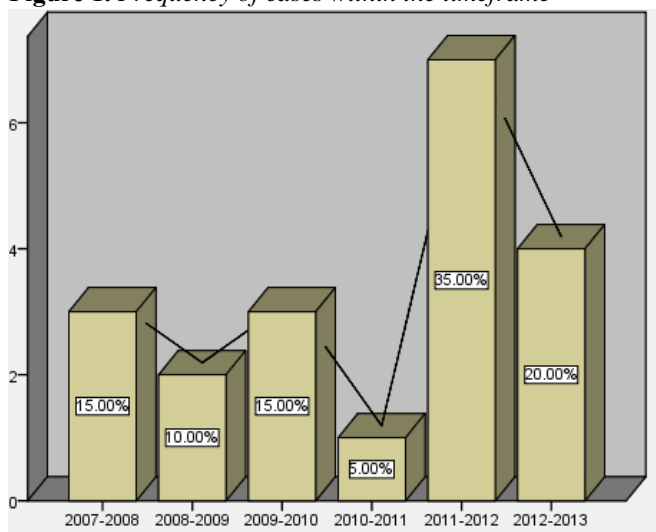
In this regard, the empirical study focuses on the following sections: A) Applicant student profile; B) labour insertion assessments; C) personal statement on the Erasmus programme's learning outcomes.

¹ Eight key competences are described, among them: *Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship* which is “the ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. The individual is aware of the context of his/her work and is able to seize opportunities that arise. It is the foundation for acquiring more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance”.

The timeframe corresponds to the LLP implementation of 2007-2013, when the Jean Monnet and Bologna processes were running simultaneously in Romania, namely 1 series of 4 years of study (promotion of 2004-2008) and 1 series of 4 years of study (promotion of 2005-2008).

One can observe the intensity of the Erasmus experiences in the academic year 2011-2012, which alone encompassed 35% of all the applications for the 2007-2013 period.

Figure 1. Frequency of cases within the timeframe



Source: own elaboration

Within the current sample, there were identified 15 students for the three years of study series (180 ECTS), 1 student from the four years of study series (240 ECTS) and 4 students in master programmes (120 ECTS).

A) **Applicant student profile** comprises of a series of relevant items, namely:

1) *Year of study, specialization and average graduation grade*

Table 1. Frequency Year of study

Year of study	ECTS		Percentage	ECTS		Percentage
	240	180		120		
2nd	0	6	30	4	20	
3rd	0	9	45	0	0	
4th	1	0	5	0	0	
Total	1	15	80	4	20	

Source: own elaboration

Table 1 illustrates the fact that 50% of cases chose to go in Erasmus in the last year of study, the academic year of graduation (3rd and 4th) and 30% of cases chose to go in the academic year before graduation (2nd). Master students are eligible for the Erasmus programme only in the 2nd year of study, which is the final academic year.

Table 2. Correlation Specialization* Academic situation

		Academic situation		Total
		promoted all	promoted a part	
Specialization	PA	3	0	3 (15%)
	EPA	15	2	17 (85%)
Total		18 (90%)	2	20

Source: own elaboration

85% of cases are students in European Public Administration (15% of cases students of specialization Public Administration)² and 90% of cases promoted all the exams during their Erasmus programme.

2) Length of the Erasmus programme

Table 3. Frequency of programme length

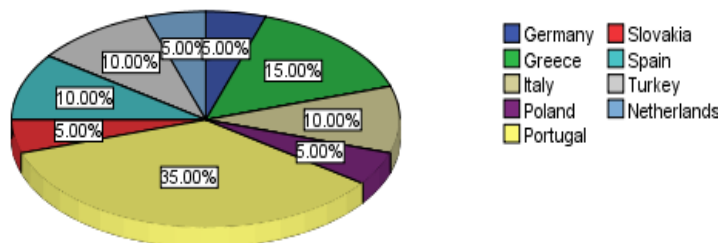
	Frequency	Percent
1 semester	17	85.0
2 semesters	3	15.0
Total	20	100.0

Source: own elaboration

85% of students choose to attend 1 semester for the Erasmus programme (Table 3), the main argument is based on financial considerations (300 euro/student/month is considered to be insufficient and they are not able to find additional financial resources for more than 1 semester).

3) Hosting country and specialization preferences

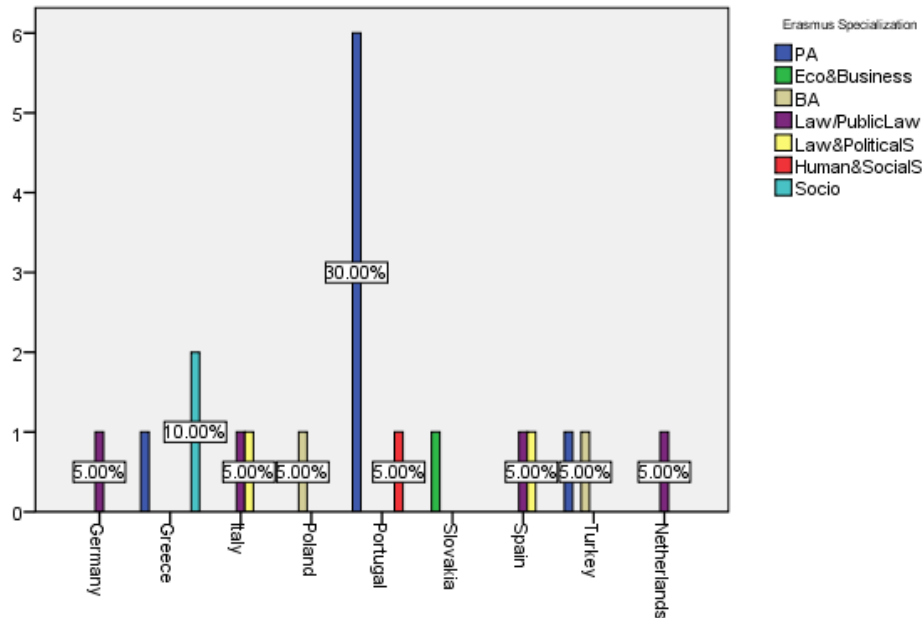
Figure 2. Frequency hosting country



Source: own elaboration

² The Faculty of Public Administration has two specializations: Public Administration and European Public Administration. Students must choose their specialization in the 2nd year of study, 2nd semester
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Figure 3. *Correlation Hosting country* Specialization*



Source: own elaboration

The most frequented country in the Erasmus programme is Portugal (35%), followed by Greece (15%), Spain, Italy and Turkey (10% each).

Generally, the option in the Erasmus programme is for the country and not for the hosting university or for a specific specialization.

When referring to the corresponding specialization within the hosting university, 40% of the programmes are in Public Administration (Portugal- the majority of cases, Turkey and Greece), 30% in Law and Public Law (Germany, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands), 15% in Economics and Business Administration (Poland, Slovakia and Turkey), 15% in Human Sciences and Sociology (Greece and Portugal).

B) Labour insertion assessments comprises of a series of relevant items, namely:

1) Highest educational level achieved, current position and years of experience

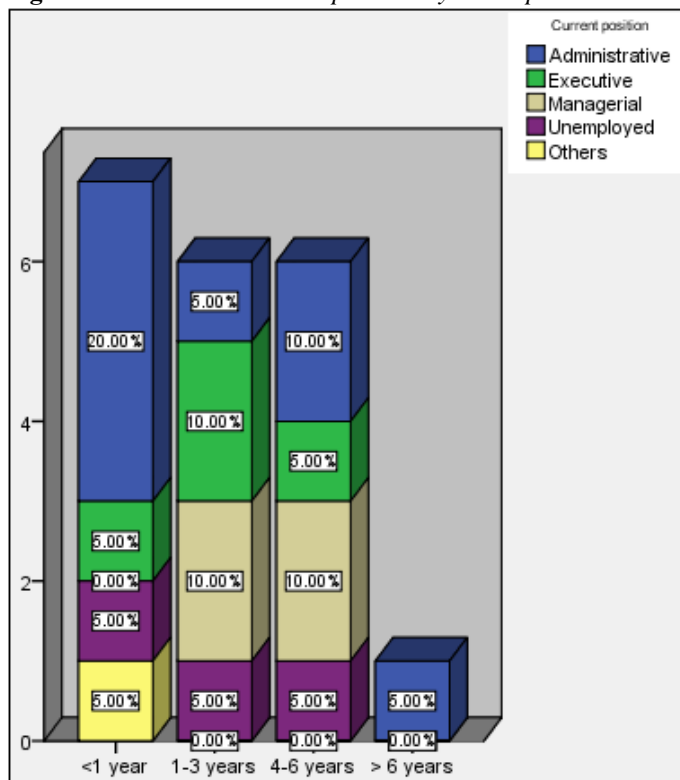
There are 65% of cases between the ages of 20-25 years old and 35% of cases between 26-31 years old.

Features of category 20-25 years old: 38 % bachelor degree, **61 % master degree**; **38% administrative position**, 23% executive position, 15% managerial position, 15% unemployed, 0,07% others (cabin crew), **0 cases entrepreneur**; years of

experience – **53% less 1 year**, 23% between 1-3 years, 15% between 4-6 years, 0,07% over 6 years.

Features of category 26-31 years old: 14% bachelor degree, **85% master degree**; **43% administrative position**, 14% executive position, 28% managerial position, 14%unemployed, **0 cases entrepreneur**; years of experience – 0 cases less 1 year, 43% between 1-3 years, **57% between 4-6 years**, 0 cases over 6 years.

Figure 4. *Correlation current position* years experience*



Source: own elaboration

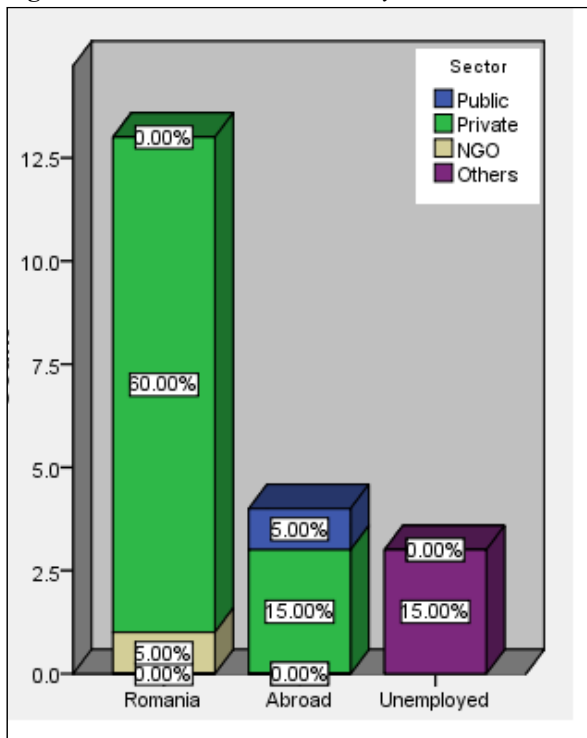
2) Sector of activity and location

Figure 5 illustrates the fact that only 20% (4 from 20) cases choose to work abroad after the Erasmus experience. One can predict that this percentage might correspond to the category of master level during the programme and to a length of 2 semesters. Instead, it corresponds to the category of *bachelor level during the programme and 1 semester in length*.

As an important remark, 3 from 4 cases (75%) working abroad were Erasmus students in the last year of study, before graduation.

75% of cases work in private sector, only 5% in public sector and 5% in NGOs, 15% unemployed and 0 cases entrepreneur.

Figure 5. *Correlation sector activity*location*



Source: own elaboration

C) Personal statement on Erasmus programme learning outcomes

1) Correlation between specific competences of Faculty of Public Administration and hosting university

The specific competences of the Faculty of PA are described in the Diploma Supplement on three important categories: cognitive and instrumental competences, interpersonal competences and systemic and decision-making competences.

The authors consider that integrating approaches on the partner-universities represent an important pillar in assessing the Erasmus students' competences and labour insertion opportunities.

Thus, tables 4, 5 and 6 illustrate the compliance of specific competences between the partner-universities' programmes (relevant only over the percentage of 50% of cases).

Table 4. *Compliance of instrumental and cognitive competences*

	No. of cases	Percent of total cases
Basic concepts	12	60.0%
Public Management	10	50.0%
PS functioning	11	55.0%
PS analyse	7	35.0%
PS arguments	14	70.0%
Complex relations	8	40.0%
Apply concrete case	12	60.0%
Using info	11	55.0%
IT	7	35.0%
Written& Oral Com	16	80.0%
Average percentage		54%

Source: own elaboration

Table 5. *Compliance of interpersonal competences*

	No. of cases	Percent of total cases
Communication relations	16	80.0%
Work relations	18	90.0%
Argumentation	15	75.0%
Problem solving	11	55.0%
Leadership& civic work	11	55.0%
Average percentage		71%

Source: own elaboration

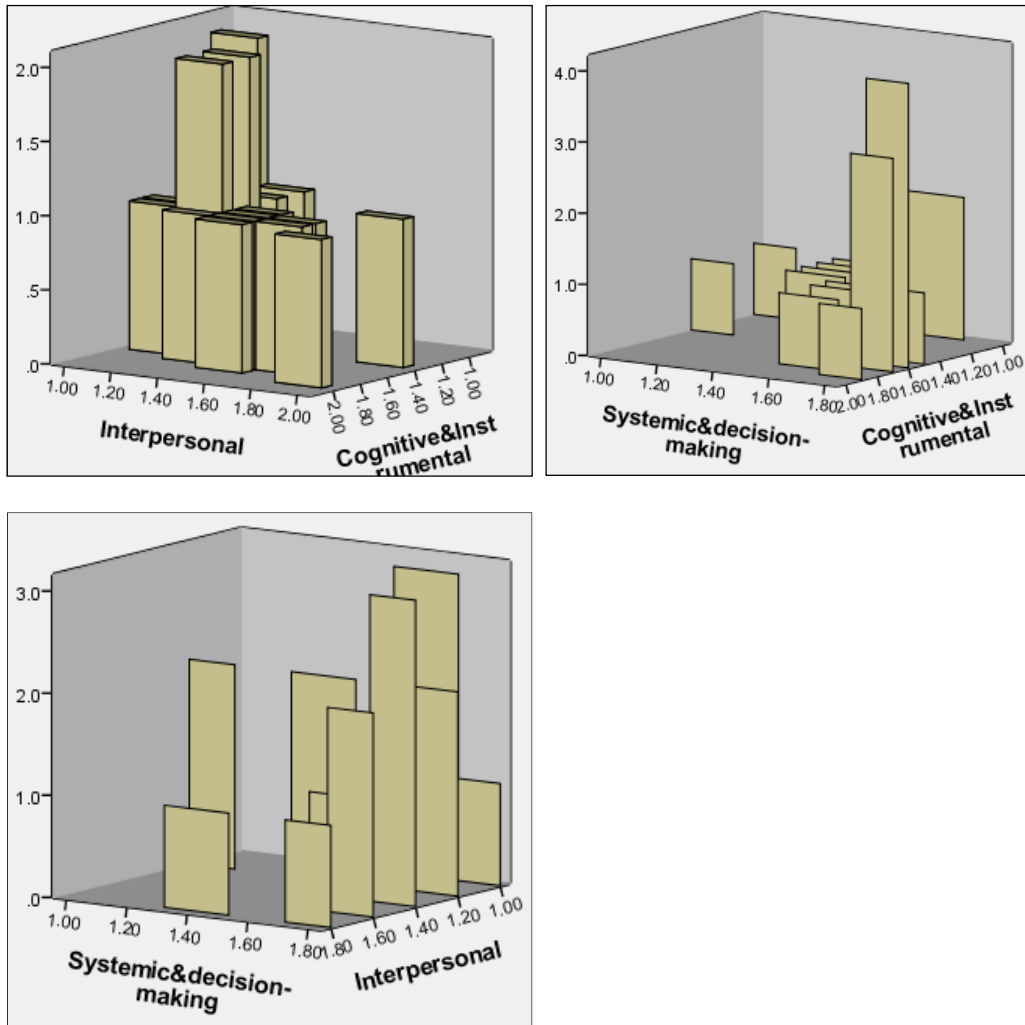
Table 6. *Compliance of systemic and decision-making competences*

	No. of cases	Percent of total cases
Anticipate PS problems	13	65.0%
Strategic PS planning	6	30.0%
Implement public decision	7	35.0%
EU/national projects	4	20.0%
Legislative expertise	11	55.0%
Average percentage		41%

Source: own elaboration

By identifying the most frequent answers, one can observe that Erasmus students consider the compliance of interpersonal competences as the most relevant, followed by instrumental and cognitive competences. The systemic and decision-making competences are seen as less relevant (differences visible in Figure 6).

Figure 6. Compliance of specific competences



Source: own elaboration

2) Education and employment opportunities

Erasmus+ leaflet reveals a series of objectives for the next timeframe of 2014-2020.

By turning these objectives into prerequisite steps within the LLP, a clear picture can be obtained from the beneficiaries of the Erasmus programme on their opinions about the learning outcomes.

Table 7. *Education and employment considerations*

No.	Question "Do you consider that the Erasmus programme..."	Yes	No
1.	Offered you the chance to explore more opportunities to study, train and gain work experience or volunteer abroad?	90%	10%
2.	Is a good opportunity for education, training and youth sector staff to teach or learn abroad?	100%	0%
3.	Contributes to the development of digital education and the use of ICT?	90%	10%
4.	Is useful for language learning?	100%	0%
5.	Contributes to the recognition of skills, including those learned outside the formal education system?	90%	10%
6.	Fosters quality improvements and innovation through strategic partnership among educational institutions and youth organizations with peers in other countries?	85%	15%
7.	Addresses skills gaps and fosters entrepreneurship by improving curricula and qualifications through cooperation between the worlds of work and education?	70%	30%
8.	Expands the opportunities for exchanges, cooperation and capacity building in higher education and the youth sector worldwide?	95%	5%
9.	Fosters the innovation in educational process and employment opportunities for graduates?	85%	15%
10.	Is an important pillar for good governance in education through the spectrum of some initiatives such as against violence, racism, intolerance, etc.?	80%	20%
	Average percentage	88,5%	11,5%

Source: own elaboration

3) *SWOT analysis*

A large series of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats about the Erasmus programme were highlighted, as follows:

Strengths: diverse and multi-cultural environment, offering the possibility of self-confidence and empowerment; international skills recognition; integrating diverse teaching methods and an EU harmonized curricula; improving relations between students and professors; access to modern and well-equipped students' services.

Weaknesses: incompatibility of basic public administration knowledge in the hosting university; insufficiency of EU financial support; language and communication barriers between students and professors; insufficiency of hosting conditions; insufficient interest from the professors.

Opportunities: expanding personal development horizons; developing social relations; possibilities to continue the studies abroad; experimenting new academic perceptions and evaluation methods; enabling international bonds; stimulating international job-seekers.

Threats: impossibility to cover all expenses; facing risks of language barriers, integration, exams graduation and incapacity to assimilate all information; insufficiency of study materials and extra-activities; insufficiency of staff support.

Regarding the labour insertion opportunities offered by Erasmus programme only two students referred specifically to job/study opportunities, students' career development and creating the conditions to aspire to work in an international environment.

The SWOT analysis reveals the fact that Erasmus students

need

Academic
Financial
Study and accommodation } **SUPPORT**

in order **to achieve**

Personal
Social relations
Knowledge
Career } **DEVELOPMENT**

4. Remarks, future research questions and hypotheses

The empirical study revealed a series of important remarks (R), future research questions (Q) and hypotheses (H), as follows:

A) Applicant student profile

R1: 50% of cases choose Erasmus programme in the academic year of graduation

Q1: Why the majority of students choose the academic year of graduation?

H1: There is the possibility to find a job in the hosting country

R2: There is a significant percentage (10%) of students that do not pass all exams during the Erasmus programme

Q2: Why is it that some students do not pass all exams during the Erasmus programme?

H2: There are some language barriers and insufficient academic and staff support

R3: 85% of cases choose to attend 1 semester for the Erasmus programme

Q3: Why do students choose a length of 1 semester for the Erasmus programme?

H3: There is insufficient financial support from EU funds/ own financial resources

R4: 80% of cases choose to attend the Erasmus programme in Portugal and Mediterranean countries

Q4: Why does the majority of students choose to attend the Erasmus programme in Portugal and Mediterranean countries?

H4: The weather conditions and the affordable living expenses can be important factors in choosing the hosting country (compared with Northern and Western countries).

B) Labour insertion assessments

R5: 65% of cases choose to work in Romania after the Erasmus programme

Q5: Why does the majority of students choose to find a job in Romania after the Erasmus programme?

H5: 1 semester for the Erasmus programme is insufficient to adapt to a new environment and different culture.

R6: Only 5% of Erasmus students work in public sector and 15% are unemployed

Q6: Why is there a significant percentage of work integration of Erasmus students in the public sector?

H6: There is a certain incompatibility level in curricula of public administration field between the partner-universities.

R7: There are no cases of Erasmus students opening a business (0 entrepreneurs)

Q7: Why aren't Erasmus students aiming at opening their own business?

H7: Programmes in public administration field do not offer business sector skills to graduates.

R8: 60% of cases have administrative and executive positions, compared to 20% in managerial positions

Q8: Why does the majority of Erasmus graduates in public administration field have administrative and executive positions?

H8: Graduates of public administration programmes do not hold sufficient managerial skills.

C) Personal statement on Erasmus programme learning outcomes

R9: There is a compliance level of interpersonal competences (average 71%), a relevant compliance level of instrumental and cognitive competences (average 54%) and a low compliance level of systemic and decision-making competences (average 41%) of the partner-universities programmes

Q9: Why is there a significant difference between the specific competences of the partner-universities programmes?

H9: Partner-universities do not cooperate efficiently in developing and standardizing the curricula in public administration field.

R10: 11,5% of cases (percentage average) consider that the Erasmus programme did not satisfy all their education and employment needs

Q10: Why is there a significant percentage of students considering that the Erasmus programme did not satisfy their education and employment needs?

H10: The Erasmus programme (LLP) is not addressed to all skills gaps and does not foster entrepreneurship through the spectrum of curricula and qualifications.

In its strategy on the modernisation of higher education the Commission highlighted the need to provide more opportunities for students to gain skills through study or training abroad. The EU target for overall student mobility is at least 20% by the end of the decade. Currently, around 10% of EU students study or train abroad with the support of public and private means. Around 5% receive an Erasmus grant³

Erasmus Impact Study (European Commission, 2014) confirms the fact that EU student exchange scheme boosts employability and job mobility. Young people who study or train abroad not only gain knowledge in specific disciplines, but also strengthen key transversal skills which are highly valued by employers. Graduates with international experience fare much better on the job market. They are half as likely to experience long-term unemployment compared with those who have not studied or trained abroad and, five years after graduation, their unemployment rate is 23% lower. The study, compiled by independent experts, is the largest of its kind and received feedback from nearly 80 000 respondents including students and businesses.

"The findings of the Erasmus Impact study are extremely significant, given the context of unacceptably high levels of youth unemployment in the EU. The message is clear: if you study or train abroad, you are more likely to increase your job prospects. The new Erasmus+ programme will offer EU grants to four million people between 2014 and 2020, allowing them to experience life in another country through studies, training, teaching or volunteering," (Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth)

Students benefitting from Erasmus funding can choose to study or take up a traineeship abroad. The report reveals that more than one in three Erasmus trainees is offered a position at the enterprise where they do their traineeship. Erasmus trainees are also more entrepreneurial than their stay-at-home counterparts: 1 in 10 has started their own company and more than 3 out of 4 plan to, or can imagine doing so. They can also expect faster career advancement; staff with international experience is given greater professional responsibility according to 64% of employers.

Erasmus not only improves career prospects, it also offers students broader horizons and social links. 40% have changed their country of residence or work at least once

³ This figure is based on latest available data from Eurostat for 2011-12, which shows the number of graduates was over 5.35 million in the Erasmus participating countries and the number of Erasmus students was nearly 253 000.

since graduation, almost double the number of those who were not mobile during studies. While 93% of students with international experience can imagine living abroad in the future, this is the case for only 73% of those who stay in the same country during their studies.

The new Erasmus+ programme will provide opportunities to go abroad for 4 million people, including 2 million higher education students and 300 000 higher education staff in the next seven years (2014-2020). In addition, the programme will fund 135 000 student and staff exchanges involving non-European partner countries. Erasmus+ will be even more accessible thanks to increased linguistic support, more flexible rules and additional support for people with special needs, from disadvantaged backgrounds or from remote areas.

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