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erasmus + insights

Digitalisation.

Inclusion.

Sustainability.

Dear Readers,



The corona pandemic became the main topic for us all in 2020, and will surely also define 2021. Quick reaction by the EU Commission enabled flexible solutions to be found for Erasmus+ students both at the start of the pandemic in the summer semester 2020 and as it progressed. Digital and blended formats played a major role in this. It was even possible to commence a virtual Erasmus+ stay for the first time in the winter semester 2020/2021.

At the start of the winter semester and even in the first weeks of the new year, as members of the National Agency, we frequently discussed how we should provide information on Erasmus+ in times of a corona crisis. Is it legitimate to travel abroad during a global pandemic? We all agreed: protecting participants should be our top priority — health comes before everything else. That is why we continue to advise against travel to risk areas with high levels of corona.

Beyond that, one thing is clear to us: Erasmus+ is systemically relevant for Europe. European cohesion, European identity and European interchange are now more important than ever. We are therefore delighted that conclusion of the negotiations on a multiannual financial framework in December 2020 has set the decisive course for a new Erasmus+ programme. A total of over 28 billion euros for the next seven years means we can strengthen the European Education Area, enable greater participation in the Erasmus+ programme and establish the European Universities of the future. As the German Erasmus+ National Agency for Higher Education we look forward to making our contribution to improving our common coexistence in Europe.

Last year, we prepared German higher education institutions for the thematic priorities in the new programme generation. We used three editions of our print magazine *DAADeuroletter* to address the transversal and central topics of the future: digitalisation, inclusion and sustainability. We have selected some related articles and interviews from our publications, which will give you an insight into our multi-layered activities. There is also the 'Forum' in which you will find additional articles, including, for instance, a study on the career significance of experience abroad, and an interview with Dr Dorothea Rüland, long-standing DAAD Secretary General, who began her well-deserved retirement at the end of January.

Some articles were slightly adapted and updated for this edition, one was rewritten. Other articles remain unchanged. We have marked these with the date of their initial publication.

The first articles deal with digitalisation, a topic that has increasingly attracted public attention due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Four articles provide you with information on subjects like the initiatives and accompanying measures being implemented as part of Erasmus+, and the associated options and opportunities the programme offers regarding the internationalisation of teaching, studies and administration.

In four other articles we highlight the various dimensions of inclusion within higher education, 'a complex challenge', as so fittingly stated in the subtitle to the introductory article. We also introduce, among other things, the instruments that Erasmus+ provides for people with disabilities and to support student who are parents.

Finally, six articles cover different aspects of sustainability. The spectrum ranges from the Green Deal, with which the European Union has put sustainability at the core of its growth strategy, and an interview with French MEP Laurence Farreng, who has presented measures to 'green' Erasmus+ as the rapporteur of the European Parliament's Culture and Education Committee, to funding opportunities for sustainable cooperation projects under the education programme.

We hope we can present you with fascinating insights into the Erasmus+ programme and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Enjoy an interesting read!

Dr Stephan Geifes

Director National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation at DAAD

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International exchange and mutual recognition of all academic achievements are the core idea behind the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). A lot has been implemented so far, some aspects are still pending. DAAD is responsible for the operational implementation of the Bologna Hub Peer Support, a support programme for higher education institutions aiming to align their structures to the Bologna Key Commitments.

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Young people studying abroad want to have their achievements recognised by their home institution. Does that always work smoothly? DAAD regularly reviews the recognition of so-called ECTS credit points. Its most recent study was published in autumn 2020.

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At the beginning of July 2020, the European Commission announced the results of the second pilot call for European Universities. Of the 62 submitted projects, 24 were selected. The total number of alliances supported under the latest Erasmus+ project line has now risen to 41.

68 'Internationalisation has never been as important as it is today'. An interview with Dr Dorothea Rüland, DAAD Secretary General

Dorothea Rüland talked with us about the effects of the Corona pandemic on academic exchange, the changes it caused in international university cooperation and at DAAD, and she reflects on the opportunities and limitations of digitalisation. She also shares with us her insights and views on Erasmus+.



Digitalisation

Digital transformation in higher education

'Digitalisation' has experienced a significant surge in the university context, not least due to the corona pandemic. Even before that, however, digital innovations in the handling and design of mobility were planned for the new Erasmus+ programme generation.

Blended mobility and blended intensive programmes will also complement classic physical mobility. Digitalisation is an important building block on the path to wider social participation in the Erasmus+ programme – one of the European Commission's declared objectives. In connection with the topics 'inclusion' and 'sustainability', digitalisation has a particularly important leverage function in exploiting the full potential.

Under the umbrella of the European Student Card Initiative, the exchange of digital learning agreements via the Erasmus Without Paper network will gradually make administration more digital from the 2021 call onwards.

NA DAAD expects to use concerted cooperation among experts to continue to provide an extensive range of information, and to support higher education institutions in their successful implementation of the new Erasmus+ programme.

Regarding the Progressive Digitalisation of Erasmus+

Initiatives, tasks, accompanying measures

TEXT: MARTIN SCHIFFERINGS, MAXIMILIAN PINNEN

Digitalisation of the Erasmus+ programme is one of the major topics relating to the future of collaboration among European higher education institutions. And in some parts it is already a reality. Numerous digital activities have been tested over recent years to ensure they can be applied across the entire Erasmus+ programme from 2021. The European Student Card Initiative (ESCI), Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) and the Online Learning Agreement (OLA) are probably the best known initiatives in this context.

The European Commission has confirmed that these are interlinked and will be obligatory in the new Erasmus+ programme. However, not everything will happen in one fell swoop. Introduction will occur in multiple stages from 2021 onwards.

The planned initiatives are explained below and set in relation to one another.

Digital transformation extends beyond Erasmus

It is crucial that German higher education institutions already vigorously tackle the preparation and implementation of a digital infrastructure so that they will be in a position to meet Erasmus+ requirements in the future. It is also important to emphasise that the required adaptations extend far beyond the introduction of digital instruments or the use of digital portals. The necessary transformation reaches deep into the administrative structures of higher education institutions and requires a critical examination of procedures and potential for change. Existing internal processes for handling student mobility, for example, need to be analysed and prepared for digital interconnectivity. This is no simple task and can certainly only be mastered if the relevant internal structures cooperate closely. Management, international office, faculty, examination office, data centre - the support of many people is required and there will be no blueprint solutions.

Heading towards a European Education Area

We need to widen our focus to understand the objectives that the European Commission is pursuing with the digitalisation of the Erasmus+ programme. Against the backdrop of the overall social developments in Europe, the European Commission used a summit of the European heads of state and government in Gothenburg in November 2017 to present its vision and specific steps for creating a European Education Area by 2025. Its intention is 'to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for jobs, social fairness, active citizenship as well as a means to experience European identity in all its diversity'. ¹

This does not initially sound very digital. But if we consider the specific steps involved in creating a European Education Area, then we immediately come across 'buzzwords' in the current debate about Erasmus Digital. These include the 'mutual recognition of higher education and school leaving diplomas', but also 'making mobility for all a reality' and the introduction of 'an EU Student Card to offer a new user-friendly way to store information on a person's academic records'. ²

Multiple projects, three objectives

As described above, establishing a digital infrastructure is undoubtedly one of the most complex challenges faced by higher education institutions in Europe in recent decades. The fact that digitalisation of the Erasmus+programme is not driven centrally, but rather via a large number of individual projects, does not make it any easier to assess the necessary adjustments. Erasmus Without Paper, Online Learning Agreement, Erasmus+ App, European Student Card Initiative, MyAcademicID, EMREX, Erasmus+ Dashboard – the list is long and it is sometimes difficult to keep abreast of developments in the individual initiatives. If we attempt to place the initiatives in a hierarchy, however, it becomes clear that the Europe-

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture, The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017, available online at https://tip.de/egat [27 January 2021].

² European Commission, Towards a European Education Area by 2025, Weekly Meeting, Strasbourg, France, 14 November 2017, available online at https://trp.de/761q [21 January 2021].

an Student Card Initiative stands above everything else. No secret has been made of the fact that this is not an additional student card. It is not even a card, but rather an initiative to realise the three main goals of digitising European student exchange.

Single online entry point for coordinators

The aim is to create an infrastructure for the digital exchange of student data. This should make it possible to manage student mobility completely digitally. Connectivity to existing European Commission databases, such as Mobility Tool+, should also be possible.

Single online entry point for students

Students should have central access to basic information and push notifications about their stay abroad. They should be able to use the system to directly apply for mobility and also to complete and process the required learning agreement online. Access to the European Commission's online linguistic support (OLS) should also be included. Finally, students should have access to services offered by the respective (host) higher education institution and the possibility of ECTS credits acquired abroad being automatically recognised.

Unique student e-identifier

The introduction of a European student eID is intended to allow the secure exchange of personal data and acquired qualifications. In future, enrolment at higher education institutions in Europe could be handled completely online. Students could register online for many of the higher education institution's own services and use some of them on their smartphones.

Another point that is important to the European Commission in this context is a very similar one: student ID cards that include the above functionalities should be marked as an ESC by means of a hologram. This would enable every student who holds such a card to be recognised as an EU citizen.

The European Commission is relying on two central instruments to bring the three objectives of the European Student Card Initiative into operation: EWP and MyAcademicID.

Let us summarise

If you have not yet had any interaction with the available tools, this should happen as soon as possible. It allows you to become familiar with their functionalities and to integrate them in your higher education institution's existing IT infrastructure – many of the initiatives are beneficial even beyond Erasmus+.

At the same time, it is important to stress that it is not the use of the individual programmes and portals that will be obligatory, but connectivity to the EWP Network and your compliance with the (data) standards formulated for the European Student Card Initiative (and its associated instruments). The instruments developed on behalf of the European Commission, such as OLA, the Inter-Institutional Agreement Manager (IIAM) or the Erasmus+ Dashboard, should be seen as reference implementations. In other words, using these tools generally guarantees compliance with the standards formulated for Erasmus+. However, implementation of digital agreements can occur equally well using other (commercial and in-house) software solutions.

We will accompany you on your journey

The National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation (NA DAAD) takes the digitalisation challenges posed by the Erasmus+ programme very seriously and provides support with introducing the digital initiatives in the form of various information and advisory services. We want to concentrate not so much on individual instruments and their use, but rather on addressing and providing support with the required digital transformation within higher education institutions.

In line with the established Erasmus experts that NA DAAD has for many years made available to German higher education institutions as experienced contacts in relation to issues and problems in day-to-day and strategic programme implementation, we are currently establishing an extended network that will focus on the digital infrastructure challenges posed by Erasmus+. NA DAAD will work jointly with this network and other experts to devise a training course in preparation for the new programme generation.

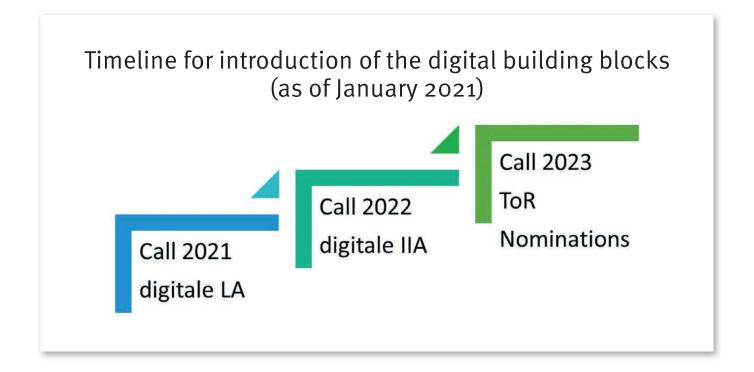
We wish to emphasise here once again that we do not see digitalisation under Erasmus+ as an end in itself. It involves a structural and procedural transformation in the administration of the Erasmus+ programme – and moreover the establishment of a 'digital mindset'. We want to tackle this important task in close collaboration with you, and throughout the year we will organise various practical workshops, web-based seminars, and conferences on this topic.

Martin Schifferings

Section EU₀₅ – Communication and Student Engagement for Europe

Maximilian Pinnen

Section EU02 - Mobility of Individuals



An overview of the initiatives

1. The European Student Card Initiative is intended to enable each student to easily and securely provide electronic identification and register at higher education institutions in Europe during their stay abroad, eliminating the need for local enrolment and reducing bureaucracy. The plan is for this initiative to be fully rolled out during 2021 in all higher education institutions participating in the future Erasmus programme. Its use will only be obligatory from 2025 onwards. The European Commission sees the ESCI as an umbrella initiative that amalgamates Erasmus Without Paper (EWP), the MyAcademicID project, and the European Student Card pilot project (ESC).



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- **a. Erasmus Without Paper** (target group = higher education institutions): EWP involves a network structure for the rapid exchange of Erasmus+ mobility data between existing databases. Use of this EWP network will gradually become obligatory in the forthcoming Erasmus+ programme generation from 2021 onwards.
- **b. MyAcademicID** (target group = students): this project builds on the ESCI pilot project. Its objective is to enable students to identify themselves by means of an eID and to enhance existing physical student ID cards with elements of the European Student ID Card (emblem, QR code, for example).

Further applications

- 2. The Erasmus+ Dashboard (target group = higher education institutions) is a free-of-charge online platform for managing mobility data. It also functions as a communication platform for Erasmus students, and additionally enables higher education institutions to send group emails and appointments, and to distribute notifications via the Erasmus+ Mobile App.
- **3. The Online Learning Agreement** (OLA; target groups being higher education institutions/students) enables students (and also higher education institutions) to create and manage learning agreements online.
- **4.** The Erasmus+ Mobile App (target group = students) is intended to support mobile Erasmus+ students with information and functions throughout their stay abroad.
- 5. **EMREX** (target group = students) is a network in which students can use a standardised data format (ELMO) to start and authorise the exchange of their data and performance records between higher education institutions and systems (degree and credit mobility) for international mobility, admission and recognition procedures, recruiting, and so on.

Further information

Details on the various initiatives as well as links to the corresponding websites are available on the NA DAAD website Erasmus+DIGITAL via https://trp.de/2im8.

Strengthening Exchange, Learning from Partners, Creating Synergies

The transnational policy dialogue in the OpenU project

TEXT: KATHARINA ENGEL*

Higher education institutions are engaged in the process of digital transformation. Networking, mobilities and cooperation among institutions are to a considerable extent moving online. In this context, Erasmus+ policy support projects provide the opportunity to feed evidence from innovative experimentations at

higher education institutions directly into the political discourse. Thus, European cooperation can contribute to more effective policies, systemic improvement and sustainable funding strategies for digitalisation and internationalisation processes.

The Erasmus+ project 'Online Pedagogical Resources for European Universities' (OpenU) under Erasmus+ Key Action 3 'Support for policy reform - Initiatives for policy innovation' is aimed precisely at such transnational cooperation. Since February 2019, ministries from six European countries and the Erasmus Student Network have been supporting the technical develop-

ment and testing of a digital hub, which intends to strengthen cooperation, online teaching and learning and mobility among European Universities. Delegated by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the **DAAD** coordinates the policy dialogue in the project with a focus on issues relating to digital internationalisation.



Partners in the OpenU policy cluster:

- The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)
- The German Academic Exchange Service (assigned coordinating role)
- The Flemish Community, Belgium
- The Ministry of Science and Innovation, Spain
- The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, France
- Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, Latvia
- Direção-Geral do Ensino Superior, Portugal
- Erasmus Student Network AISBL, Belgium

^{*} An early version of the text was written by Saskia Weißenbach.

Total funding	2,664,880 million euros (75% EU funding)
Duration	20 February 2020–19 December 2022
Partners	21, including 6 ministries of education, 11 universities, 3 network organisations and DAAD
Coordination	Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

Digital internationalisation?

There are numerous digitalisation projects and initiatives addressing higher education and international mobility, both at EU level (e.g. the European Student Card Initiative or the European Commission's Europass) and in national and regional contexts. Until now, however, there has rarely been any systematic consideration of dynamic developments at the interface between digitalisation and internationalisation at the level of educational policymaking. Yet dialogue and knowledge transfer across borders and sectors are needed if longer-term national and European solutions are to be devised and some projects to be merged. The European Commission uses Erasmus+ policy support projects – like OpenU – to promote such transnational cooperation under the leadership of high-level public authorities – and in the context of current EU policy priorities.

A (digital) European Education Area

Building on the 'Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training' (ET 2020), which supported the EU member states in their first joint initiatives, the European Commission adopted two key initiatives in September 2020:

Firstly, an updated vision of the European Education Area to be achieved by 2025. The policy considers six dimensions that can be further improved by means of European cooperation: quality, inclusion and gender equality, green and digital transitions, teachers, higher education, and a stronger Europe in the world. In the context of higher education, the focus is on developing a policy framework that allows seamless mobility and close cross-border cooperation between universities – as promoted specifically in the European Universities Initiative.

Secondly, the new edition of the Digital Education Action Plan for the period 2021–2027, which links two key priorities for a strategic, longer-term approach to 'resetting education and training for the digital age': 1) fostering a high-performing digital education ecosystem, that is to say building infrastructure, improving connectivity and deploying digital technologies more effectively in education as well as educating teaching staff to be digitally competent; and 2) developing digital skills and competences for the digital and green transformation. Everyone in Europe should have access to high-quality, inclusive digital education and possess the basic digital skills to enable them to develop personally, exercise their rights and contribute to society in a digital world.

The Action Plan is explicitly presented as the European Commission's 'call to action for stronger cooperation at European level' and as a 'co-ordinated policy response at EU level with actions, investment, and support measures designed to have greater impact than isolated initiatives at Member State level'. The relevance of the European Universities Initiative is highlighted once again with regard to their mission to establish inter-university campuses in both virtual and face-to-face formats, thus introducing innovative models of digital higher education.

The OpenU project has a strong link to the European Universities Initiative: since two university alliances are part of the project consortium: Una Europa¹ and EDUC

¹ https://www.una-europa.eu/[23 March 2021].

(European Digital UniverCity)². A total of 21 European partners collaborate in the OpenU project to develop a digital infrastructure that is tested in these two university alliances: The BLOOM hub shall make cooperation in the university alliances easier, support their joint provision of online learning and teaching, foster mobility in virtual and blended formats, and facilitate administrative procedures within and between the institutions.

The advantages and disadvantages of the BLOOM hub and also the impact of the institutional and national policy frameworks on working with the hub will be tested by the two European University alliances in the project. The University of Potsdam evaluates these experimentations, the results of which provide the basis for the policy dialogue among the ministries of education involved in the project.

Promoting dialogue and deriving policy recommendations

In OpenU, high-level authorities are directly included in the project process. The exchange and mutual learning among the six ministries of education and the Erasmus Student Network in the Policy Cluster have a specific purpose and are linked to tasks in the iterative development of the BLOOM hub's: Synergies between OpenU and ongoing projects in the participating member states and at European level are identified, proven educational policy practices are compared, and new strategies for achieving digitalisation and internationalisation objectives are tested via the hub. By the end of the project, the policy cluster will deliver recommendations for European and national policymaking based on the findings of the dialogue process and the results of the independent evaluation of the hub, thereby providing for evidence-based policymaking. Looking more closely into the policy cluster's activities: which formats are used in the policy dialogue?

From national...

In addition to the policy cluster's bi-monthly virtual meetings, physical meetings of the high-level authorities take place at intervals of 4 to 6 months. Each ministry in the project hosts one of the dialogue events and sets the agenda for the exchange according to national priorities. Project partners and relevant national stakeholders are invited, to examine the respective national developments and to establish links with the current status of the OpenU project. Which political agendas in digital internationalisation are already in place or are being formulated on the regional or national level? Which digitalisation projects at higher education institutions, in society or in the country's private sector are particularly interesting with regard to the OpenU project? The interim results of experimentation and evaluation are shared and there is room for discussion on how to respond to the findings.

The insights gained at the dialogue events from the joint discussion of the evaluation and from the exchange between all participants are collated and included in a report. Thus, results of the dialogue process gradually feed into the policy recommendations that will be handed over to the European Commission and the public at the end of the project.

... to European

A change of perspective towards the European level is being made in the series of public **web seminars** that the DAAD is planning and organising. The policy cluster jointly decides on the current issues and developments in 'digital higher education and internationalisation' that should be the focus of these online events. Ministries and interested stakeholders will therefore have the opportunity to gain insights into the constantly changing innovation landscape at the European level.

² https://educalliance.eu/[23 March 2021].

Learning from each other and creating added value for European higher education institutions is what the OpenU project stands for. Dialogue allows for different perspectives − national and European − to be reconciled and contemplated in a forward-looking manner. Evidence-based policymaking is promoted and the ground is prepared for the further implementation of the BLOOM hub − beyond the OpenU project's duration and its project consortium. ■

Katharina Engel
Section So1 –
Digitalisation



Digitisation and Internationalisation in Teaching and Studies

Opportunities and possibilities of Erasmus+

TEXT: BEATE KÖRNER

Internationalisation now places far greater demands on higher education institutions than it did a few years ago. New demands have been added to teaching, studies and internationalisation at home in relation to the exchange of students and lecturers, and to the implementation of projects. Digitisation is also playing an ever more important role within internationalisation, be it in the development and distribution of digital learning content in an international classroom or in the inclusion of digital components for the preparation, implementation and follow-up of students' and lecturers' stays abroad.

Digital elements – also in Erasmus+ (2014–2020)

Erasmus+ had already set itself the objective of using digital elements to advance internationalisation in all areas of education within the programme generation (2014–2020). The various Erasmus+ project funding lines, such as strategic partnerships, knowledge alliances, but also the area of 'Capacity Building in the field of higher education' or policy support, continue to promote the use of e-learning and blended learning within teaching to encourage the internationalisation of higher education institutions. An equally important role in overcoming gaps and discrepancies in relation to the skills and competence of learners is played by the development, testing and implementation of flexible and modular course designs, and by increasing the attractiveness of curricula in terms of problem-based learning methods, information and communication technology (ICT) applications, and collaborative practices, including cooperation between higher education institutions and companies.

The action plan for digital education

This is accompanied by the new Digital Education Action Plan adopted by the European Commission in autumn 2020, which builds on the Digital Education Action Plan¹ of 2018–2020. This new action plan includes two priorities: a) fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem and b) enhancing digital skills and competences for digital transformation. These will in each case be supported by appropriate measures, instruments and various agendas and frameworks to help EU Member States seize the opportunities and overcome the challenges of education in the digital age.

These funding opportunities have been intensively used at German higher education institutions since 2014. From 2014 to 2020, 160 Erasmus+ projects with German participation promoted internationalisation with the help of digital elements both within Europe and in support of capacity building in emerging and developing countries.

In the case of Erasmus+ strategic partnerships funded by NA DAAD, e-learning and the use of ICT-based methods and instruments have been among the top three priority topics from the outset. These have a huge bandwidth. They range from the use of digital media in architecture at the University of Kiel ('Ancient cities. Creating a Digital Learning Environment on Cultural Heritage') to earthquake research at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar ('Forecast Engineering: From Past Design to Future Decisions') and projects relating to the recognition of virtual mobility skills at Beuth University of Applied Sciences Berlin ('openVM: Opening Education for Developing, Assessing and Recognising Virtual Mobility Skills in Higher Education') to the European Virtual Campus at Munich University of Applied Sciences, where students learn how to ward off cyberattacks, for example.

¹ Details can be found at https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en [11 February 2020].



Figure EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Many of these projects benefit not only students and lecturers at the respective partner higher education institutions. Thanks to cooperation across educational sectors, for instance, they also have an impact in schools, vocational training and in society. This is also the declared objective of Erasmus+ funding.

Future

In autumn 2020, NA DAAD launched a transnational cooperation activity entitled 'Erasmus+ Projects: Teaching and Learning in a Digital Age', and also took a look at the future design of the new generation of programmes (2021–2027) with regard to the topic 'Internationalisation and Digitisation'.' Even if some points have not yet been finalised, it is already clear that this topic will assume an even greater role. This relates to the comprehensive digitisation of programme instruments (such as Erasmus Without Paper) and is also reflected in all areas of education and key actions.³

Beate Körner
Section EU03 —
Partnerships and Cooperation Projects

² See also Transnational Cooperation Activity – Erasmus+ Projects: Teaching and Learning in a Digital age – National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation – DAAD.

³ See European Commission, Commission adopts proposal for next Erasmus+ programme 2021–2027, 30 May 2018, available online at https://trp.de/1fze [11 February 2020].

A Mobile Companion for Your Stay Abroad

The entdecker (discoverer) app from Leipzig University

TEXT: KATHARINA PINGEL

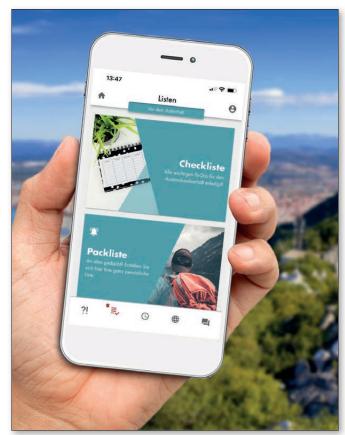
'Best buddy' for your adventures abroad

'You have to prepare yourself really well for a stay abroad during your studies, observe deadlines and take care that you don't forget anything. So it's helpful if you don't have to do it all on your own,' says Katja Richter, who was in Italy for a semester during her bachelor's degree course. At that time, she would have liked to have had a handy assistant on her smartphone to provide all the information and help she needed for her stay abroad.

Since January 2021, there has been such a companion for students at Leipzig University.¹ Almost 500 students have now downloaded the app from the App Store free of charge and with guaranteed data security. Katja Richter is enthusiastic. 'I organised all the information in the app, adapted it to my requirements and made sure it's well structured,' says the student, who now has a master's degree in communication and media studies and is just beginning to prepare for her next semester abroad. Such contactless planning via a mobile application is a great advantage during a pandemic.

Smart all-rounder

Whether it's studies, an internship, a specialist course or a language course, the *entdecker* app contains content for all four types of stay. Students can use the app before, during and after their mobility. 'Students can now click through the app even before they come to me for advice. This gives them an individualised overview of their options. They have lots of relevant information at their fingertips, which we can then go through



in detail during our session,' explains Friederike Fuchs,

consultant for exchange and funding opportunities in

Photo ©: Uni Leipzig

the International Centre. The mobile app links various digital communication channels, such as the central website of Leipzig University and its social media sites, and expands tried-and-tested analogue information and consultancy services.

¹ Further information about the app and its advertising clip is available via www.uni-leipzig.de/entdecker-app.

Filtered content for better visibility

After downloading, those interested in mobility go through separate steps to create a personal profile, which then individualises the app. To do this, they simply need to decide what type of stay they are seeking, what mobility phase they are in and whether they are going to a European or a non-European country. Users receive content specifically tailored to their situation and mobility phase. Voluntary input of their study subject allows the information to be further specified in the app.

The app is thus personalised depending on the profile setting. A feed tailored to the student will be created containing news from the university, current calls for applications, links to further information, and various videos and articles. Students can use the FAQ function to find answers to frequently asked questions and keep track of important to-dos with interactive checklists and personal packing lists. They can enter regular appointments in a weekly overview and they will be shown relevant contacts.

Discoverer stories - a highlight of the app

The so-called discoverer stories ('Entdeckerstorys') make up a large part of the app. These are field reports from other students who have already been abroad and give an account of the organisation and planning of their stay, their impressions at the higher education institution, but also about local life in that location. The stories can be filtered according to the type of stay abroad, field of study, degree, degree course, countries and cities, so that the required information can be provided.

These articles convey authenticity and can motivate other students to go abroad themselves. They also offer first-hand tips to help students make decisions about the right type of stay abroad. 'The many experiences of other students let me know what I need to be aware of in some countries or cities, or give me information on certain courses at partner higher education institutions. This can be very specific information that is otherwise difficult to find,' explains Katja Richter.

In addition, users can use the app not only to search and read the illustrated discoverer stories, they can also write their own story about their adventure abroad directly in the app – and thus inspire others to plan a visit abroad. The discoverer stories are also available on the Leipzig University website (link: https://www.uni-leipzig.de/entdeckerstorys/). ■



Inclusion

Participation: an observation of the state of affairs, activities and, last but not least, the people at the centre of the issue

The 2021–2027 programme generation intends to enable even more Europeans to participate in Erasmus more easily than before. This policy objective is deeply embedded in the new programme and backed by extensive measures. In particular, the programme now addresses those it has not reached in the past due to their personal or social situation or because of structural factors.

Over the years, NA DAAD has already systematically improved its assistance for disabled participants or students who go abroad with children. In anticipation of simplified framework conditions, these groups will be even more effectively included. There are also new social support supplements for target groups that are worried about travelling abroad for financial reasons. Moreover, NA DAAD is working on an additional social grant from the European Social Fund.

Over the coming years, NA DAAD will also establish a network of Erasmus coordinators, stakeholders and student representatives based on an independent strategy and provide them with additional funds to achieve this.

Social Inclusion in Higher Education

On the status quo and the prospects of a complex challenge

TEXT: MARKUS SYMMANK

Erasmus in Germany thus far sees inclusion in higher education as supporting people with disabilities and students with children travelling abroad. The new generation of programmes sees the term being significantly broadened: Enhancing social inclusion and fostering diversity is one of the four thematic pillars. This is reason enough to address the challenges that need to be overcome, so that more people – in the context of social inclusion – can participate in education and experience Europe in a positive way in the future.

A brief historical retrospective

The National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation (NA DAAD) started offering general support as early as 1999, which provided the first European-wide support for people with disabilities in the Erasmus+ programme. At the same time, NA DAAD began to focus on this group in a targeted manner via events and publications. The result of all these efforts is a large number of relevant projects in the context of partnerships (Key Actions 2) and policy support (Key Action 3), which is impressively demonstrated in the European results database (http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/).



A handrail with Braille at Hamburg Central Station Photo: KMJ, CC BY-SA 3.0, de.wikipedia.org

In 2007, an important aspect of social participation was added to the understanding of inclusion aimed solely at people with disabilities. This was the funding of students with a child or children. This measure can be seen as a first step toward the *inclusive turn*, which is apparent in the current generation of programmes and has been implemented even more consistently since the beginning of 2021. The declared aim is to remove all social barriers that restrict or hinder participation.

This movement – away from the previous understanding with clear target groups towards an expanded concept of inclusion – has far-reaching consequences for Erasmus+ and the work of national agencies, not least that of NA DAAD. The participating countries are now obliged to broaden the base, both nationally and by means of Erasmus funding.¹ The first issue here is the students' situations.

¹ A look at institutions and organisations outside the higher education sector could be helpful in formulating solutions for this task. One example of this is the activities of Aktion Mensch (from its foundation in 1964 to 2000: Aktion Sorgenkind). Their funding projects demonstrate how a transition from integration to inclusivity can succeed in the workplace: the aim is no longer just to integrate a group of people with disabilities into the workplace, but also to include them in regular organisations and companies.

The link between international mobility and the propensity for mobility

Surveys conducted under Erasmus, in other words reports from participants, and the social surveys commissioned by the Deutsches Studentenwerk (German National Association for Student Affairs – DSW) on the economic and social situation of students at German higher education institutions reveal a number of reasons why students are prevented from travelling abroad. In the last social survey in which this question was examined in a separate section,² the additional financial burden, loss of earning opportunities, difficulties in finding accommodation and fears of long-term distancing from the social environment are identified as some of the inhibiting factors.

To understand the financial situation, it is particularly important that we consider the 'employment rate during the semester', which has increased significantly since 1991. In 2016 – the survey period for the last social survey – the proportion of students at universities of applied sciences who worked was 65 percent, at universities 69 percent. This means that two-thirds of students depend on jobs they would have to give up – at least temporarily – if they were to undertake a stay abroad. So this need to earn money while studying results in reservations about undertaking a stay abroad. Among the students who 'do not plan a study-related stay abroad', two-thirds of all respondents anticipate additional financial burdens (24 percent 'strongly' and 44 percent 'very strongly').

Necessary changes

When we consider these barriers to student mobility abroad, Germany would have to reduce or even eliminate social barriers to mobility on several levels. First, sufficient financing would have to be created abroad, whereby 'sufficient' in this context means having the equivalent of a German income while abroad. This includes benefits such as BAföG (Germany's Federal Training Assistance Act for students), continued payment by parents, and also the possibility of earning an income from part-time jobs, which is particularly important for German students, at least for the period of international mobility.

A similarly major challenge is the provision of accommodation. The Erasmus system works with options in which higher education institutions arrange exchange places with their partners to develop a wide range of services for their students. Not all exchange places are taken up. So if we attempt to arrange accommodation in cooperation with partner universities and places are not taken up, we are keeping open capacities for international students that are urgently needed nationally. Reducing the number of possible exchange places conversely reduces academic and regional offerings for interested students. The balance between the figures for residential accommodation based on experience and our students' commitment and flexibility is what is currently being maintained. This requires personal tolerance and a willingness to compromise.

² See Elke Middendorff et al., Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Studierenden in Deutschland 2016 (The Economic and Social Situation of Students in Germany in 2016). Social Survey 21 for the Deutsches Studentenwerk conducted by the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies. Berlin: Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) 2017, pp. 19–23, available online at http://www.sozialerhebung.de/download/21/Soz21_hauptbericht.pdf [5 May 2020].

Concern about leaving a social environment and dropping out of networks is also something that cannot be entirely dismissed, despite social media. During their six months or year abroad, students can go through huge developments that alienate them from their surroundings once they return. It can be helpful here to offer students seminars to prepare them for such developments and, after returning, reintegration aids that extend beyond academic ones. It would be preferable to be able to respond to complex social changes with individual support, but this presupposes appropriate personnel resources in the higher education institutions of origin. Such considerations would result in massive financial demands for the Erasmus programme.

What is to be done?

An improvement in social participation depends on various factors. Improved resources always play a role, so that success depends to some extent on the programme's amenities. If they are available to individuals, funding rates increase. If they are offered to higher education institutions and mobility consortia, supervision resources are available. But who are those individuals for whom financing and supervision can be considered success factors? In the jargon of the Erasmus programme, how can less represented groups be described?

At this point, a balancing act must be organised between addressing the mainstream and decision-making for individuals. The new Erasmus programme is based on simplification through digitisation and regulatory reduction. The simpler, then the more general the requirements and test rules for the use of public funding. The more individual (and thus higher) the funding, the more formally a decision must be secured. If it is not, the – necessary – betterment of some programme participants will be contestable.

Socially disadvantaged groups will receive more support in coordination with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and with the close involvement of higher education institutions. While the allocation of social criteria – as occurs in the United Kingdom – is viewed positively, and is required by the system in the interests of reduced tuition fees, in Germany we historically struggle with an externalised attribution of characteristics. It is important to develop a manageable mix of self-declaration and verification.

The good level of preparation at many higher education institutions in Germany is helpful. After the internationalisation audit of the German Rectors' Conference and a close look at their objectives and target groups, many have also undergone a diversity audit by the Stifterverband. Topics such as 'diversity' and 'internationalisation' have long since been on the agenda at management level. Independent institutions such as DoBuS at the Technical University of Dortmund (the Department of Disability and Studies at the Centre for Higher Education) are exemplary, although rare.



Credit: Fachhochschule Hildesheim, Holzminden, Göttingen already has 17 gender-neutral toilets installed across its sites

The role of the NA

It is also expedient to similarly discuss the issue of inclusive internationalisation with regard to internal or semi-internal bodies at higher education institutions. These include disability officers, social counselling centres, the student association and interest groups. NA DAAD is to systematically support this dialogue in higher education institutions, federal states and the regions.

At the national level – along with the Erasmus+ Programme Committee and the stakeholders represented there – the National Agency is to develop an inclusion strategy for tertiary education that is in line with the European Commission's stipulation and will appropriately transpose the framework strategy it has developed for Germany.

Paradoxically, the coronavirus is also renewing everything here when it brings essential aspects to the surface: the social question as a recalcitrant element of an environment that is trimmed to efficient processes and speed. The dependence of considerable proportions of the student population on part-time jobs is painfully apparent.

Concluding remark

It remains to be seen whether the thematic pillars of the new Erasmus+ programme – sustainability, digitisation, inclusion and participation in democratic life – complement each other, or whether they will attract attention to competition for resources, and whether the transformation will continue through adaptation or change. In any case, this is a good opportunity to utilise the disruptive events of recent months to turn once again toward the individual and to jointly contribute more and more to Europe.

Markus Symmank

Expert in social participation

Guest commentary

'Those who want social inclusion must tackle social imbalances' (June 2020)

By Achim Meyer auf der Heyde*

Duden defines a guest as 'someone who is temporarily in an environment other than their own for specific purposes, especially in a circle of people to which they do not permanently belong'. This definition aptly describes our intention to use guest commentaries in the *DAADeuroletter* to open up perspectives and gain impulses that are not influenced by our everyday work with and for Erasmus+. The

selection criterion behind this is relevance: a united Europe; the international exchange of knowledge, concepts and visions; the challenges that teachers and learners have to face – these are the topics on which we will invite authors to formulate their thoughts.



Photo ©: K. Herschelmann

^{*} This article reflects the author's personal opinion and consequently does not represent the opinion of the National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation.

As an association of the 57 student unions in Germany, we welcome the introduction of a holistic concept of inclusion as stipulated by the EU Commission for the next programme generation from 2021 onwards. Social inclusion, understood as the participation of all people in society in the sense of genuine equality of opportunity, is finally given greater weight.

For a long time now, the German National Association for Student Affairs has been demanding that the social dimension should not merely be invoked in the European Higher Education Area, but grasped and implemented as a central element in establishing a European knowledge society. We strongly welcome the effort to make it easier for learners/students faced with disadvantages in the education system to access existing services via the EU programmes.

The nationwide 57 student unions themselves are an essential and indispensable guarantee of a social dimension within the German higher education system. They serve more than 2.5 million students at over 300 higher education institutions in around 200 higher education cities and are responsible for funding social, health, economic and cultural aspects.

In concrete terms, the student associations offer a wide range of services in the fields of 'higher-education catering', 'affordable living', 'study finance', 'childcare', 'consultancy and placement services', 'international affairs', and 'culture'. These services are always aimed at all students, but they often enable social inclusion and participation for special groups of students, such as students with children or students with disabilities or chronic illness. In other words, this wide range of services offered by the student associations is already ensuring greater equal opportunities in studies.

Nevertheless, we know from our online student surveys on the economic and social situation of students that we can be far from satisfied with the status quo for implementation of equal opportunities and inclusion at higher education institutions. The following examples clearly illustrate the enormous barriers, or at least the complications in relation to participation in European programmes like the Erasmus programme. The situation is worsening as the financial situation of many students continues to deteriorate, especially in these times of the corona pandemic.

Our Social Survey 21 on the economic and social situation of students shows very clearly that financial barriers to the mobility of German students abroad are high and continue to rise: 70 percent of students now anticipate an additional financial burden (in 2012 it was barely two-thirds). Stays abroad now only appear to be possible by means of 'mixed funding': 72 percent of students (in 2012 it was 73 percent) have to rely on parental subsidies. Funding via BAföG has only marginally improved from 28 percent to 30 percent. One positive aspect is the increase in EU scholarships (from 41 to 49 percent) and in German scholarships (from 16 to 18 percent).

But that is obviously insufficient. Many students are already dependent on income from part-time jobs to finance their studies in Germany, and their number is increasing: 68 percent of all students have part-time jobs. An above-average number of students from non-academic homes (69 percent) work part-time. The need to work 'to cover basic living expenses' is stated with above-average frequency by students in the group with a 'lower class' family background (73 percent compared to 43 percent in the group with an 'upper class' family background). In short, the international mobility of German students continues to depend on their family background. The higher the family background, the greater the proportion of those who have been abroad for study purposes.

The loss of income opportunities in their home country excludes a large number of students from participating in programmes like Erasmus, since the lump sum financial support they would receive is too low. The average monthly Erasmus grant was just 336 euros in 2018, which is obviously insufficient to cover accommodation costs in many European cities. A survey of 24,000 students revealed that 70 percent of those surveyed believed the Erasmus grant would only cover half or less of their total costs. A bold increase - in the interest of social inclusion – would enable a larger number of students, especially from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, to participate in the programme.

The situation is rather bleak: we know from our social survey that there has been a decline in international mobility. Mobility rates did admittedly rise from 1991 (20 percent) to 2000 (32 percent), but they have stagnated since then. The recent mobility rate has even declined to just 28 percent — a level from before the Bologna reform! In the case of men (compared to women), students with a migration background ('Bildungsinländer'), repatriates or students with disabilities the situation is even worse.

If the Erasmus programme is to be a key catalyst in producing European citizens who are open-minded, civic and critical of populist approaches, it is crucial that the next programme reaches a greater number of participants and is more inclusive. For 20 years, financial barriers have been the reason why mobility programmes have not been used. Those who work while studying, do not have wealthy parents, or have to take care of relatives, will put down the Erasmus brochure as soon as they see the level of the funding amount. That is why it is vital that the Erasmus grants be reformulated into a simpler system with a universal basis of 850 euros per month*:

- Erasmus is for many the epitome of the European experience, but the way funding is allocated is anything but equal. Grant levels are currently divided into different categories, which are often applied inconsistently between countries. A simplified grant system would permit the programme to be better communicated to future participants and improve transparency for students from a lower socio-economic background.
- The current system sees a significant proportion of the subsidies not even being awarded every year. By determining a minimum grant with the option of a top-up, the remaining funds could be reallocated and provide the necessary support to those who urgently need it.

^{*} This sum is based on the BAföG rate

But even that will not be enough. Funding based on the 'watering can' principle and by lump sums does not assist everyone equally, but rather disadvantages those who have other, greater needs or lower financial and social resources. The Erasmus programme should therefore set up a second funding instrument to address specific social situations in a needs-based manner. The corona pandemic has clearly demonstrated that it does not require large-scale bureaucracy to quickly and decisively help those who need it most.

If we had one wish, what would we change if we could? We would like to see an additional funding line in the coming Erasmus programme, which in a needs-based manner and without major formalities addresses the real social and financial difficulties faced by students who are already struggling during their studies in Germany.

During a pole vaulting competition among equals all the poles are the same length. In the case of a pole vaulting competition among diverse participants – the children of academics and migrants, students with children or without academically educated parents, with depression or physical impairment, with or without a part-time job and with or without good contacts – the poles have to be of varying length. If the Erasmus+ programme does not rise to this challenge, the social imbalance in international mobility will not change in the next 10 years.



Photo ©: K. Herschelmann

Achim Meyer auf der Heyde has been Secretary General of the Deutsches Studentenwerk (German National Association for Student Affairs – DSW) since 2003 and forms the association's Executive Board in this capacity. He is also Vice-President of the European Council for Student Affairs (ECStA) and is currently a member of the Higher Education Council at the universities of Wuppertal and Marburg, the management board of the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband welfare organisation, the Foundation Board of the Stiftung Berufliche Bildung Hamburg as well as the Presidium and the Main Committee of the German Association for Public and Private Welfare (Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge).

In 1980 he became managing director of the Ausbildungswerk Kreuzberg, a project that supports disadvantaged young people, and in 1985 he assumed the same function in the BBJ company group, a consultancy for youth, social welfare, labour markets and educational policy. From 1995 until 2003 he was active as General Director at the ministry for education in Hamburg.

A Significant Step Toward Equal Participation

Preparatory trips for students with severe disabilities

TEXT: PETRA PODLECH

Erasmus+ has an inclusive approach and wants to enable as many students as possible to enjoy a stay abroad, regardless of their personal situation. Since 2019, students with disabilities (from a degree of disability [DoD] of 50 and above) have therefore been able to apply for grants towards preparatory trips for previously agreed student or internship mobility.

Reason and purpose

A stay abroad usually represents a major challenge for all young people. This is even more true for people with disabilities. Even if the host institution can promise barrier-free access and good supervision, there are also many things in daily life that should be individually assessed and tested, such as the living environment, and accessibility on campus or on public transport. Students and interns with severe disabilities (from a DoD of 50) thus have the opportunity to assess and become acquainted with the local conditions in relation to their individual requirements ahead of their planned Erasmus+ stay abroad that has already been agreed with the home institution.

Funding can also be awarded to an accompanying person. This person should support the students during their journey, for example by helping them to check routes and by accompanying them during preparatory mobility training on site. Assistance can also be provided with administrative preparations (arrangements at the higher education institution, filling out forms, and so on).

In practice

Five students from German higher education institutions and their accompanying persons have been able to take advantage of this opportunity since funding for preparatory trips was introduced in 2019. This includes Sarah P., a student at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, for whom 'the preparatory trip was superb', she emphasises. 'I was able to fly to Spain with a friend in advance, search for an apartment locally, and get to know the city and the university. It was amazing and comforting to see my future apartment, meet my fellow residents and visit the university. A few weeks later I was therefore able to start my semester abroad in a relaxed and great state of mind.'

Based on her own experience, Lenka Tucek, higher education coordinator for student mobility at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, is convinced that the 'new funding option is a great approach for more inclusion in the Erasmus+ programme'. It 'helps to reduce students' fears about international mobility and gives them planning certainty'. Tucek emphasises that it is important to 'submit the uncomplicated application for special funding as early as possible'.

Outlook

The crisis caused by the coronavirus means that further preparatory trips are currently not possible. Once the current health risks are reduced to a minimum and travel can occur again without restrictions, we look forward to lots of higher education institutions accepting this offer and informing their students about these possibilities.

Higher education institutions have already requested an extension to mobility with partner countries outside Europe (KA107) and this is being discussed. NA DAAD will review this again in 2021, taking into account the funding provided by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research along with the outstanding details of the new programme generation.

Funds provided by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) enable NA DAAD to finance preparatory trips for students with disabilities (from DoD 50) in preparation for an Erasmus+ stay abroad relating to studies and internships in a programme country. The grant is awarded as a country-dependent lump sum for the student and a maximum of one accompanying person.

The application procedure for preparatory trips has been simplified in line with the target group. It is the higher education institution that submits an application or communicates with NA DAAD, and this institution is then considered to be the applicant.

Requirements

- The person receiving the grant needs to be studying at a higher education institution that has an Erasmus+ Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) and participates in the Erasmus+ programme.
- > The receiving institution must also have an ECHE and participate in the Erasmus+ programme.
- The higher education institution must have awarded the recipient a binding grant for an Erasmus+ stay in the target country specified in the application.
- ▶ Proof of the degree of disability (a disabled person's pass) must be available to the applicant institution.

Application and procedure

- ➤ The application for students with disabilities and an accompanying person, if applicable, is submitted by the home institution to relieve the beneficiaries of the administrative burden. Early submission of applications is advisable to ensure planning certainty for the beneficiaries.
- Approval by NA DAAD occurs within four weeks of application and according to the availability of funds. The approval letter is sent to the Erasmus+ coordinator at the higher education institution. The attached acceptance form must be available to NA DAAD before the start of the trip.
- Retrospective funding is excluded. Only applications received and approved by NA DAAD before the start of the trip will be considered.

Implementation of the trip

- A subsidy at the level of a country-dependent lump sum is awarded, which amounts to between 250 and around 500 euros depending on the country of travel, and covers both the student and the accompanying person.
- ▶ The trip and its duration are freely selectable.
- There is no obligation to provide documentary evidence. Only a confirmation of stay issued by the (future) host institution is required.

After the trip

- Payment of the approved travel package is made to the higher education institution's account, provided that the sending institution has received confirmation that the trip has taken place.
- This confirmation must be received by DAAD six weeks after completion of the trip, but not later than 1 December of the current calendar year.
- At the same time, an (informal) travel report detailing the extent to which the trip objectives have been achieved is to be submitted.

Further information

https://t1p.de/75a (quick link to the NA DAAD website) ■

Petra Podlech Section EU02 - Mobility of Individuals

Exciting Fields of Activity for Inclusion: Cooperation Projects in Erasmus

TEXT: BEATE KÖRNER

Developments in the recently concluded Erasmus+ programme generation effectively reflect the profound political and social changes that have occurred in the last seven years. At the beginning of 2014, the focus was on the employability of students, the elimination of youth unemployment and cooperation with business. However, in the wake of the refugee crisis from 2015 and 2016, topics such as 'equal opportunities and inclusion', 'social participation', 'civic engagement' and 'European values' have become much more important.

Supported by very open and forceful communication in the general and specialist public, Erasmus+ has simultaneously transformed itself into a programme with many facets and approaches, not least in project funding. The various funding lines have enabled many universities and educational institutions to develop and test innovative means, approaches and methods. It is certainly clear that the social discourse within the German and European higher education landscape in recent years has placed particular focus on key areas such as 'equal opportunities and inclusion'. This is illustrated especially well by the 'strategic partnerships' funding line: Whereas only one application for equal opportunities and inclusion was submitted to NA DAAD at the beginning of the 2014 programme generation, there were 11 in 2019.

Inclusion as an expanded concept

Its broad understanding of inclusion means the Erasmus programme already offers higher education institutions, schools and other educational institutions very good opportunities to connect in this regard. Erasmus sees inclusion as much more than merely funding people with disabilities. The programme guide from the end of August 2020 reveals that it includes people with mental, physical, sensory or other impairments, young people with educational problems, and those who are disadvantaged by social, geographical or economic barriers.¹

The EU Commission wants to underline the exceptional importance of this topic in the new programme generation resulting from this concept being translated into national inclusion strategies and into a common European inclusion strategy. It is hoped this will improve the previous reach to disadvantaged target groups and encourage them to participate in Erasmus. In the area of 'strategic partnerships', the intense focus on 'equal opportunities' is further reinforced by the definition of relevant horizontal and sectoral priorities.

Project applications for the new cooperation partnerships relating to the horizontal 'social inclusion' priority are moreover already selected as a priority. That is also a clear signal from the EU Commission that this issue is already high on the European agenda.

See European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Version 3 (2020): 25 August 2020, p. 10, available online at https://tɪp.de/h6i1 [27 January 2021].

Practical examples

Almost all Erasmus+ funding lines, such as the Jean Monnet activities or capacity-building projects, contain interesting examples of projects focusing on target regions outside Europe. We would like to present to you in the following two successful strategic partnerships that are particularly focused on Europe.

Both deal with inclusion of the deaf or those with hearing impairments but address different issues. The 'In-Sign' project launched in 2019 and run by the University of Siegen is dedicated to an innovative infrastructure for a common lingua franca between the deaf and those who can hear, while the 'Live Text Access' project coordinated since 2018 by Sprachen & Dolmetscher Institut München e. V. (the Munich Language and Interpreter Institute) focuses on the inclusion of deaf people by means of harmonised training courses in interlingual, real-time subtitling. The two project coordinators, Professor Dr Hubert Roth (Siegen) and Ms Rocío Bernabé Caro (Munich), give us an insight into the different aspects of their work.

Horizontal priorities for strategic partnerships

Social inclusion is a top priority in all areas of the Erasmus+ Programme. Innovative and holistic approaches, in particular, are intended to promote the sharing of common values, equality, social inclusion, diversity and non-discrimination. Priority is given to projects that support and evaluate new approaches to reducing inequalities in access to and management of formal and non-formal education, or that address discrimination, segregation and racism.

Sector-specific priorities in strategic partnerships within higher education

Sector-specific priorities in strategic partnerships within higher education

The programme supports inclusive approaches with regard to mobility and collaboration, such as

- a) increased equality of access, participation and higher graduation rates among under-represented and disadvantaged groups,
- b) development and implementation of flexible mobility programmes (short-term, virtual and mixed) and
- c) active assistance for arriving participants in the search for accommodation. There is a particular focus on an even gender balance.

Beate Körner

Section EUo3 -

Partnerships and Cooperation Projects

Project example

The strategic partnership 'Advancing inclusive education through International Sign' (InSign)

Coordinator Professor Dr Hubert Roth, University of Siegen, Germany

Partners – Politécnico do Porto, Portugal

- Europaikos Syndesmos Prosanatolismou Stadiodromias, Cyprus

- Hellenic Mediterranean University, Greece

- University of Maribor, Slovenia

Funding period 2019–2022
Funding amount 293,014 euros

Website https://www.uni-siegen.de/zew/insign/

Deaf students experience difficulties in communication with non-deaf and deaf students from different nationalities due to the use of different sign languages. The InSign project establishes an innovative infrastructure to raise awareness and promote the use of International Sign as a lingua franca for deaf-deaf and deaf-non-deaf users. This innovative infrastructure will tear down barriers to communication with deaf students and open the door towards internationalisation, education and globalisation for young deaf students. InSign develops the systems and tools required to support an inclusive higher education paradigm by transferring recent research results to society.

What made you decide to tackle this topic?

In Europe, there are approximately 50 officially recognized sign languages used by millions of people. Sign languages, however, are different despite sharing common characteristics; similar to oral languages. The lack of a lingua franca shared by all creates communication barriers which causes the exclusion of deaf people from the globalized world and from international networks. These communication barriers are so hard to overcome that the natural reaction of the deaf is to live in their own communities with little contact to what is outside of them. This involuntary isolation is one of the main reasons for high numbers of depression and mental illness in deaf students.

Providing channels for communication and access to digital educational materials in a common sign language that all deaf students can understand will facilitate the access of deaf students to education and promote their inclusion into a globalized society. This common sign language does exist in the form of International Sign (IS), but it is not commonly used, apart from big international congresses and global events like the World Federation of the Deaf and COINES. Raising awareness of and promoting a preliminary contact with IS in academia will make a significant contribution to opening the global world of education and mobility to deaf students. This is the purpose of the InSign project.

What are the intended results of this project?

There are three main objectives we pursue:

- An automatic translator from text to gesture in several European languages to International Sign represented by a 3D avatar
- A certified course on International Sign and a MOOC addressed to the deaf and non-deaf that want to learn a simple sign language
- A book published in five European languages describing the main aspects of International Sign as a globalized lingua franca

What do you hope to achieve?

There are a number of things we would like to have achieved at the national, European and international level by the end of the project, particularly concerning different target groups and stakeholders. Concerning the latter, we expect – or certainly hope – that deaf students will have facilitated access to education and will obtain effective ways to communicate with non-deaf and other deaf of different nationalities. In addition, we hope that institutions adopting the InSign outputs will enhance their digital integration at various levels in learning, teaching, training and youth work and also assume a leading role when it comes to the inclusion of deaf citizens, boosting their visibility and public recognition.

At the national levels – keeping in mind that institutions from five European countries participate in the project –, deaf communities should have better access to education and find it easier to be active citizens. At the same time, we hope to raise awareness of the need for inclusive schools as well as the benefits of assistive technology for the deaf community.

Turning to the European and international levels, the European Sign Language Translator should not only be available in classrooms, but should also be utilized for public attendance services. The InSign project will produce, to the best of our knowledge, the first unique system for automatic real time translation between sign languages from different nationalities and for International Sign. This will have an impact on schools, mainly those in higher education and on vocational education schools that are focusing on the internationalisation of education as a key factor to improve students' competences in European public institutions like the European Parliament, as well as in multinational institutions like UNESCO, ONU, Amnesty International and Disabled People's International.

By encouraging widespread use of International Sign, this project seeks to establish new best practices in its expansion among educational institutions from the local to international level for the improved inclusion of deaf students into academia and society.



The InSign project partners at the kick-off meeting in Siegen Photo ©: Peter Sahm

Project example

The strategic partnership 'Live Text Access (LTA): Quality training in real time subtitling across EU and EU languages'

Coordinator Rocío Bernabé Caro, Sprachen- und Dolmetscherinstitut München e.V., Germany

Partners — Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

- Scuola Superiore per Mediatori Linguistici, Italy

- ECQA GmbH, Austria

Velotype VOF, the Netherlands

- SUB-TI Access SRL, Italy

- European Federation of Hard of Hearing People, the Netherlands

ZDF Digital Medienproduktion GmbH, Germany

Funding period 2018–2021
Funding amount 356,331 euros

Website https://ltaproject.eu

LiveTextAccess is a strategic partnership between educational and non-educational institutions that tackles the need for harmonised training in real-time intralingual subtitling. This type of subtitles, also called captions, are used to provide access to live content for people with hearing loss. The partnership consists of three universities, two accessibility service providers, one broadcasting company, one certification association and one enduser association. The project comprises five working packages called intellectual outputs (IOs) that have two central focuses: competence-based training and certification. On its completion in August 2021, LTA will provide four main outputs: skills cards for respeakers and velotypists, a modular curriculum, open-source learning materials, and a certificate.

What made you decide to tackle this topic?

Real-time intralingual subtitling has gained momentum as a profession since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and as legal frameworks have evolved across Europe and overseas. Training programmes have emerged in higher education and in-house contexts to meet increasing demand for qualified professionals. However, courses often focus on a single technique either respeaking or keyboard-based production – or work setting, mainly TV broadcasting. As a result, trainees fail to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure even provision for different work settings, such as broadcasting, parliamentary assemblies, education or the workplace. LiveTextAccess project aims to approach harmonisation in training by providing vocational and higher education institutions with an all-encompassing modular curriculum and open-source learning materials.

What contribution does the project make to inclusion at your university or within your consortium? Why is the international, European or Erasmus+ aspect important for you?

Higher-education partners will be able to consolidate and expand their role as institutions that foster inclusion at a local and European level. Overall, university partners will be able to raise awareness among students and lecturers and to implement the LTA curriculum transversally. On the one hand, students from translation-related degrees will profit from a new specialisation. On the other, students from other degrees will have access to the general module about accessibility through workshops.

The European Federation of Hard of Hearing People will be able to reach a wider audience and increase awareness of their needs. The training will reflect what end-users of real-time intralingual subtitles expect from live subtitles in each situation. Likewise, partners working as service providers will be able to improve their services and to develop their in-house training programmes for prospective employees in the job.

Erasmus+ is an overarching programme that is known for fostering high-quality projects that support European priorities. Being part of this platform allows the project to more efficiently reach and transfer knowledge within Europe as well as to create new alliances. One example has been the planned events, which have proven to be excellent platforms for exchange and networking across Europe and sectors.

What do you hope to achieve with the project?

LTA's results will primarily affect future real-time subtitling experts. Often real-time subtitlers are transferred from different but related jobs, lacking consistent evidence-based training. LTA will equip them with the skills to become an intralingual real-time subtitler as needed in the market and provide the training procedures for both higher education and vocational students. It will also lay out the main requirements to integrate these professionals in live events, in the classroom, in TV and in parliamentary assemblies. These new trained skills will foster their employability. At the same time, the trained working settings – face-to-face, online and relay – will open LTA students to new job opportunities. The flexible nature of the training material will cater to the individual needs of different types of trainees and offer them a unique, open and high-quality learning opportunity. Europe-wide open access will allow intersectoral knowledge transfer.

Through the new certified profile and the exchange of best practices between academia and the industry, the project will raise awareness and promote media accessibility as a business opportunity. Partners outside of higher education and real-time subtitling providers will be able to broaden their knowledge about the competences required of the real-time subtitlers they employ.

The open and innovative education and training offered by LTA will have a direct impact on all professions related to real-time subtitling, also creating youth work opportunities in the audiovisual translation and real-time subtitling sectors. The status of the real-time subtitler will be recognized and the widened professional profile will cater to more text-specific needs and creative solutions.

New audiences (e.g. the elderly, migrants, people with learning disabilities) will be reached and new settings (e.g. medical assistance) will arise. The quality of the subtitles will increase, and the service will expand to other languages and countries with less of a subtitling tradition. Reaching out to blind end users and other parties will be driven by stakeholders at the local (Bavarian Association of People with Hearing Disabilities, GIB), regional (e.g. Progetto il Seme), national (e.g. Sinosz) and international level (e.g. European Disability Forum), including countries not represented in the consortium. Lastly, through dissemination activities, especially at the local level, we expect to raise awareness of media accessibility. Through our research and the dissemination of our findings we aim to expand the capabilities of real-time intralingual subtitling within a wider range of real-life contexts.



The LTA consortium at a meeting in Munich Photo ©: SDI-München



Sustainability

Towards sustainability: different aspects of a challenge

Eco-friendly mobility and sustainable cooperation projects: 'Green Erasmus' is one of the priorities of the new programme generation. By providing financial incentives for using eco-friendly means of transport, raising awareness of 'sustainability', 'the environment' and 'climate change', promoting green skills, and using digital instruments, the new programme focuses on reducing the carbon footprint of Erasmus+ and on promoting sustainability.

The 'green' transformation of Erasmus+ requires not merely critical debate among higher education institutions and students on the subject of 'sustainable development'; the implementing organisations are also important stakeholders in this process. DAAD has also taken on the issue of sustainable development and is currently working to integrate sustainability aspects in its institutional management and funding activities. This includes, among other things, the consideration of sustainability criteria for organising business trips and events. DAAD has also published a paper on sustainable mobility that seeks discourse with higher education institutions and funding providers and outlines possible solutions for how academic mobility can be designed in an eco-friendly and sustainable manner.

Sustainable Development for a Future-oriented Europe

TEXT: NINA KNOPS

'There is no planet B', 'Climate justice now' – posters bearing these slogans have been visible at the climate demonstrations of the 'Fridays for Future' protests taking place around the globe since March 2019. The activists are calling for adherence to the objectives of the Paris Agreement on climate change. They are demanding, in particular, that global warming be limited in the long term to below 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to the pre-industrialisation level. The focus of the activists' demands is on the concept of climate justice: 'decisions taken at the expense of poorer regions and future generations' 'are unacceptable'.

From the Brundtland Report to the UN Agenda 2030

The idea that the actions of a generation, their dealings with nature and resources should be responsible and geared toward the next generation is by no means new. The concept of 'sustainable development' was already shaped in 1987 by the Brundtland Report released by the World Commission on Environment and Development. It states that 'sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'

This report recognised that environmental problems can only be addressed if global poverty and inequality are also addressed. The Commission, led by former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, defined sustainable development as a process of change in which, among other things, the use of resources, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes must be reconciled with current and future needs.



The EU's long-term budget from 2021 to 2027 is intended not only to respond to the realities of today, but also to the uncertainties of tomorrow. 373.9 billion euros is earmarked for the 'Natural resources and environment' sector.

Photo ©: European Union, 2020/Aurore Martignoni

Five years after the publication of her report, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the concept of sustainable development based on three dimensions established itself: social (social justice), ecological (ecological sustainability) and economic (economic performance).

The concept of sustainable development is also a core idea of the United Nations Agenda 2030, which calls equally on industrialised, emerging and developing countries to take sustainable action. From education, clean energy, sustainable cities and communities to sustainable consumption, climate protection, peace and justice, the Agenda 2030 addresses all policy areas – it is, as the German government sees it, a 'roadmap for the future'.

¹ German government, Global goals for sustainable development, https://t1p.de/90s3 [27 October 2020].

Timeline of the European Green Deal

18 January 2021

New European Bauhaus

10 December 2020

European Battery Alliance

9 December 2020

European Climate Pact

19 November 2020

Offshore renewable energy

14 October 2020

Renovation wave

Methane strategy

Chemicals strategy for sustainability

17 September 2020

Presentation of the 2030 Climate Target Plan

8 July 2020

Adoption of the EU strategy for energy system integration and hydrogen to pave the way for a fully decarbonised, more efficient and interconnected energy sector

20 May 2020

Presentation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 to protect the fragile natural resources on our planet

20 May 2020

Presentation of the 'Farm to fork strategy' to make food systems more sustainable

11 March 2020

Proposal for a Circular Economy Action Plan focusing on sustainable resource use

10 March 2020

Adoption of the European Industrial Strategy, a plan for a future-ready economy

4 March 2020

Proposal for a European climate law to ensure a climate neutral European Union by 2050

Public consultation (open until 17 June 2020) on the European Climate Pact bringing together regions, local communities, civil society, businesses and schools

14 January 2020

Presentation of the European Green deal Investment Plan and the Just Transition Mechanism

11 December 2019

Presentation of the European Green Deal

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en [25 February 2021]

Photo ©: DAAD/Jan von Allwörden

Europe's contribution

Climate and environmental protection have gained in importance both socially and politically at a national, European and international level in recent years. This is endorsed, for example, by the fact that climate protection was the most important topic for German voters in the 2019 European elections.² Another sign is the increased commitment of the European Union.

The European Green Deal presented by the European Commission in December 2019 means the EU is now putting sustainable development at the very core of its growth strategy. Economic development should occur in conformity with environmental and climate protection and contribute to fairly distributed prosperity and growth within the EU³. The Green Deal also stipulates that all EU policies and strategies must contribute to the achievement of its objectives in the future. Sustainability and environmental protection are thus incorporated into

all EU policies with the aim of making Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

Focusing on inclusion, digital transformation, political participation and sustainability – the four transversal themes of the new programme generation – Erasmus+ sets important priorities that raise awareness of sustainable development to achieve a Europe that is social, innovative and promotes the political participation of its citizens whilst retaining a strong focus on the needs of the next generation.

Nina Knops

Section EU04 - Policy Support

² Climate protection is the most important topic, Tagesschau, 16 May 2019, available online at https://tip.de/bdlb [27 October 2020].

³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The European Green Deal, Brussels, 11 December 2019, p. 2, available online at https://t1p.de/g2a4 [27 January 2021].

Using Erasmus+ to become the First Climate-neutral Continent?

TEXT: ANNA-LENA SENDER

In December 2019, the European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen, presented its roadmap for a sustainable EU economy: the 'European Green Deal'. Its declared goal is to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. This is to occur taking into account all sectors of the economy and all policy areas – and not least with regard to the social and economic impacts felt by regions, industries and employees as a result of the necessary changes.

The EU budget plays a central role in this respect. 30 percent of the expenditure under all EU programmes is expected to contribute to achieving the climate targets. Horizon Europe, the ninth European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, is also expected to spend at least 35 percent of its funding on financing new solutions for climate protection. Education is also highlighted within the EU Green Deal roadmap. It emphasises that 'schools, training institutions and universities are well placed to engage with pupils, parents, and the wider community on the changes needed for a successful transition¹.' The EU Commission therefore plans to provide supporting materials and facilitate the exchange of best practices via EU-wide networked teacher training programmes with the concept of the so called teacher academies.

What contribution can education make to the 'European Green Deal'?

In addition to the EU roadmap, the Commission's Communication on the Creation of a European Education Area by 2025, published on 30 September 2020, clarifies that the transition to a sustainable and climate-neutral economy in Europe can only be achieved by developing the necessary skills and raising awareness through education.² Measures in the field of education should therefore aim to create a favourable environment for the green transformation. These include:

- the funding of skills for green business and entrepreneurship, and the digital and technological transformation.
- investment in education and training to increase the number of specialists working for a climate-neutral and resource-efficient economy,
- the integration of ecological sustainability perspectives into the natural sciences and humanities,
- the development of a sustainable education infrastructure.

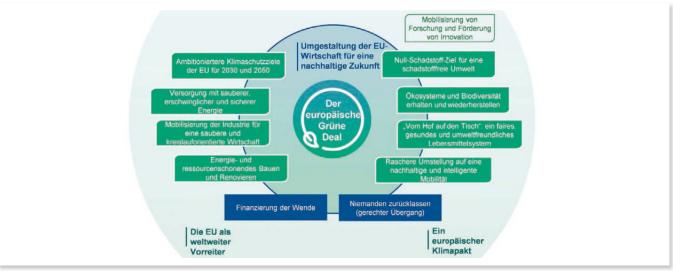


Figure: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/?qid=1596443911913&uri=CELEX:52019DC0640#document1

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The European Green Deal, Brussels, 11 December 2019, p. 19, available online at https://trp.de/g2a4 [27 January 2021].

² See DAAD Brussels, a European Education Area by 2025, n.d., available online at https://t1p.de/3y2x [27 October 2020].

What specific suggestions is the European Parliament making?

- Commencement of data collection on the ecological footprint of individual mobility via the mobility tool
- Consideration of environmental aspects during project evaluation by the national agencies (integration of environmental protection into each national priority list)
- Redirection of programme participants towards more eco-friendly modes of transport by means of new incentives and the adaptation of current financial provisions (including basic and full compensation for additional costs and travel times, not only in exceptional cases)
- Collection, coordination and evaluation of best practices, starting with the Commission publishing a list of recommendations
- Integration of environmental protection as a principle into the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) and the programme indicators
- Partnerships with European rail and bus companies to obtain preferential rates

Against this background, the Commission launched the 'Education for Climate' coalition in December 2020 to promote innovative projects and raise awareness in educational institutions. In 2021, the Commission also plans council recommendations on sustainability in education and an European competence framework to help map and evaluate knowledge, skills and attitudes in the fields of 'climate change' and 'sustainable development'.

A greener Erasmus+

Last but not least, the new Erasmus+ (2021–2027) is consistently more environmentally conscious and should in principle contribute to the EU's climate protection measures: the draft programme guide, for example, plans to add a virtual component to financially support climate-friendly physical mobility between programme countries. Students will be able to benefit from this via a top-up that is easy to apply for; employees at higher education institutions via an allowance in addition to their regular travel allowance. In the meantime, the 'environment' topic should be prioritised in cooperation projects, and sustainable implementation of these projects should be funded.

In line with the Green Deal, future measures under Erasmus+ should respect the 'do no harm' principle without altering the fundamental nature of the programme. Such measures are to be identified, implemented and re-evaluated during programme implementation as part of evaluations and reviews. Any activities (under Key Action 1)

and projects (under Key Action 2) that contribute to the climate objectives and may reduce the programme's environmental impacts are also to be measured.

The European Parliament's position

The European Parliament adopted its initiative report 'European Parliament resolution of 15 September 2020 on effective measures to "green" Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps'.³ It calls for the 'greening' of the EU's cultural and educational programmes.

The European Parliament used this report to reaffirm the importance of Erasmus+ in the Green Deal and suggest concrete proposals regarding the new programme generation to the Commission. The Erasmus+ programme, which has an impact on the daily lives of millions of Europeans, can make an important contribution to the overall environmental objectives in the Green Deal – if it is designed to be green and is intelligently utilised. Programme participants must be given the opportunity to use more eco-friendly means of transport, for example.

However, the MEPs also stress that greening measures must not compromise the programme's original content and values: mobility is irreplaceable and must remain the focus.

Anna-Lena Sender DAAD Regional Office in Brussels

³ DAAD Brussels, European Parliament: Initiative Report on Green Erasmus+, n.d., available online at https://tap.de/e9ow [27 October 2020].

Five Questions to MEP Laurence Farreng (December 2020)

INTERVIEW: ANNA-LENA SENDER

Which measures could make Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps 'greener'? As a rapporteur appointed by the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) of the European Parliament*, Laurence Farreng addressed this question in a report. For the *DAADeuroletter* the French MEP summarises its main findings and recommendations.



Photo ©: European Union 2019 – EP/Dominique Hommel

In preparing the report, you consulted a large number of stakeholders, including the DAAD. What do you consider to be the most significant findings from this **consultation process**? What impression did you gain from the **Erasmus+ community** on the subject of environmental protection and sustainability?

Laurence Farreng MEP: I did indeed consult with many stakeholders while working on the report, be it National Agencies, project leaders, associations or the participants themselves. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the DAAD for its very valuable inputs and ideas! I was struck by the stakeholders' commitment to making the three programmes Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) and Creative Europe greener.

I was particularly pleased to be able to rely on the work already performed by different Erasmus+ Agencies already engaged in this green transition: green indicators and green mobility are themes they are already working on. I have seen that both the Agencies and participants are ready to embark on this green path and only seek to be supported by the institutions. It's up to us, the European co-legislators and institutions, to provide them with the necessary incentives.

The report contains **concrete recommendations** on how to make the Erasmus+ programme greener. What do you consider to be the key messages, particularly in the field of **higher education**? What role can the European Student Card and the Erasmus+ App play in this?

I want to underline the importance of two principles that should remain inviolate:

- Physical mobility is the very essence of the Erasmus+ programme. Virtual mobility, which is useful during a pandemic such as the one we are currently experiencing, can only be temporary or be seen as a complement to physical mobility.
- Freedom of content and creation are essential. There may be specific project types that are promoted, but Erasmus+ projects must continue to be generated based on local needs, in a bottom-up rather than top-down approach.

I used this report to propose concrete measures that would encourage greening of the programmes; these are the main ones:

- Participants should where possible be encouraged to reduce the environmental impact of these programmes by using less polluting means of transport than air travel, in particular by adjusting the grant amounts and not by imposing penalties. It must however be possible to measure this impact before it can be diminished, which is not possible at present. That is why I asked the Commission to establish environmental indicators. This request has been heard, and we are working on these indicators for the next Erasmus+ programme.
- I also propose measures to take advantage of this incredible and life-changing experience that is Erasmus+; to change habits and introduce participants to new environmental practices. This is where the Erasmus+ App has a role to play, by providing information and local contacts to participants, for example. The European Student Card could in the medium term be developed to offer access to services that promote more eco-friendly life choices.
- I am ultimately convinced of the great potential of Erasmus+, which we must further develop to create trans-European curricula addressing sustainable environmental development.

^{*} The report is available online at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0141_EN.pdf [18 November 2020].



Laurence Farreng at a meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) with the European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel, on 27 October 2020

Photo ©: European Union 2020 – EP/Daina Le Lardic

What importance do you attach to the **European University Alliances** with regards to a 'greener' Erasmus+ programme?

In addition to the more traditional mobility and exchange projects, two very promising pilot projects are being funded under the Erasmus+ programme: the European Universities and the Centres of Excellence for Training and Learning. I am deeply convinced of the great potential of these two schemes to train tomorrow's European sustainable development professionals.

There are already some European University Alliances working on green issues, and I very much hope that this will lead to the creation of pan-European curricula, but also to successful university projects that will find solutions to environmental challenges, thanks to the cooperation of European students, researchers and academics.

The **European Year of Rail** starts on 1 January **2021**. What concrete value will this year add to the Erasmus+ programme and its participants?

It is essential for the European Commission to seize this opportunity of developing partnerships with railway companies following what has already been achieved with Discover EU. Participants should be encouraged to use the railways for their main mobility as well as mobility within their host country.

Photo ©: European Union 2019 – EP/Dominique Hommel

The Commission's communication on the creation of a European Education Area by 2025 refers, on the one hand, to the digital transformation and, on the other hand, to the 'green' transformation. How can we ensure that these two transformations, which are crucial for the future, go hand in hand?

Education is the cornerstone of both the green and digital transformations. It is clear that they cannot be delineated as a simple binary choice between the two. We therefore have to ensure that each of them works alongside the other. Given how crucial they are, they are also introducing a multitude of new and more efficient educational opportunities and further new skills, new jobs, new ways to interact, to connect, to fully grasp our citizenship as Europeans. It is up to us to establish the principles of our green and digital transformations in a concrete manner. It means that the European Education Area has the opportunity to promote our values of inclusiveness, resilience and progress in forming the educative European tools for the new skills relating to the digital economy, environmental sustainability, the circular and climate-neutral economy. How can we succeed in the greatest challenge of human history without developing and using all the efficient tools we need? The first and essential stage is for digital technologies to be used to increase the quality and the number of our professionals working towards a climate-neutral economy.

Laurence Farreng MEP is a French politician from the Democratic Movement (Mouvement Démocrate) who has been serving as a Member of the European Parliament since May 2019, having been elected on the 'Renew Europe' list. She is also a Pau Town Councillor and Community Councillor of the Pau Béarn Pyrénées Agglomeration. (According to: en.wikipedia.org)

- https://www.instagram.com/laurencefarreng/?hl=de
- http://www.meptwitter.eu/mep.php?id=197589



Facets of Sustainability in Erasmus+ Cooperation Projects

TEXT: KATRIN WINTER

In times of climate change and changes in our global environment, the topic of 'sustainability' is dominated above all else by 'green' or ecological issues. However, sustainability is not merely discussed as an ecological issue, but rather as a general imperative – and rightly so. Protagonists in all areas of education and expertise are now in demand.

Cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation, not least cross-border cooperation, also promote the potential for sustainable impacts in higher education. The Erasmus+ funding lines for cooperation projects (like strategic partnerships, knowledge alliances, capacity-building projects, Jean Monnet activities or Erasmus Mundus) provide an ideal framework for many European and international projects to address the relevant issues.

The framework conditions

The sustainability of project results crucially depends on whether they correspond to and can continue to work within their systemic environment and their developments. They must be disseminated and used beyond the time and structural framework of the project to fully realise their potential for impact. Especially in relation to cooperation projects¹, the Erasmus+ programme guide states that '[t]he extent of dissemination and exploitation activities will increase with the size and strategic importance of the project.'²

The cooperation projects include planned events after the individual project phases, for example, during which the community is informed about and can discuss initial findings. Key people and the general (specialist) public are intended to be involved in this process, whereby they act as multipliers and suggest ways to achieve the widest possible utilisation of these findings, also in other areas. The prerequisite for this is that the findings and insights are freely accessible beyond the project duration.

Sustainability as a funding criterion

Beyond the concrete project objectives, Erasmus+ cooperation projects must therefore from the outset focus to a large extent on sustainability, and on creating suitable conditions for the best possible exploitation and maximisation of the project results. The early development of a well-thought-out sustainability strategy and dissemination plan during project preparation is helpful in this context. The relevant documents should be prepared and considered within the consortium before the application is submitted to ensure that the evaluators have as clear an assessment basis as possible for a potential funding decision during the selection process.

Even if cooperation projects are based on binding cooperation among institutions, the initiative and implementation of ambitious projects often relies heavily on the commitment of individuals and their network partners. The consolidation, implementation and further development of the results should therefore be incorporated and described from the outset, in particular with a view to sustainability. A decision should also be made about which entities will continue to follow up on the results, further develop them as necessary, and provide information about them after project completion.

¹ Practical examples of cooperation among higher education institutions can be found on the NA DAAD website at https://tɪp.de/1jg8 [23 January 2021].

² European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Version 3 (2020): 25 August 2020, p. 318, available online at https://tɪp.de/h6i1 [27 January 2021].

NA DAAD wants to know

The same exacting standards as for funded projects apply to the funding institutions and intermediary organisations: sustainability topics are one aspect, the sustainability of their support is another. Funders and intermediaries must not only question the respective project managers about the usefulness of each measure, but also themselves.

NA DAAD has for a long time been providing support to project coordinators in planning the sustainability of their projects. We are also increasingly evaluating what happens to the findings once the project ends. In the field of Erasmus+ cooperation projects and at the end of the last programme generation, an evaluation will be conducted in the first half of 2021 after completion of the funding to examine, among other things, the sustainability of these projects in terms of the continuous use of findings and their positive impact on change. We are particularly curious about any unintended effects that may also be revealed. We will notify you as soon as we have the results.

But it is not just Erasmus+ that is thinking and working sustainably: The National Agency and the whole of DAAD are also undergoing a process of sustainable development. This relates to our organisation of events, the effectiveness of our processes and programmes, and the development of a holistic sustainability strategy. We will keep you informed about these developments too.

Katrin Winter

Section EU₀₃ – Partnerships and Cooperation Projects

The NA Annual Meeting Cycle

TEXT: MARCUS KLEIN

After Lüneburg and Saarbrücken, it ought to have been Augsburg in 2020. That was at least the plan announced in the *DAADeuroletter* 68 which was completed at the beginning of March. It became clear shortly after its publication, however, that COVID-19 would make it impossible to hold the Erasmus+ annual meeting as a face-to-face event with hundreds of participants. So instead of a meeting in Augsburg, it became a virtual meeting.

A new approach

Work on a suitable concept began in May, because at no point was consideration given to cancellation of such an important annual meeting without a replacement. 'It wasn't about whether,' explains Kerstin Tanović from the NA DAAD event team, 'that was never in question. It was about how, that is to say how to realise it. And that posed a challenge, since we were entering totally new territory from a technical viewpoint.'

The most significant change made to the concept developed by Section EUo1 and its Events team in close coordination with the Heads of Section and the NA Directorate concerned the process. It was impossible to simply adopt the programme for the face-to-face event, so the virtual annual meeting was structured in a modular fashion. A series of thematic sessions were planned for October and November in addition to a kick-off event, with a look back at the past year and a look at prospects for the forthcoming Erasmus programme generation.

EU01 and the Events team were able to count on broad support for this implementation. This included professional partners being engaged for the kick-off event. They brought along the studio technology and assumed responsibility for the recording, while colleagues in the specialist sections were responsible for the content design, supported by external experts. Public Relations was also heavily involved, especially the online team that manages and maintains the EU website and the NA DAAD social media presence.

A successful kick-off

After only four months of preparation – a good part of it under the difficult conditions of home working and limited personal contacts – the time had come on 30 September. In front of

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500 interconnected individuals, that is to say far more than the number of attendees present in Saarbrücken in September 2019, for example, NA Director Dr Stephan Geifes opened the first virtual Erasmus+ annual meeting. The keen interest 'was a pleasant surprise,' says Tanović, even though NA DAAD had assumed that more participants would be able to attend online meetings than a face-to-face event.





Photos ©: DAAD/Susanne Reich

The NA Annual Meeting Cycle

The reactions to the event were also thoroughly positive. 'We believe we've been able to achieve our objective, namely to adapt the format, the content and the duration of the kick-off event to the interests and expectations of our participants, and give them a taster for subsequent sessions,' explains Tanović. The number of participants in these sessions confirms that this was achieved. There were never fewer than 40 participants; on one occasion there were almost 400. The average was just over 190.

Firstly, there is a need for improvement in the interaction among participants. 'The annual meeting cycle has given us important impetus and feedback,' Tanović notes. Secondly – apart from technical aspects – it is difficult to address the participants. Without direct feedback, even through body language, there are limits in this respect. But the hope is that there will also be a solution to these issues.

The thematic sessions

A total of 16 events were held between mid-October and the end of November (three more planned sessions were post-poned until 2021). The topics ranged from student engagement, sustainability in project funding, and the importance of international experience to the career success of university graduates in the German labour market to new effective ways of communicating with students as a target group, thus covering the full breadth and depth of Erasmus.

Except for one online workshop, all of the sessions involved an information format, that is to say lectures by specialist speakers as is customary for traditional face-to-face events at the annual meeting. Participants were able to submit any questions they had via chat, which ensured a certain degree of interactivity.

Positive interim results and remaining tasks

The first impression that the Events team gained during the annual meeting cycle was confirmed in the following detailed evaluation of the individual sessions, namely that the format of the thematic sessions was generally very well received. The satisfaction score was 8.54 (on a scale of 1 to 10). In future, they could represent a genuine alternative for quickly and directly providing as many interested parties as possible with information on topics that are relevant to them.





Photos @. DAAD/Susanno Boich

Travelling... How Can We Travel Sustainably?

When an exchange pricks our conscience

TEXT: LUTZ CLEEVES

Studying abroad in the US, completing an internship in Latvia or continuing education in Israel – what is still possible when one's own carbon footprint becomes the focus of attention? Is the will to act sustainably compatible with the desire to study and gain vocational experience abroad? Planning a stay abroad often leads to a dialogue with one's own conscience, yet one thing seems clear: a little more sustainability is usually possible – but not always! Students wanting to gain international experience in countries such as America, Australia or New Zealand, for example, are hardly likely to travel there by any other means of transport than by plane.

We have taken a look at three Erasmus+ students implementing their personal sustainability strategy during exchange situations – and discovered how they are coping with the challenges they face during the corona pandemic. The correspondents use the 'studieren weltweit – ERLEBE ES!' (studying worldwide – LIVE THE EXPERIENCE!) portal to report on their individual experiences and strategies in lots of fascinating articles and with some great photos of their exchange experiences.

Green in the truest sense: the library at Lund University.

Photo © Benjamin Schlegel

Benjamin, who normally studies industrial engineering in Berlin, travelled northwards with Erasmus+ to spend a semester in the 'green beyond the Øresund' in Swedish Lund from August 2020 to January 2021. He was particularly attracted by the wide range of courses on sustainable technologies at his host university and the fact that they take place in smaller groups.

'Of course one thing makes the whole undertaking difficult: the corona pandemic. Even though Sweden has taken its own special path, one has to adjust [...] to restrictions.

Most of the courses are held online, for example', writes Benjamin.

He travelled anyway, and in a very resource-saving manner (with additional benefits): '**Getting to Lund by train** is very convenient: firstly, it is more eco-friendly than by plane, and you can also take much more luggage. Thick winter clothes, in particular, take up lot of space in your suitcase.'

https://www.studieren-weltweit.de/gruen-hinter-dem-oeresund-meine-mission-in-lund/ [9 October 2020]

Students from Germany undertaking a study-related stay abroad use personal blog posts and social networks on the www.studieren-weltweit.de portal to report on their exploits and experiences as part of the 'studieren weltweit – ERLEBE ES!' (studying worldwide – LIVE THE EXPERIENCE!) campaign.

The dossier on 'Sustainability' at www.studieren-weltweit.de/nachhaltigkeit provides students with suitable reports on the experiences of correspondents, expert interviews and tips on how to make stays abroad sustainable.

On foot to the (Portuguese) end of Europe: Sophie on hiking trails around Cabo da Roca, northwest of Lisbon. Photo © Henrike Klein

Sophie, who spent a semester abroad studying philosophy and business administration with Erasmus+ in Portugal from February to July 2020, writes why she had planned to live in a particularly sustainable manner – and that the sustainable manner is not the easy one: 'A sustainable lifestyle takes time. Going to the market takes time, finding the organic supermarket takes time, travelling by train takes time, gathering information takes time. But the reason I'm here is to learn to love the very things that take time. And where could I learn that better than here in Lisbon, where I feel that time passes much more slowly.'



https://www.studieren-weltweit.de/nachhaltig-leben-im-auslandssemestererstes-fazit-nach-4-wochen/ [9 October 2020]

Before her semester abroad with Erasmus+ for teacher training in special needs education in **Oulu, northern Finland** from January to May 2020, **Silvia** considered how she could travel over 2,600 kilometres to her desired destination **without flying**. She managed it! It took almost four days to cross Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland, with 'sufficient relaxing evenings included with friends in Berlin and Tallinn', travelling from Swabia to the northernmost city of the European Union by bus, train and ferry. Altogether, Silvia summarises, 'the entire trip cost me 127 euros'.

And was that really more eco-friendly than flying? Silvia says: 'Definitely yes! I generated CO2 emissions of 83 kg compared to 431.5 kg by plane.'

https://www.studieren-weltweit.de/umweltfreundlich-ins-auslandssemester/ [17 October 2020]

Silvia tells us that Korvapuusti (cinnamon rolls) are one of the reasons that Finns are such happy people. Photo © Silvia Stitzenberger





Forum

In addition to this issue's three core topics, our Forum presents you with excerpts of our work from last year, including important studies, new projects the NA has started, an overview of the all-important European Universities Initiative and an interview with our long-standing Secretary-General Dr Dorothea Rüland.

Another significant component of our work has been communication on the major policy issues of the past year — from the corona pandemic and negotiations on the next multi-year financial framework to Brexit. Our active press and public relations work has informed our target groups and raised awareness of the Erasmus+ programme in Germany. Some press reports on the pandemic, for example, can be found here: https://eu.daad.de/service/erasmus-und-covid-19/de/







FAZ-Interview

Mehr erfahren »

"Möglich machen, was möglich ist" Stephan Geifes über die Folgen für Stipendien

Mehr erfahren »



The Significance of International Experience in Career Success

TEXT: MARINA STEINMANN

Experience gained during a study-related stay abroad is very valuable, especially from a professional point of view. A study commissioned by DAAD reveals that missing out on international experience during your studies could twice prove to be a loss of additional career opportunities in the professional life of higher education graduates.

Objective

The overall objective of the study conducted by the German Economic Institute (Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft – IW) in 2020 was to determine the role that international experience acquired during studies plays in one's career.¹ For the first time, it therefore examined how employers evaluate international experience when filling career positions and whether the gain in personal and social skills associated with a stay abroad is relevant to the requirements profile for leaders. As in previous studies, factors impacting career entry and the role played by international experience were examined as well.

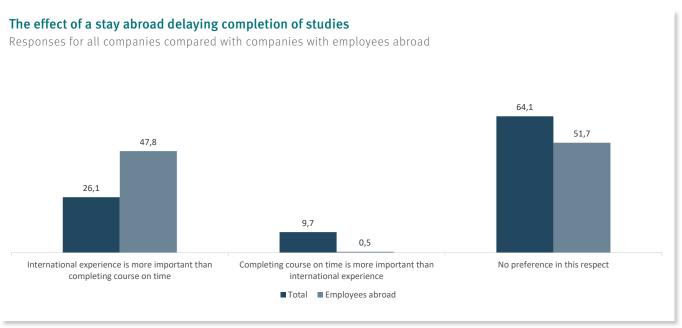
Design and implementation

The project comprised three parts:

- a comprehensive analysis of the research literature published up to 2020 on the relationship between the competences and skills sought by employers, and those acquired during study abroad,
- a subsequent representative online survey of 1,099
 German companies conducted in autumn 2019 in relation to skills that are decisive in recruitment and career development,
- eight detailed qualitative interviews with personnel managers from companies as a comment and a more in-depth element in April and May 2020.

These interviews concentrated on discussing the role of social and personal skills in greater detail, but also the question of the extent to which international experience is significant for the promotion of employees and for their overall career development. The corona crisis created entirely new challenges that were unforeseeable when the key survey questions were defined, and the first two parts of this study were implemented, so the impact of these on the respective company's recruitment and promotion policies was also discussed.

¹ The full study 'Die Bedeutung von Auslandserfahrung für den Karriereerfolg von Hochschulabsolventen auf dem deutschen Arbeitsmarkt' (The Significance of International Experience in Career Success of Graduates in the German Labour Market' can be downloaded from eu.daad.de/auswertungen.



Source: IW-Personnel Panel, 2019, p. 25

Findings

The online survey revealed that practical experience is the most significant selection criterion for companies during the recruitment process. The duration of the course or the final mark attained and even international experience as a purely formal criterion, are significantly less relevant. Nevertheless, if their qualifications are otherwise the same, such applicants will have better recruitment chances at every fourth company; companies with employees abroad cite this advantage even more frequently, at over 50 percent. The vast majority of companies do not see it as a problem if the duration of studies is extended due to a stay abroad. Experience abroad is often even a condition of employment for internationally oriented entry-level programmes.

In addition to the positive effects that international experience provides in the selection process under certain conditions, it can positively influence the development of job-related skills. These skills include intercultural competence, communication skills, self-confidence and openness to something new. They are more in demand than ever in a work environment characterised by constant pressure for change and unpredictability. This

applies not only to recent academic graduates, but also to future managers.

Study-related experience abroad is not a formal requirement for career development, but it can lead to additional career options. Given the same qualifications, it can bring advantages when starting a career, and it is highly likely to increase the chances of being offered a job with international connections. This may result in further career opportunities, especially in companies that are internationally active.

Achievements at work are the most important aspect in career progression. Since social and personal skills are at least as important as professional skills, the expansion of these qualities during studies is all the more important. By training appropriate skills, the course is set not only for entry into the labour market but for an individual's entire working life.

In-depth experience abroad potentially has several advantages: it expands professional competence and strengthens social skills. Furthermore, experience abroad



Source: IW-Personnel Panel, 2019, p. 32

is a must for recruitment with many internationally oriented employers and it also opens up options for taking on specific tasks at other companies.

Consequences

A stay abroad is not merely a box that is simply ticked when application documents are reviewed. When supporting, preparing and following up on stays, higher education institutions should therefore pay special attention to helping students recognise the additional competences they have gained and present them appropriately in job applications. When counselling students, it is important not only to emphasise the formal significance of international experience for starting a career, but also

to refer to advantages that manifest themselves much later in professional life. The aim should be to motivate students to study abroad and to point out the kind of experience they should seek to acquire specific skills.

Marina Steinmann

Expert in EU Higher Education Cooperation

Aligning our Compass with Bologna

TEXT: WOLFGANG THIELMANN

A bachelor's degree in Madrid, internships in Tbilisi and Bergen, a master's degree in Tirana, a doctorate in Aachen – in other words international exchange, and the mutual recognition of all academic achievements within Europe and beyond – this is the main idea behind the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). A lot has been implemented so far, some aspects are still pending. DAAD is responsible for the operational implementation of the Bologna Hub Peer Support, a support programme for higher education institutions aiming to align their structures to the Bologna Key Commitments.

Support for higher education institutions

A new project, Bologna Hub Peer Support, aims to support higher education institutions in their implementation of the Bologna key commitments. Higher education institutions across the European Higher Education Area [https://www.daad.de/daad-interactive-map/]could apply for participation in the project until March 2021. DAAD, which is responsible for its operational implementation, is bringing together the participating institutions and Bologna experts.

Existing challenges shall jointly be identified, experiences exchanged and reforms advanced – digitally and also in person, if this becomes possible again after the Corona pandemic subsides. The results are intended to facilitate mobility opportunities for students and researchers in the area between Reykjavík and Vladivostok and to encourage academic exchange. 'Some nations in the EHEA have still potential to deepen the implementation of the key Bologna reforms to a certain extent – this remains a central challenge' says Dr Frank Petrikowski from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). 'Projects such as Bologna Hub Peer Support promote quite substantially the implementation of Bologna reforms in all 49 participating nations.'

The BMBF is responsible for coordinating the project, which is mainly funded by the European Union with Erasmus+ funds, and is also providing a financial contribution. The partners in this two-year project include the Spanish Rectors' Conference, the Science Ministries of Albania, Georgia and Ukraine, and the European Students' Union – the umbrella organisation of 45 national student organisations in 40 countries which is based in Brussels and represents nearly 20 million students.

A common higher education area

The Bologna process is named after the Italian university city where 29 European Ministers of Education initiated a Europe-wide higher education reform in 1999. In addition to the EU Member States, a large number of other countries are involved in the Bologna process. The aim was to create a common higher education area with comparability and mutual recognition of all degrees and quality assurance based on jointly agreed standards, which thereby also contribute to the promotion of student mobility.





Dr Frank Petrikowski is a Senior Desk Officer at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The Bologna Hub Peer Support project is coordinated by the BMBF.

Photo ©: privat

These key elements of the Bologna process – the aforementioned key commitments– were stated in a communiqué by the Education Ministers of the Member States in 2018 and must be fully applied in all Member States within the EHEA. The project pursues a structured peer support approach which has been identified as one of the key tools in enabling the EHEA to realise its full potential in the future. Moreover, the project's international dimension, in particular, also enables participants to learn from each other and to mutually engage in open exchange.

Experience with Counselling Missions

DAAD has considerable experience in helping higher education institutions to develop a greater openness towards Europe. 'DAAD has been providing German higher education institutions with advice through a team of German and international Bologna experts for several years,' reports Dr Stephan Geifes, Director of the National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation at DAAD. 'This project sees us transposing our successful model to the European Higher Education Area. The high-quality advice from our participating European Bologna specialists means we offer higher education institutions targeted assistance in this field.'

Twenty-five higher education institutions can take advantage of its consultancy. There are no specific requirements for participation. An attractive offer awaits them: each higher education institution that has successfully applied will be offered two counselling sessions in two phases. All participants can exchange views at the final conference.



Dr Gabriele Abermann from Salzburg has been advising higher education institutions on implementing Bologna reform measures since 2009.

Photo ©: Sandra Lagler

Very positive feedback at national level

Each partner institution in the project provides its expertise and informs relevant stakeholders via their respective networks. This ensures a broad regional approach. The first applications from the higher education institutions reflect this desired geographical diversity. A first evaluation and an interim conclusion are planned for winter 2021. The overall assessment will be made after a second evaluation following a final conference in 2022.

Dr Gabriele Abermann, emeritus professor at Salzburg University of Applied Sciences and long-standing Bologna expert, has recorded positive experiences in Austria and recommends that universities apply: 'There was very positive feedback on peer support consultancy sessions at national level. Higher education institutions, particularly, appreciated the external perspective amongst equals, shaped by personal experience, which stimulated the internal discussions on Bologna-related topics.' This underlined the importance of the strategic interaction of all higher education staff in improving the Bologna concepts in relation to the quality of studies and teaching. The participants also discovered new options for implementation. 'Higher education institutions should not miss out on this opportunity to reflect on Bologna-related topics through the lens of the Bologna Hub Peer Support project,' says Abermann, who is one of the 27 members of the international team of experts.

FURTHER LINKS

- ▶ Bologna Hub Peer Support (https://eu.daad.de/programme-und- hochschulpolitik/bologna/bologna-hub-peer-support/de/)
- □ Team of experts (https://eu.daad.de/programme-und-hochschulpolitik/bologna/bologna-hub-peer-support/our-team-of-experts/de/78051-our-team-of-experts/)
- ▶ Bologna Hub (https://eu.daad.de/programme-und-hochschulpolitik/bologna/die-na-im-bologna-prozess/de/55835-bologna-hub/)

Source: https://www2.daad.de/der-daad/daad-aktuell/de/78820-den-kompass-an-bologna-ausrichten/ [19.01.2021]

Recognition of International Academic Achievements

Text: Astrid Hopp

Young people studying abroad want to have their achievements recognised by their home institution. Does that always work smoothly? DAAD has regularly been examining the state of recognition practice at German higher education institutions since 2007. The most recent – already the seventh – study was published in October 2020.

It is important for students that their achievements at a host institution abroad are recognised by their home institution. DAAD interviewed 6,000 students who were abroad from 2017 to 2019 about their experience with this process, and published its findings in the 2019 study 'Anerkennung – (k)ein Problem?' (Recognition – [not] a problem?). 'Feedback from students is important to us,' emphasises the responsible coordinator and editor, Dr Susanne Wilking from the National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation (NA DAAD), 'because recognition of achievements is ultimately a very central aspect when it comes to facilitating and funding international exchange and thus mobility.'

One of the key findings of the current study is that 81 percent of all ECTS points earned at host institutions abroad are recognised. 'We note that in general the higher education institutions have now established procedures within their departments. There are more and more lecturers and specialists in their administration departments who are well-versed in the subject of recognition and who reach satisfactory results in close coordination with the students,' says Wilking.

Taking a differentiated view

Wilking believes that the degree of recognition can be expressed in various ways. Students' experiences can only be accurately depicted if the questions they were asked cover many aspects. 'We have to ask very precisely. So for the first time, we also asked about the eligibility for recognition of credit points. The rate of recognition here is very high, at 93 percent,' says Wilking.

Why was it important to ask about the issue of eligibility for recognition separately? If, for example, a mathematics student travels abroad, and of his or her own volition participates in an art class he or she knows from the outset that the ECTS points for this will not be recognised, only those in his or her actual subject. If he or she was only asked about recognition of achieved credit points, a limited picture would be obtained.

High recognition in internationally oriented courses

Other factors that influence the recognition process include, for instance, the subject or the type of higher education institution. Economics and business administration have for years achieved a high recognition rate, whereas law is at the bottom of the ranking list. 'We suspect this is attributable to the international orientation of the faculties,' says Wilking.

'Economics and business administration are usually very internationally oriented courses of study. A high proportion of students travel abroad because their programme allows or requires this,' explains Wilking. Another aspect is that the faculties have established good partnerships with international higher education institutions.' Those who study law in Germany and spend a semester in Denmark to take courses in Danish law, however, will probably not receive recognition, or will receive only partial recognition, for these courses.

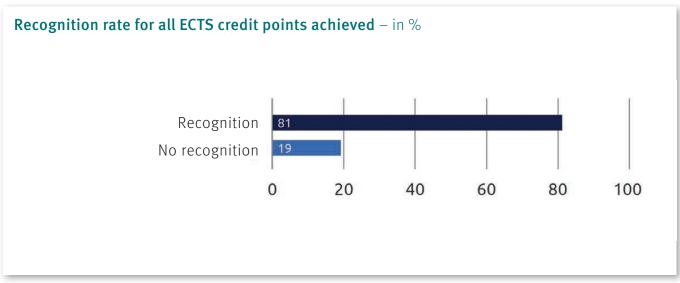
UASs perform better than universities

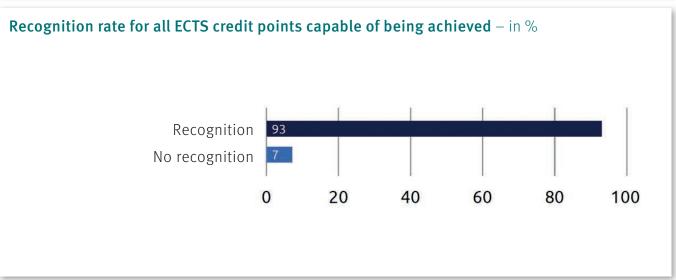
What is also striking is that the recognition rates for universities of applied sciences (UASs) are higher than those for universities. 'UASs are usually smaller than universities,' explains Wilking. 'And experience shows that the smaller a higher education institution, the shorter the distances and the better the communication between participants in the recognition process.'

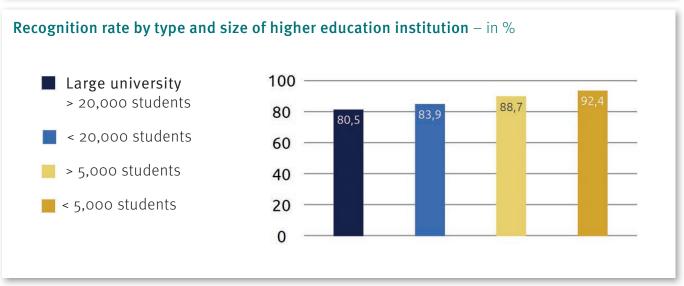
Focus on learning outcomes, not content

Wilking draws a generally positive conclusion since 76 percent of respondents say they are satisfied to very sat-

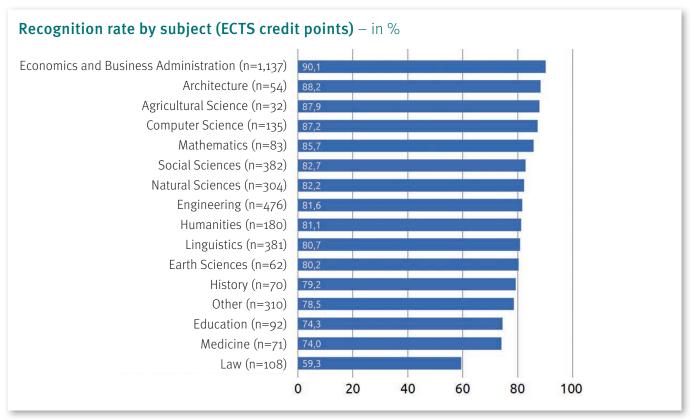
¹ The 2-page summary can be found at https://t1p.de/g5ao [23 January 2021].







Source: NA DAAD: Factsheet Anerkennung, p. 1



Source: NA DAAD: Factsheet Anerkennung, p. 2

is fied with the level of recognition. This is also reflected in the many comments made by students in the online survey.

In cases that were not satisfactory, however, there is a need to stay on the ball and remind the home institutions that what counts in the recognition of achievements are the learning outcomes and the skills that students have acquired. It is not a question of whether the contents of the modules at the host and home institution are identical. 'Ultimately,' Wilking states, 'it is the concern of the Bologna process and the Lisbon Recognition Convention that the cross-border recognition of academic achievements should be transparent and occur according to comprehensible rules to facilitate cross-border mobility'.

Information on the 2019 survey 'Anerkennung – (k)ein Problem?' (Recognition – [not] a problem?)

- The National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation at DAAD has been conducting this survey every two years since 2007.
- The study published in October 2020 relates to an evaluation of recognition from 2017 to 2019.
- Fact sheet on the survey [https://eu.daad.de/medien/eu.daad.de.2016/Bilder/service/factsheet_an Further findings from the 2019 recognition survey]
- https://eu.daad.de/service/auswertung-und-statistik/studien-und-auswertungen-der-na-daad/anerkennung-k-ein-problem/de/

Further links:

- DAAD Aktuell: 'International experience promotes career development' [https://www2.daad.de/der-daad/daad-aktuell/de/78193- auslandserfahrung-foerdert-karriereentwicklung/]

Source: https://www2.daad.de/der-daad/daad-aktuell/de/78755-studienleistungen-aus-dem-ausland-anerkennen/

European Universities: a Current Inventory

TEXT: MARCUS KLEIN

At the beginning of July 2020, the European Commission announced the eagerly anticipated results of the second and last pilot call for European Universities. Of the 62 submitted projects, 24 were selected. The total number of alliances supported under the latest Erasmus+ project line has now risen to 41. At the national level, DAAD offers comprehensive support to German universities via its accompanying programme.

The status quo

The decision taken by independent external experts in a new competitive procedure reveals that all 27 EU member states and 32 of the 34 Erasmus programme countries currently have at least one such university. In absolute terms, Germany leads the way with 35 higher education institutions¹, followed by France (32), and Italy and Spain (24 each). Seen in relation to their population, this becomes Slovakia (3), Cyprus (2) and Estonia (3). Across Europe, 284 higher education institutions are participating in the 41 alliances.

The consortia, which comprise on average 7 higher education institutions, reveal the fantastic diversity of the



Classic full universities are involved, as are technical universities, art colleges and universities of applied sciences; in Germany, for example, two universities of applied sciences have happily been selected for the first time in the second selection round. The same applies to the objectives that are to be implemented and the issues they

are addressing. There are for instance collaborations that take a comprehensive approach, but also those that have set a clear thematic focus on topics like the oceans, social sciences or global health, and that pay particular attention not least to the subject of sustainability.

European Universities are transnational alliances that will become the universities of the future, promoting **European values** and identity, and revolutionising **the quality** and **competitiveness** of European higher education. In order to achieve this major step forward, the Commission is testing different cooperation models for European Universities with two calls for proposals under the **Erasmus+ programme**. The alliances will:

- include partners from all types of higher education institution and cover a broad geographic scope across Europe
- be based upon a co-envisioned long-term strategy focused on sustainability, excellence and European values
- offer student-centred curricula jointly delivered across inter-university campuses, where diverse student bodies can build their own programmes and experience mobility at all levels of study
- adopt a challenge-based approach according to which students, academics and external partners can cooperate in inter-disciplinary teams to tackle the biggest issues facing Europe today

Source: European Commission, Education and Training, European Universities Initiative, available at https://trp.de/8hv8 [25 February 2021]



The financial and institutional framework

To implement their different cooperation models, the university alliances will for 3 years, in other words until 2022 (first pilot round) and 2023 (second pilot round), each be awarded 5 million euros, which is 'the highest amount of funding for a project line ever provided in Erasmus or in one of its predecessor programmes'². In March 2020 the Commission also decided to allocate an additional two million euros per alliance from the EU's Horizon 2020 research programme to strengthen the research and innovation dimension of European Universities in addition to the education dimension. The consortia in the first pilot call received this funding commitment at the end of July 2020.

The Commission has therefore anticipated a development which was only intended to have been introduced with the start of the new Erasmus+ generations (2021–2027) and Horizon Europe (the name of the research programme from 2021). Indeed, the respective drafts reveal the possibility – already requested by university representatives during the funding line's conception – of linking education policy with research and innovation policy, and thereby creating synergies between the different areas.

The significance of the initiative

Horizon 2020 funding will improve the financial resources of the alliances – the amount available to all partners each year will rise from 1.67 to 2.33 million euros – and will, in particular, underpin the research component within these alliances. Overall, the decision can be seen as a further commitment to the European Universities Initiative, which is 'undoubtedly the most discussed political project in higher education and research at the European Union level in recent years'.3

According to a series of announcements and publications, the Commission sees these alliances as an important (educational) policy tool. The renewed European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social justice and resilience in European Universities, issued at the beginning of July 2020, is for instance one of 12 measures.⁴ And these alliances are also of great significance within the Erasmus+ programme; as a Partnership for Excellence, they are seen as the most ambitious long-term strategic cooperation projects.

² Beate Körner, European Universities. German higher education institutions are ready for the pilot call for this new funding line, DAADeuroletter 65 (2018), p. 62.

3 Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, European Universities Initiative – Chances and challenges, University World News, 6 November 2019, available online at https://trp.de/h1aff3 November 2020].

⁴ European Commission, European Skills Agenda: For Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience, Brussels 2020, p. 11, available online at https://tip.de/lnx1 [21 October 2020].

Some fundamental questions still remain open, however, and this too must be made clear. This relates to the actual design of the funding line, how many and which of the consortia will be funded beyond the pilot phase and, last but not least, the financial resources that will be available for this until 2027. Final clarity will probably only be achieved when the findings and results of the two 2019 and 2020 pilot phases are available.

The German accompanying programme

The national accompanying programme, European University Networks (EUN) – National Initiative, launched by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and managed by DAAD⁵, will continue with its 2 project lines also in 2021. The 20 German higher education institutions selected in the second pilot call can apply for additional funding (*topping up*) totalling 750,000 euros (up to 250,000 euros per budget year). And higher education institutions not considered due to the selection situation (such as regional distribution) despite their application being deemed eligible for funding have the possibility of receiving grants (*approved but not funded*) totalling a maximum of 450,000 euros (up to 150,000 per budget year); at least five German higher education institutions are benefiting from this after the first pilot call. ■

⁵ For details, see DAAD, European University Networks (EUN) – National Initiative, available online at https://tip.de/hk/zd [23 November 2020].

'Internationalisation has never been as important as it is today'

An interview with Dr Dorothea Rüland, DAAD Secretary General (December 2020)

INTERVIEW: LUTZ CLEEVES AND MARCUS KLEIN

Dr Dorothea Rüland, the Secretary General of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), talked with us about the effects of the Corona pandemic on academic exchange, the changes it caused in international university cooperation and at DAAD, and she also reflects on the opportunities and limitations of digitisation. On the occasion of her retirement on 1 February 2021, she shares her insights and views on Erasmus+ with us.

Challenges and reactions

Dr Rüland, what comes to mind spontaneously about academic exchange when you look back at the second decade of the 21st century, which you helped shape as DAAD Secretary General?

Dr Dorothea Rüland: Those were eventful years in which a lot was happening, and a number of challenges had to be overcome. Initially, it was the aftermath of the 2007/2008 financial crisis, then came the Syrian war and the major refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016 resulting in the integration of refugees at German higher education institutions. Since the spring of 2020, it has been the coronavirus that has confronted us with unprecedented challenges.

What does this mean for DAAD's activities as the world's largest funding organisation for the international exchange of students and researchers?

The internationalisation of higher education institutions and research, our core task, always interacts with political, economic and social events and developments that determine our environment at national, European and global level. It is a very dynamic process.

Regarding the higher education institutions, two central and sometimes contradictory phenomena can be identified in relation to the last decade, namely cooperation and competition. My team and I, as well as DAAD as a whole, had to position ourselves as an institution to deal with this. Cooperation was further expanded across countries and institutions, and at the same time German higher education institutions – not least with assistance from DAAD and its programmes – were supported in raising their profiles to be better positioned and more focused on global issues.

Has DAAD itself changed as an institution in this respect?

The process-oriented organisational structure introduced at the beginning of 2015 meant we created the institutional conditions to enable us to respond even better to such developments. In this way, we are also fulfilling our political responsibilities, which have grown in recent years. That is one reason why the 'Strategy' department with its 'Knowledge' division was founded during the reform, for instance. Another example is the DAAD Competence Centre for International Academic Cooperation established in November 2019 on the recommendation of the Science Council. It helps universities to establish and expand their international cooperation. And lastly, we are actively pursuing the goal of completely reorganising the global DAAD network of regional offices and information centres.



Digitalisation (and the role of COVID-19)

The coronavirus, as you noted earlier, is the latest in a series of significant challenges during your term of office. How did you and DAAD deal with this in strategic terms?

At the end of March 2020, we were faced with the task of coming up with a suitable strategy for approximately 8,000 DAAD scholarship holders who at that time were situated abroad or here in Germany with our support. For both groups, this meant either remaining where they were or returning to their respective home country. In cooperation with the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, we were able to find a satisfactory solution for each individual case. The same applied to around 18,000 German Erasmus+students abroad.

In parallel, we had to check all our programmes to see whether and to what extent mobility could be supplemented and/or replaced by digital elements. We also had to analyse the areas in which we could develop additional programmes to support higher education institutions, which also had to switch to digital formats from one day to the next, for example by implementing joint digital semester programmes with partners abroad. We achieved both very quickly.

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In relation to the expansion of digital offerings, it was certainly an advantage that DAAD was well positioned in this regard. We only need to think of the 'International Mobility and Cooperation' project you launched in 2019, which you described in the spring – during the first lockdown – as a 'milestone' in 'using digital components to extend physical mobility'. Did COVID-19 act as an accelerator in this context?

Yes, that seems to me to be an apt assessment. I would even say that the virus has in many ways given great impetus to digitisation in the higher education sector. Despite all the suffering it has caused, the crisis also represents an opportunity for further development, for a new direction in this sector.

However, I would not want to see digitisation as a complete alternative – in the medium and long term – particularly in the case of mobility. For young people, experience abroad and the intercultural competence it engenders is a core gain. To meet in person makes all the difference. This type of stay abroad will continue to exist. In this sense, I believe that digitisation should not be understood as an either-or, but rather as something additional.

What exactly do you mean by that?

I mean that digitalisation can be used to improve the quality of stays abroad, for example. This applies both to pre-planning and to follow-up stages. Sooner or later we will even be able to digitally map the entire student journey. Digital formats, which have gained immense popularity with the outbreak of the corona pandemic and are indispensable, at least while we are working remotely, can be used to promote the internationalisation of higher education institutions, especially internationalisation at home. Digital formats enable universities to connect with professors or academics from all over the world – people who may not be able to travel to their location, but who can simply take two hours to give a lecture via video link. There is still a lot of potential, let's put it that way.

Erasmus+

Your term of office also saw the redesign of the Erasmus programme, which gained enormous momentum with the start of the programme generation in 2014. What is your lasting impression of this? What in your opinion is the biggest contribution Erasmus has made to Europe?

The large number of young people who have been and will continue to be offered the opportunity to meet young people from other countries, to study with them, and of course to collaborate via internships is certainly decisive. This experience has a positive impact on their personal development. It will simultaneously strengthen European cohesion, which now seems more important to me than ever.

As we have seen with the DAAD programmes, the substantive development of the educational programme also appears to me to be essential, although perhaps not quite so obviously at first sight. It began with student mobility and then went on to project funding, and to research. An important and really worthwhile step is being taken by the European Universities. This initiative is basically trying to bring the various aspects together, from student mobility to joint research.



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Yet at present neither the final design nor the number of European University alliances or the funds available for them have been clarified...

That is true, but both the European Union and the initiative's national promoters see it as having the potential to further deepen European cooperation in the research sector, and to strengthen Europe's position in relation to global competition. So, I believe – despite all the reservations and uncertainties – that every effort will be made to turn the idea into a successful project.

Erasmus+ has become a significant factor in your organisation, not least due to its current budget size of 160 million euros. Is the role of the National Agency perceived accordingly throughout DAAD?

Yes absolutely, I would certainly agree with that, and we are also all heading in the same direction. This applies equally to the organisational structure and the programme offerings. Our work has a synergetic effect, so that we complement each other in terms of content and geography. Both examples, EU agency and DAAD programmes, are two sides of the same coin.

Academic exchange

Finally, we have a question about the future of academic exchange. How should we proceed in the next, let's say, ten years?

First of all – like the rest of us – I long for personal contact. This is essential, especially as we are facing relatively difficult months. We must do everything possible to enable on-site attendance at our higher education institutions, especially for students who are starting their studies.



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Dr Dorothea Rüland studied history, German studies and musicology at the University of Freiburg. After her doctorate, she assumed lectureships in England and Thailand.

She started working for DAAD as Head of Section for Great Britain, Ireland, and the Nordic countries in 1991. Other positions in the organisation followed, including management of the Jakarta Regional Office, the South Department and the Policy Department. She became Deputy Secretary General of DAAD in 2004. She then moved to the Freie Universität Berlin in 2008 as the director of its Centre for International Cooperation. Dorothea Rüland returned to DAAD in October 2010 to become its Secretary General.

As for the future: much more than ever, we should rely on multilateral cooperation, such as the European University alliances that you just mentioned. The pandemic has taught us in real time the importance of internationalisation. It has never been as important as it is today. Large international networks are needed to enable us to address the major issues of the future, such as environmental and climate protection, and the whole closely associated field of sustainability in which DAAD is actively engaged. We definitely need to extend our competence in this respect. All of these issues are among the comprehensive global challenges that can be summarised under the SDGs, the sustainable development goals.

The same applies to communication about research, in other words how research content is conveyed to society in general and, of course, it also applies to the whole topic of 'digitisation'. We are still at the beginning, there will be a lot more to come and technically there is definitely room for improvement.

Dr Rüland, thank you very much for giving us this interview. ■