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PREFACE

The Erasmus Congress (ERACON) is an annual conference organized by the European Association of ERASMUS Coordinators (EAEC) where placement and Internship Managers, researchers and professionals with an interest in the ERASMUS+ programme are actively participating with presentations, workshops and paper submissions. ERACON 2021 was the 17th conference organized since 2005.

CAREER-EU is also an annual conference organized by the European Association of Career Guidance (EACG) in cooperation with the European Association of ERASMUS Coordinators (EAEC). Career Guidance Counsellors and other experts are invited to make presentations and submit papers. Workshops and Sessions within the conference are also invited to discuss specific topics and to draw up concrete suggestions, which can contribute to the improvement of Career Guidance Counselling. CAREER-EU 2021 was the 12th annual conference organized since 2010.

ERACON 2021 & CAREER-EU 2021, were held under the patronage of the European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Dr Mariya Ivanova Gabriel.

The congress was organized as a hybrid event on 5-9 July 2021. In this electronic publication, presenters share their papers with those interested to read further on the content of their presentations.

Prof. Gregoris A. Makrides
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CRISIS MANAGEMENT OF MODERN TIMES: COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE EUROPEAN RESPONSE IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL AREA-INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ERASMUS+ PROGRAM OUTLOOK

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Res. Asst. Merve Sevinç Sakar[2]

ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 Pandemic has caught the rest of the world on the wrong foot despite watching the situation in China very closely. The experience and response to the pandemic differs in China and in Europe in many ways especially because of the structure of the EU. The pandemic has re-introduced the national states to the world stage again, then the health systems of many states have struggled with responding to the crisis and the initial need for help had to be focused on that areas. The European Commission has encapsulated it under the term of "Solidarity". The European Solidarity in Covid-19 period includes medical assistance in terms of medical equipment donations, medical teams, cross border treatments, vaccinations for all EU citizens and flight of the stranded citizens. But the need for medical curfews for extended time periods has also compromised the future of the European Dream by high jacking the educational systems. The EU has prepared to unify the educational area starting with the Bologna Process and continued very successfully with the Erasmus+ Program across the Union. But the experience in situ for the Higher Education does not mean just Education but also exposure to different cultures and a mutual dealing in social areas. Projects like "Erasmus+ Without Paper" or "Distance Education Programs" as well as "Digital Internships" had been introduced but not really maintained very well within the community. In addition to that a new concept in Virtual Mobility had also be added based on the curfews throughout European Educational Area. Therefore, the need for an appropriate response during the pandemic has forced the educational institutions to act using Crisis Management mechanisms- many times not having a broad framework to work with. The National Agencies of many countries and The EU Commission have not seized the support for the Exchange Programs despite of the difficulties in cross-continental travel, accommodation and technical problems in formal education, but they emphasized the necessity to embrace new methods in exchanges like Virtual Mobilities and Digital Internships. For the participants it meant a limited experience but for the auspices it meant continuity, stability and a way to contain the detriments of the pandemic. This work attempts to explain the terms of "Crisis" and stages of Crisis Management and the implementations of it by the EU and educational institutions while trying to survive the pandemic with the least amount of deficiencies in the educational area. The method of the research will use the evaluation of a survey done on the participants and students as well as official statements using the theoretical frame of crisis management theories. The survey was conducted online and 82 participants were asked for their thoughts on virtual mobility. The data of the study analyzed by using the quantitative analysis of content analysis method shows very clear results; 70,7% of participants think that Covid-19 is a barrier to Erasmus+, 59,8% of participants think (strongly agree and/or agree) that Virtual Mobilities go against the spirit of Erasmus+.

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INTRODUCTION

The World is not having a pandemic for the first time in its history. One of the most known ones is the Spanish Flu, an influenza virus after 1918- right behind the catastrophic World War, which has infected more than 500 Million people and caused more than 17 Million up to 100 Million estimated deaths according to Tauenberger and Morens. The disastrous pandemic had victims all around the world and its not even clear where the first outbreak might be.

Possibly because of the lack of a centric institution like World Health Organization, even if we critize its taken steps during the COVID 19 Pandemic, the effort of an information center and resource manager is a huge step to the collective action against an epidemic and pandemic, as we clearly can see.

According to the World Health Organization, The Coronavirus Disease is highly infectious and is a variation of the already known species of coronaviruses. Most infected people are expected to recover without any lasting problems, quite easily without any specialized treatment. But older people, or people with an illness history in cardiovascular system, diabetes or any other chronic illnesses are possibly to develop an illness of most serious levels. Coronovirus illness might leave a lasting damage to the body or some of the indicators like the loss of smell can be lasting, according to the World Health Organization.

The level of infections and transmissions may vary between all the variations that had developed after the first occurance of COVID19 cases in China; but the known facts about them is, that the transmissions occurs via saliva, like regular gribal infections. The WHO actually proposes the use of alcohol Based disinfection materials and frequent wash of hands with a steady use of face masks.

Those basic facts seem like the overcome of a virus like that might be easy and the procedure might be fast with a reaction worldwide.

But the reality is very much harder to understand and the effects of coronovirus pandemic has caused a worldwide crisis situation on many levels; social aspects, economic aspects, educational aspects as well as other minor aspects come to mind. The economy had to take a deep curve down and the already struggling countries, among the developing countries, as well as highly developed countries had steep problems during the pandemic. The cautionary measures of many governments were trict and limiting to many areas of economy and society.

Of course, other developments came to light, which would have required much more time, like the digitalization of Media and Education and Workspace.

For many people the way of life changed and it focused on the home; which required a new-organization of childcare, Education, school, socializing, work-space and family. The possible outcome of this change can be understood later, maybe it will require more than ten or twenty years; but there are also some surveys, indicators and research to understand at least some aspects.

This work also attempts to understand the effect of the pandemic of the educational institutions with a focus on Erasmus+ Program which is highly used by most of the Higher Educational Institutions in European Educational Area. The providers of the program, as well as the users had to meet and carry on with the high limitations based on health institutions policies. Some of them had to give up their only chance to experience an Exchange semester, or some of them had to adapt to Distance Learning which practically killed the social aspects of education and schools. Basically, it forced the educational world to re-imagine Mobilities and accept the possibility of virtual Mobilities and Internships much more earlier than expected.

The academic response to the change of that view has been a wide offering, many pupils in various academic institutions have conducted researches and published them. But with each and every research our level of understanding grows and also our ability to respond to a crisis like this makes a positive curve.

Some of the best academic works can be listed as below, to begin with a widespread view and allowing to focus on Erasmus+ afterwards to achieve a level of understanding for the fast acting and effective response.

Sir S.J. Daniels of Canada, has written a most understandable and popular paper about the challenge of the Pandemic to the Educational Systems and offers a guidance to teachers, institutional heads and officials about the necessary preparations, time consume, level of study and medium of study. He proposes that the institutional response should take advantage of asynchronous learning, which works best in digital formats and when constructing curricula, designing student assessment first helps teachers to focus. Finally, this viewpoint suggests flexible ways to repair the damage to students' learning trajectories once the pandemic is over and gives a list of resources.

Another well viewed work belong to Andreas Schleicher and the report he prepared for OECD. The focus of the report lies by the selection of indicators from 'Education at a glance 2020: OECD indicators', selected for their particular relevance in the pandemic context. Their analysis enables the understanding of countries' response and potential impact from the COVID-19 containment measures. The discussed topics include public financing of education in OECD countries; international student mobility; the loss of instructional time delivered in a school setting; measures to continue students' learning during school.

Another Instutional try to understand the impact of COVID 19 has been prepared by the International Association of Universities. According to the IAU, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown is the need for increased international and global perspectives to analyze the various impacts of COVID-19 in the short medium and long term. IAU is uniquely positioned to analyze the effects of the pandemic on HE at the global level. International and global perspectives are more important than ever in light of the pandemic and its effects, also to revisit the global goals as set by Agenda 2030 and in order to better meet them through higher quality collaborative higher education research and teaching.

Other Works are also focusing on the countries and trying another approach: to Reach the whole Picture from the puzzle parts; the many countries that make up the educational world.

One of the belongs to Nataliia Stukalo and Anastasiia Simakhova and focuses on the COVID-19 Impact on Ukrainian Higher Education. The research methods used in the article were as follows: empirical methods, methods of theoretical analysis, questionnaire, and interview. The main recommendations are the following: to organize training courses of online education methods for lecturers; to organize in-depth training courses of online education methods for lecturers of non-pedagogical specialties (including training in interactive online teaching methods, formation of an individual learning trajectory, online multidisciplinary courses development); university's management should provide constant monitoring of the satisfaction of students and lecturers of the online education organization for the accumulation of statistical data in the dynamics.

Another one has been written by Olaf Zawacki- Richter about the German Educational System. It examines the question of whether the current practice of *Emergency Remote Teaching* in the online term 2020 will lead to an acceleration of the digitalization of teaching and learning, and on what we can build upon in this development. In the light of the state of digital higher education in Germany and international experience in the field of distance education, as well as organizational support structures, the results of a longitudinal study on the media use behavior of students has been presented. While the acceptance of e-learning tools was slightly declining before the Covid-19 outbreak, it is to be assumed that the demand for digital offers will rather increase. Despite some reluctant reactions, it can be assumed that the current situation will have a positive effect on digital innovations in university teaching in Germany due to the pressure of the crisis, the great

commitment of many teachers, and raised expectations.

A work from Rita Koris, Francisco Javier Mato-Díaz and Núria Hernández-Nanclares comes closer to the theme of this paper: From real to virtual mobility: Erasmus+ students' transition to online learning amid the COVID-19 crisis. The study explores international students' perceptions of the transition to the online learning environment while they were studying on an Erasmus+ Study Mobility Programme at host universities in Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020. Applying the theoretical framework based on the affective, behavioral and cognitive aspects of adaptation in the case of international students, this study reveals what adaptive responses and decisions sojourners made, and how their study experience and learning capabilities were challenged by the restrictive measures introduced at host universities due to the state of emergency declared in the host countries.

In order to make his paper in a theoretical framework, the frame will be set by Crisis Management. Therefore the following parts will be about the Theory of Crisis and Crisis Management and the first response of the EU as a unit to the Crisis of COVID 19.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A crisis is a situation or occurrence as a result of an unpredicted event or a consequence of the said event that can be considered as a risk for an institution, organization or a much wider level of community and the Management of a crisis focuses mostly on damage control and limitation of expected damage, according to Brien Posey.

There are of course many variations of what we may call a crisis. The literature oftentimes differentiates between the following and the coronovirus imposed crisis situation is a cross between all of them depending on the impacts to the various areas:

1. Survival Crisis
2. Managerial Crisis
3. Change Crisis
4. Occurance Crisis

In most cases of managerial crises, the potential damage is only economical and is a threat to the finaces of the organisation. But the impact of organizational crises has been growing steadily and the COVID 19 Pandemic of a worldwide level has required a multidisciplinary approach. which can be found by Christine Pearson and Judith Clair's work about reframing the Crisis Management. By using psychological, social-political, and technological-structural research perspectives the definitions of organizational crisis and crisis management, as well as a framework that depicts the crisis management process has been changing.

For schools and other educational institutions those might happen in disrupted school routines or threatening of student's way of life, safety and in any kind of equilibrium achieved. Individuals handle crisis situations differently, they have different responses and reactions may differ depending on personal risk factors.

He also states that the personal risk factors include physical proximity, emotional proximity and personal vulnerabilities. Individuals with less social support and weak coping skills could have stronger threat perception and could be more affected by the incident and educational institutions are pressed hard to remember those points in order to be successful on crisis management.

Flannery and Everly also focus on those points and try to clear some of those terms in order to gain an effective perspective then most of them are used interchangeably.
According to them, a crisis is a response condition where:

- psychological homeostasis has been disrupted
- the individual's usual coping mechanisms have failed to re-establish homeostasis and
- the distress engendered by the crisis has yielded some evidence of functional impairment.

The vulnerability of an organisation during a crisis and the level of communication with its members, makes up sometimes the most of crisis Management and bring communications sciences and crisis Management closer in an academical sense[1]. In a communication focused Crisis Management plan, the plan maintains three different levels; Crisi Preparedness, Crisis Response and Crisis Results, which also have been used by Jonathan L. Bernstein.

The Pre-Crisis Level is about preparing for possibilities; anticipation of a crisis situation, vulnerability audit, specialising a communicative team, legal counsel, establishing notification and monitoring systems.

The Actual Crisis Management and Post Crisis Audit is about assesment and response.

EU RESPONSE

The Common European response to the COVID 19 situation in Europe has been coordinated by the EU Commission, which can also be considered a huge exam on itself. Usually even the meber states would be vary to give up that much power to an institution. But the level of expected response is more transcendental than any other crisis situation because of health and travel conditions. Therefore, the Commission has taken a much more active approach and action to reinforce our public health sectors and mitigate the socio-economic impact in the European Union. The Commission has also mobilised all means at their disposal to help the Member States coordinate their national responses and are providing objective information about the spread of the virus and effective efforts to contain it.

President von der Leyen has established a Coronavirus response team at political level to coordinate the response to the pandemic.

During these times of crisis, across the European Union, countries, regions and cities are stretching out a helping hand to neighbours and assistance is given to those most in need: donations of protective equipment such as masks, cross-border treatments of ill patients and bringing stranded citizens home under the motto of European Solidarity.

The Areas of the Commissions Response can be listed as:

- Public Health
- Travel
- Research and Innovation
- Vaccination Efforts
- Fighting Disinformation- The fight against disinformation, misinformation and foreign interference is a joint effort involving all European institutions, the EU Member States, civil society and online platforms.
- Transportation
- Jobs and Economy
- Digital Solutions

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[1] Nolting, Tobias / Thießen, Ansgar (Hrsg.): Krisenmanagement in der Mediengesellschaft. Potenziale und Perspektiven in der Krisenkommunikation. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2008, ISBN 978-3-531-15384-1

- Emergency Supports
- Recovery plan for Europe- To help repair the economic and social damage brought by the coronavirus pandemic, kick-start European recovery, and protect and create jobs, the European Commission is proposing a major recovery plan for Europe based on harnessing the full potential of the EU budget.

As it can be seen, because of the nature of the Crisis- Health Sector- Illness, the response lies mostly by the health care.

But as we have laid it before eyes, the pandemic has also caused a wide response and crisis in Education which is also in responsibility of the EU Commission.

The European Commission's main objective is the safety and protection of all Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps participants, while fully respecting all the containment measures taken at national level. The European Commission is working to help beneficiaries and students, pupils, volunteers and other participants in the programmes deal with the consequences for them.

The Commission is trying to adapt its response to this unprecedented situation as it evolves, clarifying and simplifying the application or rules and procedures where necessary in cooperation with Erasmus+ National Agencies and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

Two extraordinary Erasmus+ calls for proposals were launched on 25 August 2020 to support digital education readiness and creative skills. The calls each provide €100 million to respond to the coronavirus epidemic.

- The call for digital education readiness will support projects in school education, vocational education and training, and higher education. This call will aim to enhance online, distance and blended learning - including supporting teachers and trainers, as well as safeguarding the inclusive nature of digital learning opportunities.
- The call for 'partnerships for creativity' will support projects in the fields of youth, school education and adult education. The call aims to develop skills and competences that encourage creativity and boost quality, innovation and recognition of youth work.

Both calls will help link education, training and youth organisations with those in the cultural and creative sectors.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Erasmus+ is an exchange programme of EU for supporting education, training, youth and sport in Europe. Erasmus+ doesn't just mean opportunities for students, it offers opportunities for a wide variety of individuals and organisations. Key Action 1 Projects aim to enhance the skills, employability and intercultural awareness of participants. Key Action 1 supported three main types of activities such as Mobility in the Field of Education, Training and Youth, Erasmus+ Mundus Joint Master Degrees and the Erasmus+ Master Loan Scheme. Key Action 1 covers: KA101 (School education staff mobility), KA102/KA116 (Vocational Education and Training (VET) learners and staff mobility), KA103 (Higher education students and staff mobility within Programme Countries), KA107 (Higher education students and staff mobility between Programme and Partner Countries), KA111 (Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees), KA104 (Adult education staff mobility) and KA105 (Mobility of young people and youth workers) (European Commission). In the 2021 project period, the name of the KA103 project was changed to KA131, the name of the KA107 project was also changed to KA171.

Overall Key Action 1 activity has increased steadily, with close to 19 400 projects contracted in 2019, 938 thousand individual mobilities and more than 938 500 organisations have reaped benefits from Key Action 1 funding in 2019, since 2014 (European Commission, 2020).
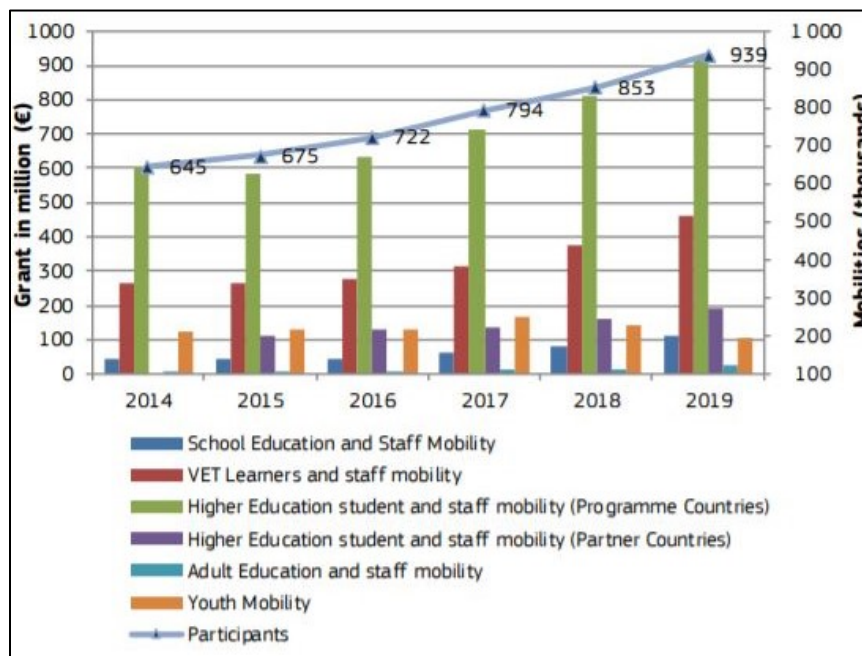

Figure 1. KA1 Mobility Trends 2014-2019 for indirect management (European Commision, 2020).

Action	Projects			Grants	Organisations	Participants
Type	Received	Contracted	Success Rate (*)	in million EUR		
School education staff mobility (KA101)	11 098	4 363	39%	112.2	15 473	54 200
VET learner and staff mobility (KA102+KA116)	8 384	4 551	54%	459.5	32 882	192 140
Higher education student and staff mobility (KA103)	4 230	4 193	80%	922.2	4 197	449 498
Higher education student and staff mobility between Programme and Partner Countries (KA107)	1 517	1 093	72%	194.2	1 093	55 465
Adult education staff mobility (KA104)	1 443	806	56%	23.6	2 843	12 592
Youth mobility (KA105)	12 903	4 255	33%	107.2	25 743	174 673
Subtotal for decentralised actions	**39 575**	**19 261**		**1 818.9**	**82 231**	**938 568**
Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees	97	48	49%	178.4	265	-
Join Master Degrees - Partnership with Japan	10	3	30%	4.8	12	-
Subtotal for centralised actions	**107**	**51**		**183.2**	**277**	**-**
Grand total	**39 682**	**19 312**		**2 002.0**	**82 508**	**938 568**

Figure 2. KA1 actions - Results of the calls 2019 for contracted projects (European Commision, 2020).

4.192 organizations and 449.498 participants benefited erasmus+ in higher education student and staff mobility (KA103) type in 2019. 449.498 participants make up the universe of the research. An online survey was run among 82 participants and they were asked for their thoughts of virtual mobility. A total of 82 responses were submitted, from 11 different countries. 26 response received from 10 European countries and 56 response received from different parts of Turkey. The data collected via survey in online platform between 01-16 October 2020. The data of the study analyzed by using the quantitative analysis of content analysis method.

RESULTS

192 organizations and 449.498 participants benefited from Erasmus+ in Higher Education Student And Staff Mobility (KA103-now it is called KA131) type in 2019. The COVID-19 outbreak negatively affects ongoing or planned activities under the Erasmus+ programme and European Solidarity Corps. 449.498 participants make up the universe of the research. The sample of the research consists of 56 participants from different parts of Turkey and 26 participants from ten different European countries. The data collected via survey in online platform between 01-16 October 2020. 82 Participants attended our Survey from all Europe: 56 participants from different parts of Turkey, seven participants from Spain, five participants from Bulgaria, five participants from Romania, three participants from Croatia, and the one participant from Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia. 25 participants are academician, 16 participants are student, 13 participants are officer at Erasmus+ office, 12 participants are new graduated, 7 participants are executive at Erasmus+ office and 9 participants related to other jobs. 47 participants are male, 34 of the participants are female and one participant preferred not to say. 45 participants are not an Erasmus+ beneficiary; but the 37 participants are currently an Erasmus+ beneficiary. While 19 participants perform virtual mobility, 17 participants perform physical mobility. 13 participants do staff mobility for teaching 11 participants do student mobility for studies, 7 participants do staff mobility for training and 5 participants do student mobility for internship. 28 participants are between 18-24 ages, 16 participants are between 25-32 ages, 15 participants are between 51 and over ages, 11 participants between 33-40 ages and 11 participants between 41-50 ages. 61 of the participants also have been benefited Erasmus+ programme before.

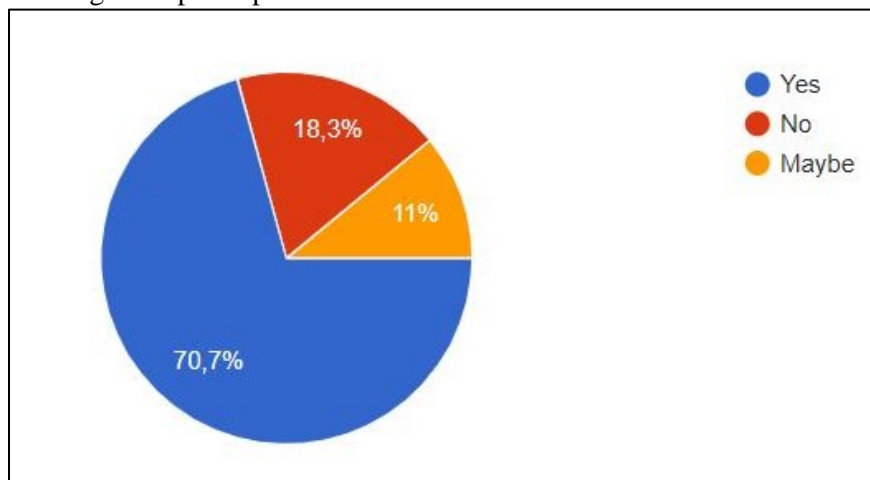Figure 3 shows the thoughts of participants about Covid-19 a barrier or not on Erasmus+.

Figure 3. Percentage Distribution Graph of Participants Thoughts about Covid-19 a Barrier or Not On Erasmus+

When figure 3 is examined, it is seemed that 70,7% of participants think that Covid-19 is a barrier on Erasmus+, 18,3% of participants think that Erasmus+ is not a barrier on Erasmus+ and 11% of participants answered maybe.

Figure 4 shows the thoughts of participants about physical mobility during the Covid-19 outbreak
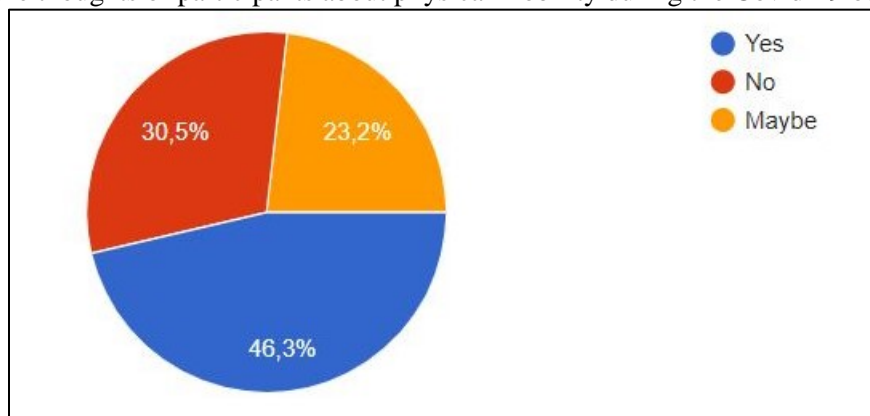

Figure 4. Thoughts of Participants About Physical Mobility During the Covid-19 Outbreak
When figure 4 is examined, it is seemed that 46,3% of participants would like to do physical mobility despite the coronavirus outbreak. 30,5% of participants would not like to do physical mobility and 23,2% of participants are undecided about physical activity.
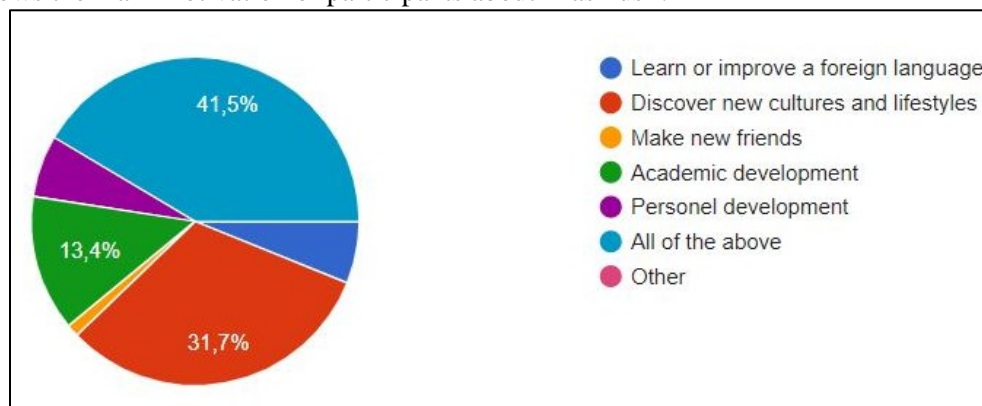Figure 5 shows the main motivation of participants about Erasmus+.

Figure 5. Main Motivation of Participants About Erasmus
When figure 5 is examined, it is seemed that 41,5% of participants would like to do erasmus+ for learn or improve a foreign language, discover new cultures and lifestyles, make new friends, academic development and personel devolopment. 31% of participants' main motivation for erasmus+ is discover new cultures and lifestyles. 13,4% of participants' main motivation for erasmus+ is academic development. 5 participants would like to learn or improve a foreign language, 5 participants would like to have personel development an done participant would like to have new friends.
Some of the participants think that people can learn both the foreign language and the customs and traditions of the foreign language and the life styles of citizens in other countries through a digital platform.
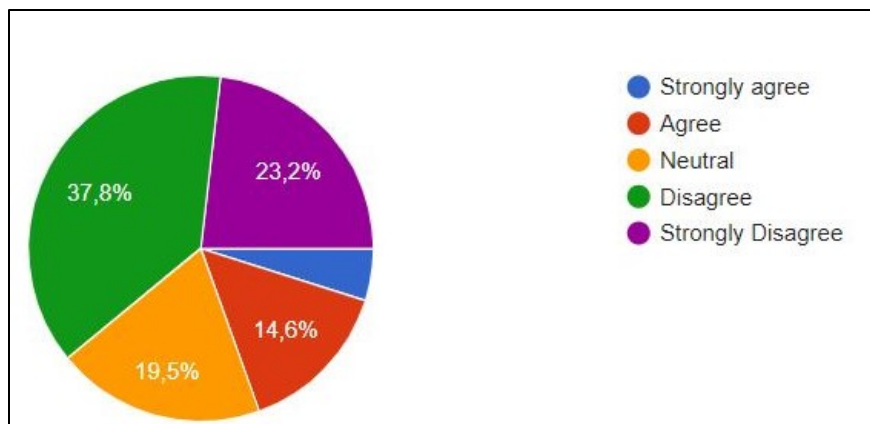Figure 6 shows virtual mobility can fulfil erasmus+ expectations.

Figure 6. Virtual Mobility Can Fulfil Erasmus+ Expectations
When figure 6 is examined, it is seemed that 61% of participants (strongly disagree and disagree) think that virtual mobility can not fulfil erasmus+ expectation. 19,5% of participants think that virtual mobility can fulfil erasmus+ expectation. 14,6% of participants are neutral about virtual mobility can fulfil erasmus+ expectation or not. 4 participants strongly agree that virtual mobility can fulfil erasmus+ expectation.
Figure 7 shows virtual mobility could meet participants' expectations
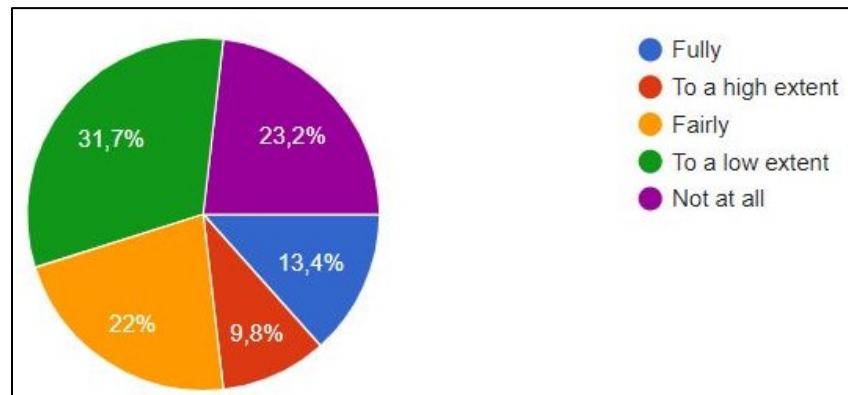
Figure 7. Virtual Mobility Can Meet Participants Erasmus+ Expectations
When figure 7 is examined, it is seemed that 31% participants think that virtual mobility could meet their expectations in a low talent. 23,2% of participants think that virtual mobility could meet their expectations not at all, 22% of participants think that virtual mobility could meet their expectations fairly, 13,4% of participants think that virtual mobility could meet their expectations fully and 9,8% of participants think that virtual mobility could meet their expectations to a high extemt.
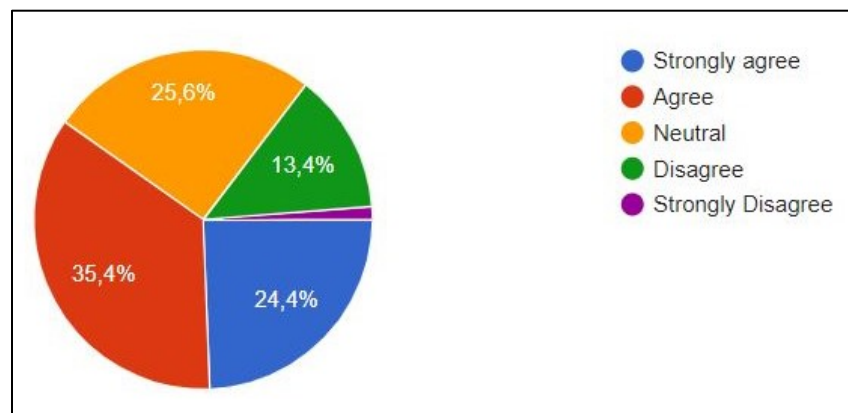Figure 8 shows virtual mobility against the spirit of erasmus+.

Figure 8. Virtual Mobility Against the Spirit of Erasmus+

When figure 8 is examined, it is seemed that 59,8% (strongly agree and agree) of participants think that virtual mobility against the spirit of erasmus+. 25,6% of participants are neutral about virtual mobility against the spirit of erasmus+ or not, 13,4 of participants disagree with virtual mobility against the spirit of erasmus+. One of the participant said that "erasmus+ requieres close interaction, so being virtual is against the nature of it.".

CONCLUSION

Erasmus+ Program is one of the most affected areas by the coronovirus pandemic. After the start of the illness in Wuhan, China at the end of 2019 and the spread and outbreak all over the world, face-to-face education was suspended in almost all educational institutions including universities and very strict travel restrictions were imposed to the public.

Some students who contacted the National Agencies of the program countries had to return to their home countries. Many universities around the world have provided online or hybrid education for the 2020-2021 academic year as suggested by the European Commission, and virtual mobility has been offered to students and staff as an alternative.

This study composes an attempt to explain the terms of "Crisis" and stages of Crisis Management and the implementations of it by the EU and educational institutions while trying to survive the pandemic with the least amount of deficiencies in the educational area. As the method of the research, we used the evaluation of a survey- done on the participants and students as well as official statements using the theoretical frame of crisis management theories.

The survey was conducted online and 82 participants were asked for their thoughts on virtual mobility. The data of the study, analyzed using the quantitative analysis of content analysis method shows very clear results; 70,7% of participants think that Covid-19 is a barrier to Erasmus+, 59,8% of participants think (strongly agree and/or agree) that Virtual Mobilities go against the spirit of Erasmus+.

30,5% of participants would not like to do physcial mobility while 41,5% of participants would like to do Erasmus+ to learn or improve a foreign language, to discover new cultures and lifestyles, to make new friends, for academic development and personel devolement purposes.

Some of the participants think that people can learn both the foreign language and the customs and traditions of the foreign language and the life styles of citizens in other countries through a digital platform. 70,7% of participants think that Covid-19 is a barrier on Erasmus+ and 59,8% of participants think that virtual mobility is "virtually" against the spirit of Erasmus+.

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ANNEX

	Country	Occupation	Age	Gender	Currently an Erasmus Beneficiary	Virtual of Physical	Type of the acticity
1	Bulgaria	Executive at erasmus office	25-32	Male	Yes	Physical	Staff mobility for training
2	Bulgaria	Officer at erasmus office	33-40	Female	No	—	—
2	Bulgaria	Academician	41-50	Female	No	—	—
1	Bulgaria	Academician	41-50	Male	Yes	Physical	Staff mobility for training
3	Bulgaria	Academician	51 and over	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for teaching
8	Croatia	Officer at erasmus office	33-40	Female	No	—	—
6	Croatia	Executive at erasmus office	41-50	Female	No	—	—
7	Croatia	Executive at erasmus office	51 and over	Female	No	—	—
9	Greece	Academician	51 and over	Male	No	—	—
10	Italy	Officer at erasmus office	51 and over	Female	No	—	—
11	Lithuania	Officer at erasmus office	33-40	Female	No	—	—
12	Poland	Academician	51 and over	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for teaching
13	Portugal	Officer at erasmus office	51 and over	Female	Yes	Physical	Student mobility for studies
17	Romania	Student	18-24	Female	Yes	Virtual	Student mobility for studies
15	Romania	Officer at erasmus office	25-32	Female	No	—	—
14	Romania	Academician	41-50	Female	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for training
16	Romania	Other	41-50	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for training
18	Romania	Student	18-24	Female	Yes	Physical	Student mobility for studies
19	Slovenia	Officer at erasmus office	25-32	Female	No	—	—
22	Spain	Officer at erasmus office	18-24	Female	No	—	—
26	Spain	Student	18-24	Female	Yes	Physical	Student mobility for studies
25	Spain	Student	18-24	Female	Yes	Virtual	Student mobility for studies
27	Spain	Student	18-24	Female	Yes	Virtual	Student mobility for studies
24	Spain	Officer at erasmus office	25-32	Male	Yes	Physical	Staff mobility for training
21	Spain	Executive at erasmus office	41-50	Male	Yes	Physical	Staff mobility for training
20	Spain	Academician	51 and over	Female	No	—	—
23	Spain	Officer at erasmus office	51 and over	Female	No	—	—
52	Turkey	New graduated	18-24	Female	No	—	—
57	Turkey	New graduated	18-24	Female	No	—	—
70	Turkey	Other	18-24	Female	No	—	—
79	Turkey	Student	18-24	Female	No	—	—
54	Turkey	New graduated	18-24	Male	No	—	—
55	Turkey	New graduated	18-24	Male	No	—	—
58	Turkey	New graduated	18-24	Male	No	—	—
59	Turkey	New graduated	18-24	Male	No	—	—
60	Turkey	New graduated	18-24	Male	No	—	—
69	Turkey	Other	18-24	Male	No	—	—
73	Turkey	Student	18-24	Male	No	—	—
74	Turkey	Student	18-24	Male	No	—	—
56	Turkey	New graduated	18-24	Prefer not to say	No	—	—
78	Turkey	Student	18-24	Male	Yes	—	—
51	Turkey	New graduated	18-24	Female	Yes	Physical	Staff mobility for teaching
76	Turkey	Student	18-24	Male	Yes	Physical	Student mobility for internship
80	Turkey	Student	18-24	Male	Yes	Physical	Student mobility for internship
53	Turkey	New graduated	18-24	Male	Yes	Virtual	Student mobility for internship
72	Turkey	Student	18-24	Male	Yes	Virtual	Student mobility for internship
75	Turkey	Student	18-24	Male	Yes	Physical	Student mobility for studies
77	Turkey	Student	18-24	Male	Yes	Virtual	Student mobility for studies
43	Turkey	Academician	25-32	Female	No	—	—
61	Turkey	Officer at erasmus office	25-32	Female	No	—	—
63	Turkey	Officer at erasmus office	25-32	Female	No	—	—
67	Turkey	Other	25-32	Female	No	—	—
39	Turkey	Academician	25-32	Male	No	—	—
50	Turkey	New graduated	25-32	Male	No	—	—
62	Turkey	Officer at erasmus office	25-32	Male	No	—	—
35	Turkey	Academician	25-32	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for teaching
32	Turkey	Academician	25-32	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for teaching
41	Turkey	Academician	25-32	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for teaching
38	Turkey	Academician	25-32	Male	Yes	Physical	Staff mobility for training
49	Turkey	New graduated	25-32	Male	Yes	Physical	Student mobility for internship
31	Turkey	Academician	33-40	Female	No	—	—
34	Turkey	Academician	33-40	Female	No	—	—
42	Turkey	Academician	33-40	Female	No	—	—
46	Turkey	Executive at erasmus office	33-40	Male	No	—	—
71	Turkey	Other	33-40	Male	No	—	—
37	Turkey	Academician	33-40	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for teaching
47	Turkey	Executive at erasmus office	33-40	Female	Yes	Physical	Student mobility for studies
48	Turkey	Executive at erasmus office	33-40	Female	Yes	Physical	Student mobility for studies
40	Turkey	Academician	41-50	Female	No	—	—
36	Turkey	Academician	41-50	Male	No	—	—
44	Turkey	Academician	41-50	Male	No	—	—
45	Turkey	Academician	41-50	Male	No	—	—
68	Turkey	Other	41-50	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for teaching
29	Turkey	Academician	51 and over	Male	No	—	—
30	Turkey	Academician	51 and over	Male	No	—	—
28	Turkey	Academician	51 and over	Male	Yes	Physical	Staff mobility for teaching
33	Turkey	Academician	51 and over	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for teaching
64	Turkey	Other	51 and over	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for teaching
65	Turkey	Other	51 and over	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for teaching
66	Turkey	Other	51 and over	Male	Yes	Virtual	Staff mobility for teaching
81	Turkey	Student	18-24	Male	No	—	—
82	Turkey	Student	18-24	Male	Yes	Physical	Student mobility for studies

ERASMUS+ AS A BRIDGE TOWARDS JOINT EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

In many HEIs in Europe today, staff and students may be scarce while the degree of Bologna process implementation remains unequal. On the other hand, developing countries face multiple development challenges and one major problem for HEIs is brain drain and/or unavailability of highly qualified human resources to teach in scarcity areas and/or new academic fields necessary for fulfillment of job market requirements. This research paper focuses on the potential of the KA107 mobility scheme to find common grounds for joint capacity-building practices in co-teaching through an example of a good practice implemented in a transregional context. The effectiveness of this type of partnership using EU ERASMUS+ teaching staff exchanges will be illustrated following the Exchange programme between one Central European university - Univerzita Mateja Bela in Banska Bystrica, Slovakia - and one Government-funded university located in the Indian ocean - the University of Mauritius. Strengths and weaknesses of this cooperation will be considered in order to identify and outline new perspectives for innovative HR strategies with the Erasmus+ programme for a win-win partnership. The perspectives for a long-term academic cooperation will be discussed, namely with the use of digital technologies to reach educational goals.

INTRODUCTION

The Bologna Process fosters internationalization of HEIs. Consolidation of "mobility as a means for better learning" through "quality higher education" would enhance employability of "creative, innovative, critically thinking and responsible graduates", and trigger sustainable development. On the other hand, the struggle of sub-Saharan countries in Africa to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the 1990s to attain "Primary education for all" or to "set up an international partnership for development" have been partially successful because of limited job prospects and brain drain in developing countries (Faini, 2007: 179). While different international institutions focus on measuring results and verifying achievements in terms of MDGs, OCDE (ND: 3) emphasizes the need "for more country and context specific approaches, and measurable and meaningful goals, reflecting the realities and priorities of individual countries."

Context and Problem: Some studies have explored the rationales of HEIs in developed countries for internationalization. These may be associated to historical, geographic, cultural, linguistic, and economic reasons (Luitjen-Lub *et al*., 2005) while most HEIs in developing countries are interested in nation-building and modernization of strategies to increase national capacity-building and innovation (Marginson, 2007: 71). Internationalization strategies also vary from increasing the student population, attracting high calibre students, gaining a higher status at local and/or international level to serving the motherland only (Chan and Dimmock, 2008). Internationalization may be Government driven.

In 2010, in line with its internationalization policy, the Univerzita Mateja Bela in Banska Bystrica (UMB) in Slovakia (Central Europe) sent a request for collaboration to the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology in Mauritius Island in the Indian Ocean. Mauritius was looking forward to

transforming itself into a knowledge-based economy and catalyzing the existing internationalization activities in the higher education sector (TEC, 2007). Many administrative hassles were overcome to set up the ERASMUS+ framework with the University of Mauritius (UoM) in 2012. Effective collaboration started in 2016 using the KA107 mobility scheme and two inter-institutional ERASMUS+ agreements (2015-2018 and 2018-2021). UoM staff established more successful ERASMUS+ programmes with Greece, England and Slovakia (Bratislava).

At the initial stage, UoM and UMB agreed to collaborate as follows: (i) Joint organisation of academic activities alternately between the two universities, staff mobility in the field of Education, and French & Francophone Literatures, development of bilingual or trilingual online modules (English, French and Slovak) in scarcity areas every two years, development of a University programme in the field of Education (ii) Student Exchange programmes to provide a different learning environment to both undergraduate and postgraduate students, including joint supervision of PhD students.

While Rodriguez-Heras *et al.* (2019) highlighted main problems and challenges with ERASMUS+ ICM projects, and made useful recommendations to newcomers, we still felt the need to be involved in a more qualitative research about the partnership between two radically different universities. Our main research question is as follows: how could we focus on highly cost-efficient and useful future collaborations?

Our paper is structured as follows. First, we will describe the main rationales for internationalization of both HEIs. Then, to evaluate our collaboration, we will undertake a SWOT analysis. Finally, we will discuss our results using the conceptual framework shaping internationalization rationales developed by Seeber *et al.* (2016).

RATIONALE FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION

UoM: The UoM is a publicly funded institution since 1965. It always encouraged partnerships with foreign universities in terms of consultancy for both administrative and academic matters, namely programmes' development and lectures' delivery in scarcity areas. External examiners from foreign universities conduct evaluation of programmes on a yearly basis. Cross border education started mostly with universities from developed countries. A few joint degrees were offered when there was a lack of local expertise.

By the 1990s, given the very competitive international environment, the Mauritian Government decided to establish higher education as one pillar of its economy through internationalization (Timol and Kinser, 2017: 8). The latter was integrated in UoM's strategic plan 2015-2020. The TEC (2007: 4) also opted for a plan to develop HEIs to transform "Mauritius into a regional knowledge hub" and increase "regional mobility of students and staff", lay more emphasis on "international norms of quality and performance", create a "synergy between the post-secondary education sector and the economy" and enhance research for national development.

Progress was very slow (TEC, 2019). When Government gave full support to the UoM to start ERASMUS+ programmes with the UMB, partnerships increased with other universities, and led to the creation of an International Affairs Office (IAO) in 2018[1] to follow-up on strategic alliances with institutions, enhance research and promote UoM internationally.[2] Furthermore, despite a diversified higher education and free tertiary education, Mauritius faces many difficulties to retain the best human resources (Docquier, Lohest and Marfouk, 2005: 37). In 2018, Mauritius ranked fifth in the world and first in Africa in terms of brain drain, losing some 41% of its graduates (GIS, 2018: 1). Furthermore, owing to limited fundings, Mauritian HEIs provide less opportunities than some foreign institutions[3]

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[1] Student exchange programmes and international students used to fall under the purview of the Registrar's office.

[2] UoM, *IAO International Prospectus* 2019-2020.

[3] Government does not provide any specific budget for internationalization. The UoM receives financial aids from the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) for (i) short-term academic visitors and (ii) University staff to attend conferences/seminars on a first come first served basis. Conference organization usually depends on the capacity of UoM staff to obtain sponsorships from regional and international networks and associations.

There is a shortage of expertise in emerging and new thrust areas as well as difficulties in recruiting and retaining high-level faculty. Number of students studying abroad was high until 2010, with a slow decrease over the years (TEC, 2019: 9) because of the growing economic crisis, opening of HEI space to some prestigious institutions and current pandemic.

UMB: Founded in 1992 on the backgrounds of the existing higher education institutions active in Banska Bystrica, Central Slovakia, since the1950s, UMB focuses mainly on social sciences and humanities. It is oriented both towards teaching a wide range of study programmes at the three levels of studies and research. Many higher education transformations took place in Central Europe in recent decades, especially since the 1990s (after the split of former Czechoslovakia). UMB is among first Slovak HEIs to have adopted institutional internationalization strategies, whilst the national strategy of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic was announced for the first time in 2020 and has not yet been adopted.

At UMB, internationalization has progressively become a challenge and a priority of Central management, being defined in some of the key documents of the university such as the Mission Statement, Erasmus+ Charter and Internationalization Strategy. The latter was first adopted in 2011, then revised and amended in 2016 (redefining priorities and areas of interest), 2018 (focus on dissemination and impact) and 2020 (virtual mobility concept included). UMB has managed to become a regional leader in several aspects of internationalization. For instance, the university hosted the highest number of incoming scholars among all Slovak HEIs under Erasmus+; it has the largest number of active partnerships with French-speaking HEIs throughout Europe and beyond; it runs a dozen of double degrees and joint degrees, half of them with French-speaking partners.

Similarities and differences between both HEIs: Despite different geographical contexts, some of the key challenges in internationalization remain the same for both HEIs. UMB experiences these problems just as other Slovak and Central European HEIs do, for example, brain drain. In 2018, an important ratio of students was unmotivated to study at home, despite a very rich offer of mobilities and internships to allow them to experience foreign academic environments during their studies. 30,000 Slovaks pursued higher studies in the Czech Republic. Massive movement of Slovak students to Western Europe was compensated, in part, by growing numbers of Ukrainian students applying for studies in Slovak universities. Although this phenomenon helps internationalization of Slovak HEIs, a certain disbalance is observed in some institutions with the registration of a high number of Ukrainians.

There are major differences between the two universities at financial, management and organisational levels. At UOM, internationalisation occurs "incidentally" with a budding IAO while the UMB has a well-managed and well-structured one. UoM opts for the activity and competency approaches while the UMB focuses on competency, ethos, and process approaches. However, both universities have international aspirations, each one using its own strengths, assets and resources to achieve its goals. Adjustments for more internationalisation were brought in progressively with a halt owing to the unforeseen pandemic in year 2020.

Internationalization in a specific HEI is related to several factors at environmental, organizational and intra-organization levels. While the UoM aimed mainly at the internationalist model, it was unsuccessful as it could not compete with existing prestigious universities regionally or internationally. When it adopted the globalist model, it was fragilized because of the decrease in student recruitment locally. Thus, it shifted to the translocalist model for national development.

UMB's rationale for internationalization reflects the vision of a strong regional university with important international links. It identifies strategic priority regions and zones, and divides internationalization activities into three main domains: a) two-way internationalization - UMB supports mobilities, including virtual and blended ones, and creates opportunities to fund these types of activities within privileged university partnerships networks, b) transversal internationalization - internationalization is present in all activities, including education, research and development of UMB as a result of intra-institutional synergies and a thorough cultivation together with privileged partner universities abroad, c) multilingual university - active support is given to the policy of diversity, multilingualism and interculturalism.

2. SWOT ANALYSIS

Grounded theory analysis was carried out using reports from UoM staff and students involved in the ERASMUS+ Exchange programmes and the ATLAS-ti software. Environmental factors of Seeber *et al.* (2016) were used to group the results as indicated in the SWOT analysis table below.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Increased international awareness of/ deeper engagement with global issues by students **A) Self-development** -Developed more international- mindedness and open-mindedness, flexibility of thinking, tolerance and respect for others, more intercultural understanding, and critical thinking. -Developed integrative motivation. -Developed new perceptions about women and their rights. -Appreciated a different set of values and highly professional work culture at UMB. **B) Knowledge sharing** -Acquired new knowledge and new learning opportunities and skills in language studies - the status of French language in different countries. -Gained better understanding of the difference between second language and foreign language teaching and learning. **C) Administrative efficiency** -Provision of an equal number of staff for the mobility. -Successfully overcoming red tapism. **Improved quality of teaching and learning** iscovered a teaching model geared towards human centered development. **-**Discovered Slovak authors translated in English and French. - Exposed to Cultural Studies and Social work in Central Europe. -Students strengthened their sense of belonging to a multicultural country and felt proud of their national identity. **Strengthened institutional research and knowledge production capacity** **-**Discovered the history, culture, educational system and language policies, and language management of a foreign country. -Networking with other Central European HEIs. **Enhanced international cooperation and capacity building**	**Enhanced internationalisation of the curriculum** **A) Unequal resources** -UoM depends solely on ERASMUS+ programme and UMB to fund any activity (teaching/research, module or programme development). -UoM relies on UMB to cater for exceptional circumstances (such as a pandemic) for financial assistance to students. **B) Administrative hurdles** -Duration of the Student Schengen VISA is less than one semester for UoM (non-European) students. -Calendar issues for staff mobility. **--** Perceptions of UoM students' that the Exchange is equivalent to a scholarship award highlights the limits of the existing interview grid for effective selection of students with intrinsic and integrative motivation only. -Those from Conservative families may encounter culture shock despite home university prior preparations and wish to quit the Exchange programme. -Very few highly motivated applicants. **C) Language and/or financial barriers** -Registration of students for an MA or MPhil/PhD in the field of Music or Translation studies is currently impossible. **Enhanced prestige/profile for the institution** -Lack of interest of Slovak students to opt for an Exchange programme in a developing country. -Slovak students must follow curricula of both UMB and UoM if they opt for mobility, which is a constraint. **Opportunity to benchmark/ compare institutional performance within the context of international good practice** -The equivalence system for summative evaluation was not readily accepted by students.

-Human resource development in Translation studies with sharing of appropriate tools online. -UoM benefitted from UMB multilingual human resources with proven track record in teaching and learning in two scarcity areas: Translation Studies and Music, thus satisfying labour market needs at a lower cost. **Increased international networking by faculty and researchers** -Publication possibilities in a Central European journal.	
Opportunities	**Threats**
Improved quality of teaching and learning -UoM will better prepare its students to decrease culture shock. - **Enhanced Internationalization of the curriculum** - Development of joint programmes in Music Studies, Translation Studies, and/or Cultural Studies. -Single/Joint institutional research and knowledge production.	-Development of instrumental motivation and contemplation of immigration from Mauritius, its insularity and other limitations. - Students' intrinsic motivation to pursue further studies at UMB may lead to brain drain.

3. DISCUSSION

ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

Although UoM is a public-funded university, the economic rationale is valid to enable the institution to embark on joint projects and activities without relying solely on Government funds. UMB recently developed new programmes for foreign students through technological facilities, thus entailing no living costs for undergraduate or postgraduate students. Nevertheless, dissemination of information and outreach are problematic in a hypercompetitive context.

Both UMB and UoM are engaged in research development, but UMB is engaged at top management level and regularly activates networking to increase research activities and publications. Well versed in student exchange programmes, UMB has developed a wide range of activities that were beneficial to UoM exchange students. However, there is no specific evaluation of competences developed by students in relation to increased international awareness of or deeper engagement with global issues. Development of an appropriate portfolio with learning outcomes related to UMB programme of studies and extracurricular activities for which students are duly registered could be linked to both teaching and research.

Because UoM had specific modules related to Government policies and industry-related needs and UMB provided well trained human resources, enhanced internationalization of the curriculum in designated fields could be worked out too. More specific artistic collaborations could be set up jointly to break existing and recurrent stereotypes about music (and/or other arts) teaching and learning in Mauritius. A Joint teaching and research programme in Music Studies would be highly recommendable and worthwhile for the UoM.

At UoM, the exchange programme is driven by its staff for whom curriculum development in the field of intercultural education is important. Further collaboration with UMB could concern an explicit curriculum encompassing world challenges defined by UNESCO (2009) in integrating fight against discrimination, knowledge about brain-drain in a postcolonial setting and promotion of nation building. The transnational

collaboration would be based on the construction of norms and new knowledge for specific purposes (Muller, 2009; OCDE, 2019). Competences developed would include Education for cosmopolitism and peace (Akkari et Payet, 2010), Education for Environment (Barthes et Alpe, 2012), Intercultural Education (intra et inter-culturalism, ecological principles). This could take the form of a flexible programme for undergraduate students with a number of Stand-Alone modules, thus meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets.

The two HEIs have different work cultures. UMB seeks to share but not to impose its work culture on other universities. As for UoM, given the lack of prestige at international level and resistance to change inside the institution, sharing of good practices for improvement of quality of teaching and learning remain a stumbling block. But a research project with a few volunteers engaged in peer review of their Module Specification Sheets (MSS) and teaching strategies, and sharing of alternate models of education could be helpful.

INTRA-ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

UMB follows a top-down approach and encompasses many macro variables. UMB's International Office not only exploits opportunities but creates them with a vision, bearing in mind the goals, management of activities and outcomes. It also manages the budget envelope. UoM focuses more on a bottom-up approach, relying narrowly on micro variables, like staff initiatives. Top Management first encouraged ERASMUS+ initiatives, then validated partnerships and provided a supportive environment for staff development. However, there is a higher risk of abandonment from few highly motivated staff if they feel lonely or bogged down by responsibilities. Lack of communication because of divergent ideas and perceptions about programme management may result either in delays or impossibility of reaching goals. In addition, most staff members at the UoM are not aware about the internationalization process. Thus, individual initiatives may not thrive without the constant commitment of the leaders and appropriate institutional leadership.

CONCLUSION

While the Bologna process favors the circulation of both people and knowledge, transition from an existing system to integration of ERASMUS+ programme through the K107 in the HEI of a developing country involves many challenges. Owing to the existence of representations of how middle range HEIs should function and the fact that the survival of the Mauritian HEI depends largely on its ability to ensure a continuous flow of resources, ERASMUS+ may have to remain the sole provider in future for activities with UMB, its Central European partner. An International Staff Mobility Week may solve a few practical issues but the wants, needs and outcomes of each partner university will have to be better targeted for optimization of resources. Student mobility is currently linked to recognition of modules followed in a partner country but the broader issue of evaluation of an intercultural education curricula with specific outcomes, to reflect the international and intercultural dimension in both teaching and research would enrich students' portfolio of competences.

Our research work highlights the numerous strengths and a few weaknesses of two middle range universities after the first ERASMUS+ Exchange programme. This paper helped the Link Coordinators of both HEIs to better understand drawbacks and setbacks, and identify more appropriate actions and future directions to better coexist and coevolve cost-efficiently using K107 facilities.

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INTERNATIONAL SIGN EVERYWHERE: TOWARDS INTERNATIONALISATION OF EDUCATION AND INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY OF DEAF STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The inclusion of deaf students in education has been a topic of debate and research for a long time. Deaf students experience numerous communication challenges, which is especially true for communication with those from other nationalities due to the lack of a common (sign) language. The Erasmus+ project InSign (Advancing inclusive education through International Sign) promotes the internationalisation of education and the international mobility of deaf students. This paper presents a comparative survey among five European countries aiming to inform the research community about the common challenges and perception of the communication abilities of deaf people. The results indicate that there are many misconceptions, especially from people who do not have contact with the deaf community.

INTRODUCTION

Due to their hearing loss, deaf people communicate by other means. The most expressive and non-limiting of which is definitely sign language. Sign language is a visually-sign language system with a particular setting, position, direction and movement of hands and fingers, and face mimicking. People with either severe or profound hearing loss use mainly sign language as a communication language. According to [1], in 2013, there were, globally, 138 sign languages, and in Europe, there are 47 different sign languages, excluding Makaton.

This paper is based on work done in Advancing Inclusive Education Through International Sign - InSign project. The results are a collection of data gathered from the five project partners from Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Portugal, and Slovenia. The Erasmus+ InSign promotes the internationalisation of education and the international mobility of deaf students, which is a specific cluster in the European Higher Education Area where students have little support that InSign plans to extend. By raising awareness and promoting the use of International Sign as a lingua franca by deaf and non-deaf users, InSign wishes to tear down communication barriers and open the doors of internationalisation and globalisation to deaf students.

In this paper, we will shortly look at what International Sign is and how it compares to natural sign languages. The main part of the paper will be dedicated to the analysis of a survey that was conducted primarily with

students to measure how they perceive deaf people, their difficulties in the education system, how they understand sign language, and whether they are interested in learning their national sign language or International Sign. The last section contains the discussion and conclusion.

SIGN LANGUAGES AND INTERNATIONAL SIGN

In general, there has been much effort put into improving the accessibility of deaf persons to all areas of life. The progress in terms of development and support for the national sign languages has been increasing over the years. In all of the included project partners, natural sign languages have established learning processes and have organisations supporting, developing, and teaching them. They are also relatively well supported by technology with different online tools to help communications and learning. However, there are still issues. One of the primary deficiencies of governmental support for the deaf communities in project partner countries seems to revolve around education which is shown in the low average educational level of the deaf. The most significant appears to be the lack of teachers who can use sign language, and schools that are fairly rare are usually far away and therefore not convenient for families with deaf children. Education options for deaf students also become a big limiting factor as they progress to higher levels of education.

International Sign (IS) is a form of signing for communication between signers with no other language in common [2], [3], [4]. IS signs are combined from the signer's own natural sign language mixed with highly iconic signs that can be understood by a large audience [5]. IS is therefore considered to be a mixed language, and thus, it is often characterised as pidgin [6]. However, it has different characteristics than natural sign languages, which possess a standardised lexicon and grammar. Thus it is difficult to refer to IS as language. The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) uses the term IS, rather than International Sign Language, to indicate that IS does not have full linguistic status but is a translanguaging practice. Further, it is difficult to refer to it as a universal language since IS is hardly understood by Eastern signers. This is related to the different features between Eastern and Western Sign languages [2]. Although IS is promoted as lingua franca (at least in the western world) for globalising the deaf communities and used at international conferences, there is a lack of International Sign literature.

International Signs are made by descriptive meanings, and many of the signs are borrowed from various natural sign languages. They are specific signs that are made by the necessity for communication at conferences and councils. Each speaker uses words from his/ her local sign language vocabulary, so there are more than one signs for one meaning. One of the common techniques in IS is the presentation of concepts in multiple forms, which make the information accessible to the audience despite the noisy channel. Describing the IS as a noisy channel is related to the limited number of IS vocabulary, diverse audience, and low degree of conventionalisation.

In contrast with national sign languages, the support for the International Sign is basically non-existent in all of the project partner countries. None of them reported any form of IS inclusion in education or any other less formal learning opportunities, with one small exception. As a result, those who wish to learn the IS are left to their own devices. This is especially problematic as we have noticed a general lack of IS learning materials, especially in languages other than English. This is unfortunate as many project partners report interest in learning IS, especially from the younger population, who find such a form of communication especially valuable for international communication (for travel or over the internet) and entertainment. The interest in learning a sign language and IS is also supported by the results of the survey performed in the project.

However, before we focus on the survey and its results, we would like to quickly discuss the feedback from guided interviews. We have performed guided interviews with members of the deaf community on the topic of IS to get their perspective on the use and usefulness of IS in their communities. As already stated before, they have confirmed that there are no official ways in which to learn IS, but also opportunities to use it with or listen to an advanced speaker are rare. The biggest driving force behind IS and seemingly the most invested in acquiring the knowledge to use IS is the younger generation. This is mainly related to communicating while travelling and consuming international media content. Interviewees have also been quite vocal and consistent in their opinion that the IS is to be just a supporting tool to facilitate communication between different nationalities and is not to become a substitute for actual sign languages.

SURVEY ON COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DEAF AND NON-DEAF

The survey was published in higher education environments across the five project partners. The data collected is therefore primarily from students and their teachers. The survey's main goal was to gauge participant's perception of challenges deaf people face, how they think sign languages work, their interest in learning sign language, and to collect ideas on what could be done to improve the deaf student's education experience.
The survey was translated into national languages, to not require the knowledge of English and performed by each of the project partners. Here, we will present the results combined from all participants from all partner countries. After cleaning the data, we were left with the answers from 1107 people who participated in the survey. The breakdown of the collected data by partner country is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Number of participants in the survey by the partner country.

	Number	Percent
Cyprus	40	3.6%
Germany	365	33.0%
Greece	268	24.2%
Portugal	244	22.0%
Slovenia	190	17.2%
Total	1107	100.0%

RESULT ANALYSIS

One of the first questions the participants answered was whether they have any contact with deaf people (or if they are themselves deaf). The breakdown of the answers is available in figure 1 (top values in the pie chart is the absolute number of participants, and underneath it is the share of responses in percentage). We will use this information going forward to look at whether or not participants that have a personal connection to the deaf community have answered questions differently.
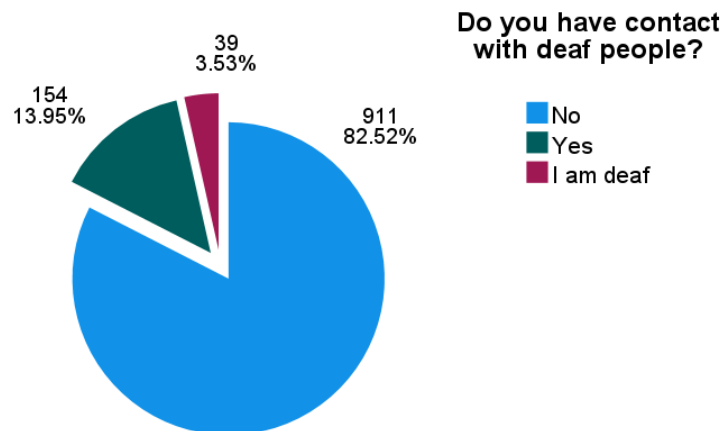

Figure 1: Participants' contact with deaf people

Almost three quarters (72%) of the participants believe deaf people can read fluently and understand written language. However, when these results are grouped by whether or not the participants have contact with the deaf community, there are noticeable differences between groups (Figure 2). Those that do not have contact are much more likely to think deaf people can read and write. They represent close to three-quarters of all participants with no contact with deaf people, while those that do have contact are much more evenly split. This does show that there is some misconception in the general public as the deaf do often struggle with learning the written language.
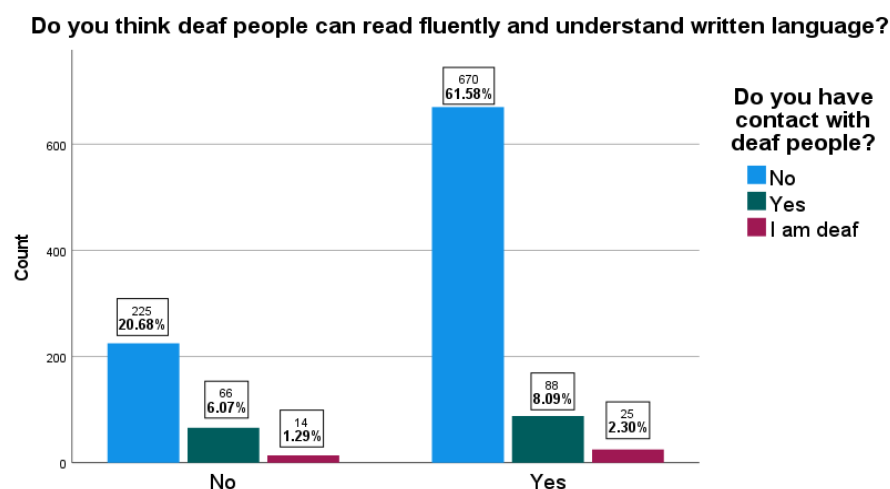
Figure 2: Perceived ability to read and write grouped by contact with deaf people.

In the answers to the question on how deaf people communicate with each other, a relatively steady rise through the four possible answers (participants could mark as many of the methods as they wanted), where writing is the least common, followed by lip-reading, then gesturing (common gestures, not a language or some sort of an established system), and finally, sign language which was the most commonly given answer with very close to 88% response rate.

The order of most common answers to the communication method among the deaf is different depending on whether or not they have contact with deaf people (see Figure 3). Writing and sign language are the least and most common method regardless; however, there is some significant difference in how common gesturing and lip-reading are perceived. Gesturing was much more popular with participants who do not have contact with deaf people. This was completely flipped in the category of deaf participants, where lip-reading was much more popular. The participants who have contact with deaf people but are not themselves deaf, bridge this gap by showing no preference to either of the two methods of communication.

Interestingly, data collected from different project partner countries often don't have any significant differences in how participants answered the question. Naturally, there are some differences, but the general trend is the same among all countries, or the participant demographics could explain it (e.g. Cyprus had a relatively small number of participants but a very high percentage of deaf people). These relatively consistent results from project partners could indicate no significant cultural difference (at least among these countries) in how deaf people or rather their communicational capabilities are perceived. However, the answers to the question on the communication methods deaf people use to communicate with each other are a notable exception. The biggest outlier here is the results from Portugal, which is the only country where the participants have not overwhelmingly chosen sign language as the primary communication method but gave much more credence to gesturing. Gesturing was also the second most popular in Greece and Germany, while Lip-reading was the second most common answer in Cyprus and Slovenia.
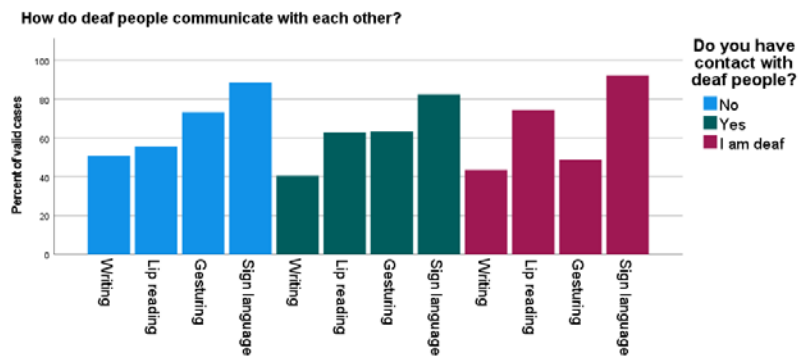
Figure 3: How deaf people communicate with each other, grouped by contact with deaf people.

The differences in communication methods are less evident in the communication between the deaf and non-deaf (Figure 4). There is no large disparity between answers from people who have and those who don't have contact with deaf people, with the only exceptions being lip-reading, which was marginally more commonly and gesturing, which was less often selected by deaf people. Surprisingly, all groups have a small number of participants who believe deaf people do not communicate with non-deaf.
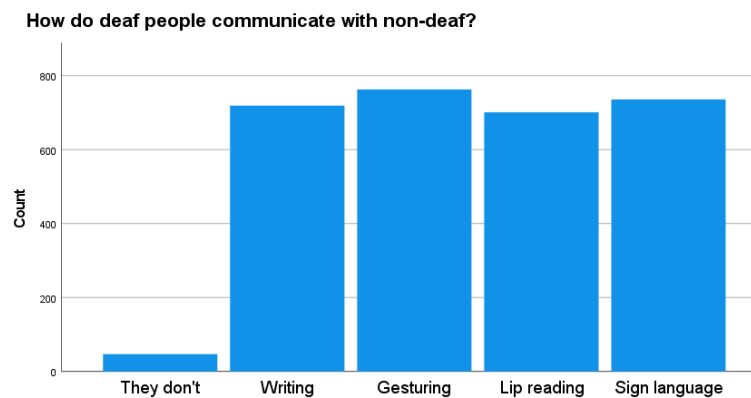
Figure 4: Answers on how deaf people communicate with non-deaf.

One of the more revealing questions was whether the participants think sign language is different from country to country. Almost one quarter (24.1%) believe sign language does not change across different countries. However, when grouped by contact with deaf people (Figure 5), it becomes more obvious that those who do not have contact with deaf people are the most likely to believe there are no differences between sign languages used in different countries.

Figure 5: Is sign language different from country to country, grouped by contact with deaf people.

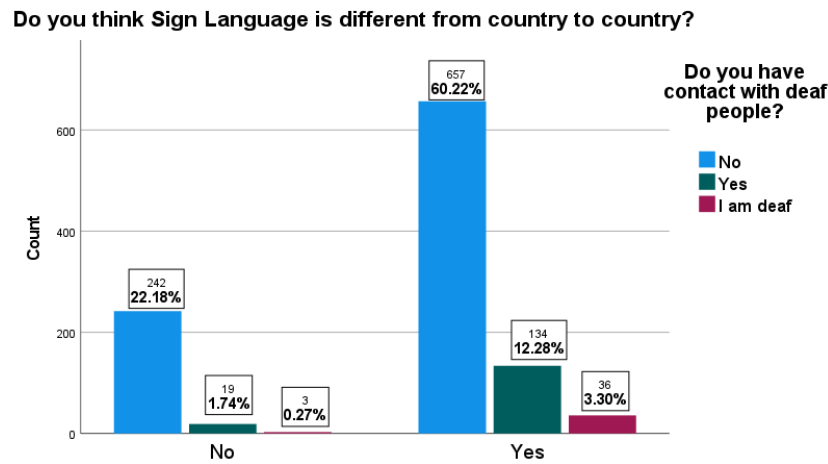We have also asked the participants how interested they were to learn their national sign language and/or the IS. Interestingly 80,6% of them were interested in learning sign language, and 80,3% were interested in learning the IS, even though only 17,8% of participants have previously been aware of the IS. As expected, deaf people, followed by those that have contact with the deaf community, are much more likely to have heard about IS before. Given the option to take a sign language course in their studies, 73,4% of participants answered they would be interested in doing so. Interest was slightly higher among the deaf and those who have contact with deaf people (Figure 6); however, still very high even among those with no interaction with the deaf community.
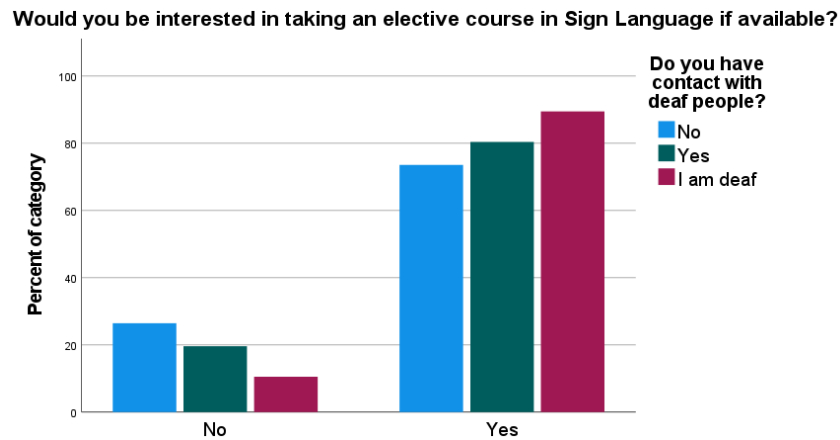

Figure 6: Interest in taking an elective course in sign language, grouped by contact with deaf people.

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DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

IS is not a real language, nor is it the aim of this project to replace natural sign languages. This nature of the IS and its at least partial dependency on the signer's knowledge and their primary sign language was also regularly emphasised by the participants in our guided interviews. This, we believe, could also be one of the major challenges we are faced with as we proceed with the project. However, in this paper, we focused on the short and general descriptions of the current situation of natural sign languages and the International Sign in project partner countries and the perception of the deaf people's communicational abilities.

Comparatively, the support for International Sing is much lower than for natural sign languages. In none of the project partner countries does the International Sign have any legal status, and there are basically no learning opportunities to learn it. The best option, short of going to events where it is used, is therefore on the internet, where again any learning materials are surprisingly scarce.

The survey results of more than 1100 participants indicate that there is a meaningful discrepancy in how the communication capabilities and options are perceived between those people that have and those that do not have any significant contact with the deaf community. Interestingly, results from across Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Portugal, and Slovenia where the survey was performed did not show any large differences, possibly indicating that there is no significant cultural difference (at least among these countries) in how deaf people or rather their communicational capabilities are perceived.

The future outputs of the InSign project will facilitate access of deaf students to education and provide effective ways to communicate among deaf and non-deaf. In this context, InSign will provide the community with a beginner's course on International Sign addressed to the deaf and non-deaf along with an automatic bidirectional translator from partners sign languages to International Sign represented by a 3D avatar. These provide a good starting point for further research towards internationalisation of education and international mobility of deaf students, e.g. extending the International Sign course to advanced levels, provide technical and non-technical courses in International Sign, extending the automatic translators to accommodate more sign languages, etc.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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THE EXPERIENCE OF BUILDING A PLATFORM TO PROMOTE A BUDDY ERASMUS RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Erasmus mobility is the main factor for the acceleration of the process of internationalization of higher education. Several benefits have been associate with these studying abroad programs. Although these benefits can be felt on the educational system or even the institutional organization, at the individual level they are more measurable and with more impact. Students' decisions of applying to study abroad programs have been analyzed and different factors can be identified.

The information given by previous Erasmus students is a very important key in the decision process. The Department of Production and Systems, from the University of Minho, Portugal, has seven degree programs, from integrated master to various PhD studies and it is engaged and profoundly interested in motivating either receiving students and sending its students abroad in studies and in training periods.

The present work describes a database platform developed to help students to find previous colleagues with similar experiences that can become a buddy or advisor for them, when they start preparing mobility. The database is structured according to the relational model, implemented in MariaDB SQL, and it is composed of 11 tables which ensure all the necessary flexibility. Its main outputs comprise information on academic coordinators and students' emails, universities departments and courses, students' impressions and useful information supplied by them, such as, accommodation, transportation and food costs. These data can be used by students looking for mobility information and finding the right place to go.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the main reasons why students move abroad, quantifying this phenomenon and elaborating some conclusions have been an increasingly relevant effort made by European institutions. One of the main reasons for these studies is the commonly accepted idea that Erasmus mobility is the main factor for the acceleration of the process of internationalization of higher education [1,2].

Several benefits have been associate with these studying abroad programs and mobility periods abroad have been considered important opportunities for acquiring and improving different skills, starting with language achievements, socialization, European culture knowledge, new learning outcomes, and independence, among others [3–7]. Although these benefits can be felt on the educational system or even the institutional organization, at the individual level they are more measurable and with more impact.

This impact has been reported in almost every area of study and it is commonly agreed that it is important in student's personal and professional lives [5]. But, the first step in any student's mobility is always the decision to go abroad. Understanding this process of decision-making among undergraduates is very important and it needs a very careful attention if a higher education institution is motivated to increase its internationalization.

As in any decision-making process, the information available for the student is one key factor. Early in an academic degree, students must be aware of the main opportunities they can afford through the different programs to study abroad. Having an academic staff or family as positive role models who motivate them to study abroad has also been identified as a very good factor. And more importantly, the information given by previous Erasmus students from the same institution or degree is a very important key in the decision process [8].

The Coordinator Erasmus team from the Department of Production and Systems (DPS), from the University of Minho, Portugal, have identified this point and since 2016 it has been involved in understanding this phenomenon and making the best effort to promote this interaction between students.

DPS is a department from the School of Engineering and it offers seven degree programs in the Industrial and Management Engineering area. These programs range from bachelor, master to various PhD studies. Its Erasmus team is engaged and profoundly interested in motivating either in receiving students and sending its students abroad in studies and in training periods. Since 2016, DPS has counted around 150 incoming students and around 300 outgoing students.

During the last five years, information has been gathered in the Erasmus mobility of the department students. The main idea behind this effort is that previous Erasmus students can be a buddy for a new student arriving at the department programs and trying to find information about going abroad.

The present work describes a database platform developed to help students to find previous colleagues with similar experiences that can become a buddy or advisor for them, when they start preparing mobility. The project is called "Start Erasmus!" and aims to implement a web platform that would allow students to help each other by sharing Erasmus experiences. In other words, the information given by previous or current Erasmus students can be used by students looking for mobility information finding the right place to go.

METHODOLOGY

Starting from 2016, the various milestones that have allowed to design and implement the platform can be visualized in Figure 1.

The first step involved the promotion of Erasmus mobility amongst the 700 department students and 60 staff members, the establishment of partnerships among European universities, and collecting information.

All sorts of informative meetings and workshops have been scheduled and the Erasmus feeling starts to grow. Treating and making use of the information gathered start to be thought and the pandemic situation conducted to a web platform. During the academic year of 2020/2021, the team started thinking and designing the platform. The platform was developed, the data were introduced and tested with some students from the Industrial Engineering and Management area.

At the moment, the new academic year is coming and the project will continue to evolve.

The first step taken as regards the collection of requirements, was to interface with the main stakeholders of the project. A teacher from the Department of Information Systems, the DPS Erasmus team and one representative person for incoming students and one representative person for outgoing students.

Figure 1 - Milestones that have allowed to design and implement the platform

From the various meetings with stakeholders, the most important requirements emerged as being:

1. Design an authentication system with 3 categories of users: Admin (this user has the task of constantly checking whether the information entered by users is relevant, the task of creating student accounts who will then enter the information and, finally, has the task of maintaining the site); Authenticated user (it has the task of entering information on his past mobility; this information can be consulted by all users who visit the platform) and Public user (this user can browse the pages of the site and consult the information on past mobility entered by other students; moreover, it will be possible to filter the various experiences on the basis of different research fields).
2. Satisfy all the stakeholders as much as possible by going against their needs expressed during the various interviews with them.
3. Respect the deadlines that have been set for the realization of the project, thus allowing to have a fully functional final product by September 2021.
4. Have the ability to record information in the database, to ensure data persistence and to be able to perform the classic CRUD (Create Read Update Delete) operations.
5. Allow the possibility of having a system accessible by anyone who goes to interrogate the database (through the appropriate queries) and can provide the results in a reasonably short time allowing a user experience appropriate to the situation.

Starting from the requirements collected and defined during the previous phase, the project moved on to the actual design of the system. This phase is fundamental and represents the heart of the project.
First, the E/R scheme downstream of a heavy conceptual design was elaborated. Once this was done, the E/R scheme was translated into the related logic scheme resulting from the logic design phase.
The result of the conceptual design is the E/R scheme is represented in Figure 2.
The entities present in the E/R scheme are as follow:
• Institution: it refers to the institution to which the curricular units belong (e.g.: UMINHO - Guimarães).

• Faculty: it refers to the faculty to which the curricular units belong (e.g.: engineering).

• Department: it refers to the department to which the curricular units belong (e.g.: department of production and system).

• Course: it refers to the course to which the curricular units belong (e.g.: MIEGI - Mestrado Integrado em Engenharia e Gestão Industrial).

• Curricular_unit: for example "Introdução à Engenharia Económica" or "Modelos de Decisão".

• Coordinator: it refers to the Erasmus coordinators (incoming and/or outgoing) of the institution, faculty, department, or course.

• Academic_year-course: it refers to the academic year of each course.

Academic_year-cu: this entity is necessary to link the academic year to each curricular unit since the same curricular unit could undergo changes every year (e.g.: professors, program and/or website).

• Mobility-cu: this entity is necessary to link mobility with each curricular unit. Therefore, the aforementioned entity represents the Learning Agreement with the list of exams that have been taken in the receiving university during the mobility period.

• Student: it refers to the student entity.

• Mobility: it refers to the mobility entity and links the entity student and the entity curricular unit.
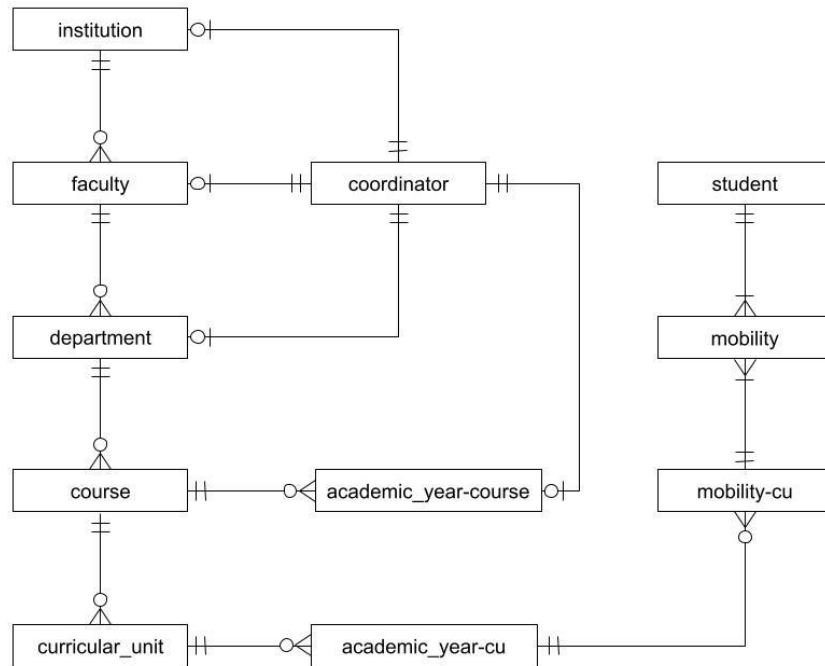
Figure 2 - E / R scheme

After careful conceptual planning, the transformation of the E/R schema into the relational logic schema was implemented. After carrying out this design phase, the actual implementation phase of the system started writing the code and using the appropriate technologies that allowed to have the final product.

The technologies used included a distributed version control software, the MariaDB (an RDBMS - Relational DataBase Management System, fork of MySQL, with a free and open-source license); XAMPP (free Apache distribution to create a cross-platform web server); Spyder (an open-source cross-platform integrated development environment for programming in the Python language); Django (it is an open-source web framework for developing web applications); Python (it is one of the hottest programming languages right now. It is a "higher level" programming language than most other languages, object-oriented, also suitable for developing distributed applications, scripting, numerical computation and system testing); HTML (version 5); CSS (Cascading Style Sheets which is the language used to style an HTML document); Bootstrap (a front-end framework which allowed us to insert responsive and adaptable components to any type of device) and Font awesome (it is an icon toolkit distributed under free licenses and allowed to place icons on the web page).

The database is structured according to the relational model, implemented in MariaDB SQL, and it is composed of 11 tables which ensure all the necessary flexibility. Its main outputs comprise information on academic coordinators and students' emails, universities departments and courses, students' impressions and useful information supplied by them, such as, accommodation, transportation and food costs.

DATABASE INPUT AND OUTPUTS

As previously define, one of the requeriments of this platform was the 3 categories of users: Admin, Authenticated user and Public user. At figure 3, some particular users are visualise because of its important action in all process.

Figure 3 – Platform main users

The users of the platform have different rules and they can perform different actions:
• Website administrator: after developing the website, he takes care of the maintenance of it.
• Incoming and outgoing students: they will be the main users of the platform since it was designed just for them. They will have the opportunity to share their experiences and/or to seek information for their future Erasmus.
• Academic coordinators: they manage and check that the information entered by students is valid.

All the implemented web pages are now presented and the main steps to use the platform correctly is now explained.

Homepage
This is the homepage of the website and features a navbar with links to the various pages of the website and a footer with the main contacts (Figure 4).
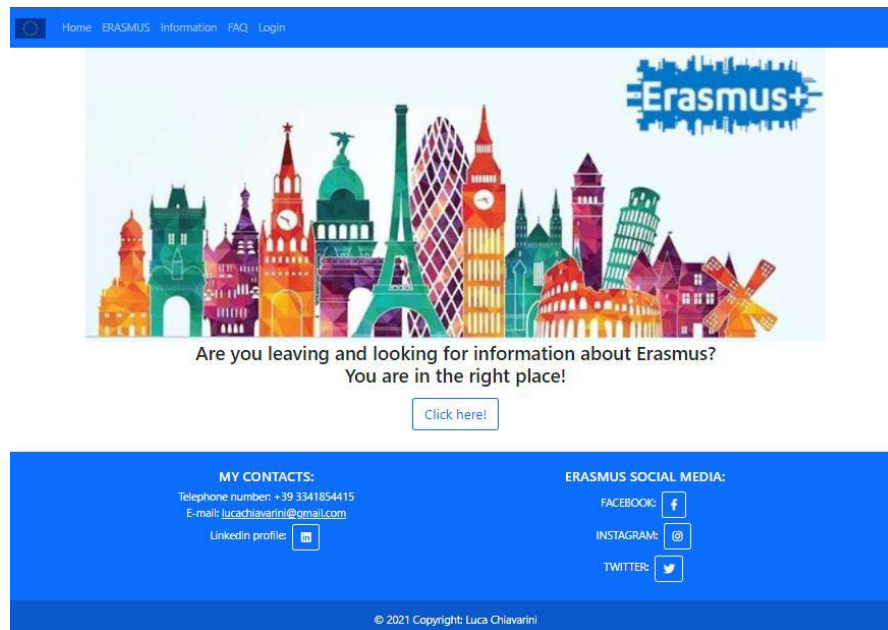
Figure 4 – Homepage of the website

Main page

This is the main page of the platform (figure 5). Each record on this page is an Erasmus experience that brings together a lot of useful information.

By expanding a record, all the information relating to the Erasmus experience and all the information relating to the university aspect (curricular units, grades, departments, etc ...) can be displaied and visualize.

In the main page, a search filter with numerous fields has been inserted that allows to satisfy every type of request. For example, a student can visualize for all the Erasmus experiences that have as sending institution "UMINHO" and as degree "bachelor".

Figure 5 – Erasmus student experience

Figure 6- Detailed information of each entry at the main page

Individual page

It is possible to authenticate and register your experience within the system. Once logged in, the system redirects the user to this page. Thanks to this page, the student can add your own experience. Then, the user must go to each of the following links and enter the relevant information (Figure 7).
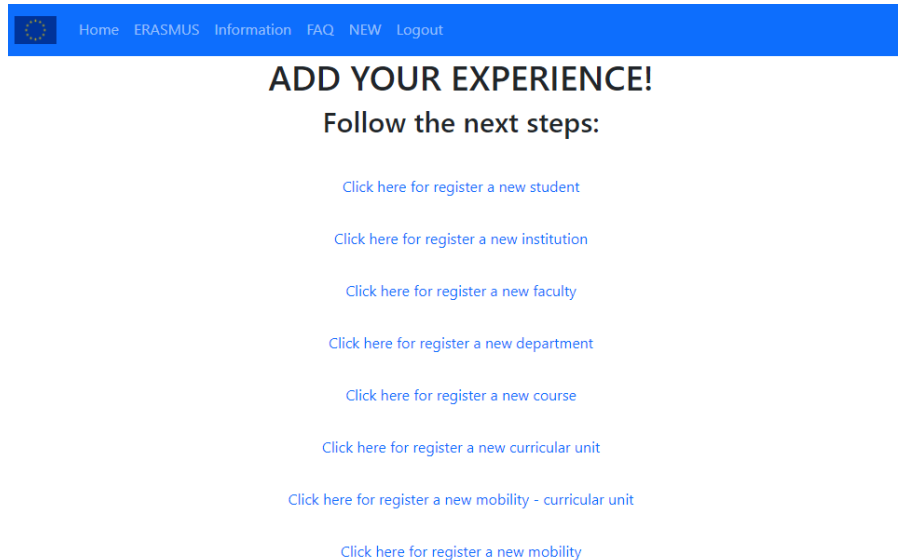
Figure 7- Webpage to introduce all the relevant experience

This page is essential since administrators will have to create the accounts of students who want to register their Erasmus experience on the site. Once the account has been created (with username and password), in fact, the student will be able to go to the "Login" page, login, and enter their Erasmus mobility experience.

FAQ – Frequently Asked Questions

Among the pages of the website, the classic section with all the FAQs has been included.

CONCLUSIONS

When a student is challenge to go out in an Erasmus experience, needs support and advise to analyse its expectations versus the available resources and to choose the best combination country-university. Former Erasmus students have the knowledge and its first hand experience. Based on these ideas, a database platform has been developed in order to gather information on the mobilities of students from the Department of Production and Systems from University of Minho, Portugal. The project is called "Start Erasmus!" and allows former students to become a buddy for students looking for mobility information.

New ideas have sprung up after the database implementation that could be future improvements. Three new ideas are now being explored: extending the project to other areas of Engineering School, analyzing the data gathered using advanced Business Intelligence tools, and sharing these pages with the main social networks (e.g.: Instagram Facebook and Twitter). These social channels could offer, each in a different way, simple and direct ways to help students moving around.

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Participation in Erasmus+ Education and Training Programme 2014-2020. Balance, lessons and considerations of Portuguese beneficiaries.

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Key Words: Erasmus+ Programme – Portuguese beneficiaries – Satisfaction survey – Results

Summary

The present paper describes the overall results of the Erasmus+ Portuguese beneficiary satisfaction survey 2020. Included in a transition period between Programmes, this last edition of the Erasmus+ satisfaction survey aims to do a balance and an in-depth satisfaction analysis of Portuguese beneficiaries participating in the Erasmus+. It also presents the unexpected pandemic moment and its effects in this edition of the beneficiaries' satisfaction assessment, stressing some of the main assumptions about the impact on the implementation of Erasmus+ projects, as well as the anticipation of some measures related to priorities of the new Programme 2021-2027 and these beneficiaries' future participation.

Introduction

The use of assessment tools to monitor and measure the quality of the service provided is a relevant part of the Portuguese National Agency's (PTNA) strategy for the management of the Erasmus+ Education and Training. In addition to allowing a more complete description of the beneficiaries' opinion, the fact that it takes on an annual basis allows to measure and compare a set of perceptions and expectations regarding the Programme as well as the National Agency service and support. The Erasmus+ 2020 beneficiary satisfaction survey was conducted online, using SurveyMonkey, from the 10th to the 26th of January 2021, addressing institutions with Erasmus+ projects granted during 2014-2020 period, under the Portuguese National Agency management (decentralized actions). Information is collected and analyzed anonymously.

The survey has been launched since 2016, and refers to a set of dimensions, including:

- Access and information about the Programme;
- Communication and overall quality of service provided by the National Agency;
- Application, selection, and project implementation (the project lifecycle management);
- Projects' results, relevance, and overall evaluation on participation;
- Inclusion and synergies (horizontal priorities for the 2021-2027 Programme);
- Pandemics and effects on participation in 2020 and 2021 (anticipation);
- Improvement suggestions.

Among the 542 emails successfully received, a total of 415 responses (77%) were collected and validated, following a very significant and growing participation when compared to previous years, and revealing the importance given by Portuguese institutions to the implementation of the Programme, as well as to its near future. The 415 respondents replicate the typification of Erasmus+ Portuguese beneficiaries, corresponding to:

- Project coordinators (73%), headmasters (22%), but also teachers and trainers (20%), are included as the roles of respondents in the beneficiary institutions;
- As for the type of institution, mostly education Institutions, at any level of education (81%), followed, far behind, by NGOs (10%);
- Institutions headquartered in Norte (37%), Lisboa (25%) and Centro (20%) regions (Eurostat NUTS II);
- Public institutions (60%), as for the legal status.

Considering Programme figures for the projects managed by the National Agency, Higher Education involves 50,5% of total individual participants (within PT NA applications) and 42,6% of the budget

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(average 2014-2020), being by far the sector which has more significant weight both in participants and budget figures. School Education involves 23,4% of participants and 32,8% of the budget, Vocational Education and Training 18% of participants and 18,8% of the budget, and Adult Education 8% of participants and 5,8% of the budget.

Erasmus+ PT NA contracted participants or mobilities by sector, by call 2014-2020
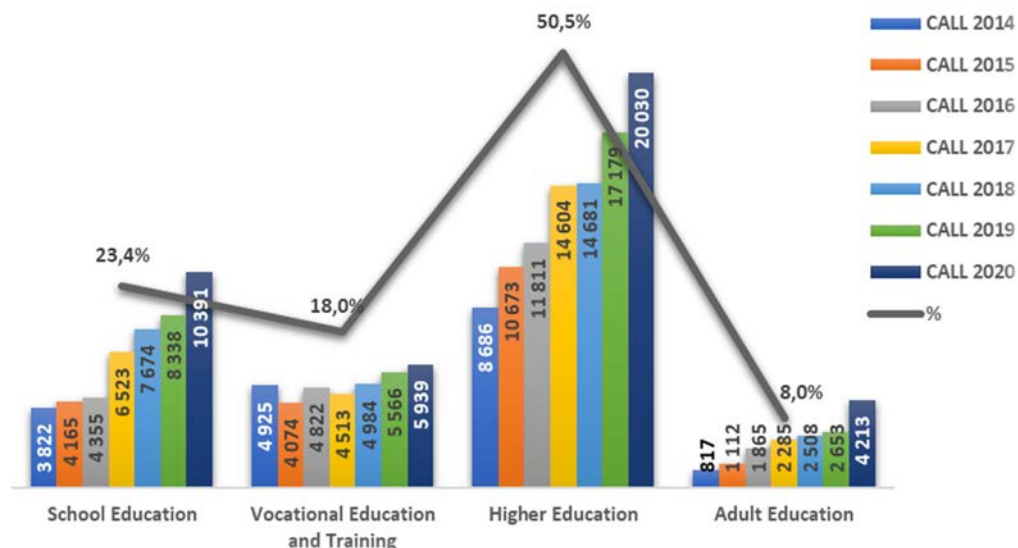
However, School Education continues to be the sector with the largest number of beneficiary organizations, accounting for 50% of the total number of institutions participating in this survey, followed by Education and Vocational Training (VET), with around 38%. Compared to the previous year of 2019, the weight of institutions with Erasmus+ projects in VET and Adult Education sectors increases, and that of School Education and Higher Education decreases.

Surveyed organisations by sector and key action 2019 *vs* 2020 - multiple answer (%)
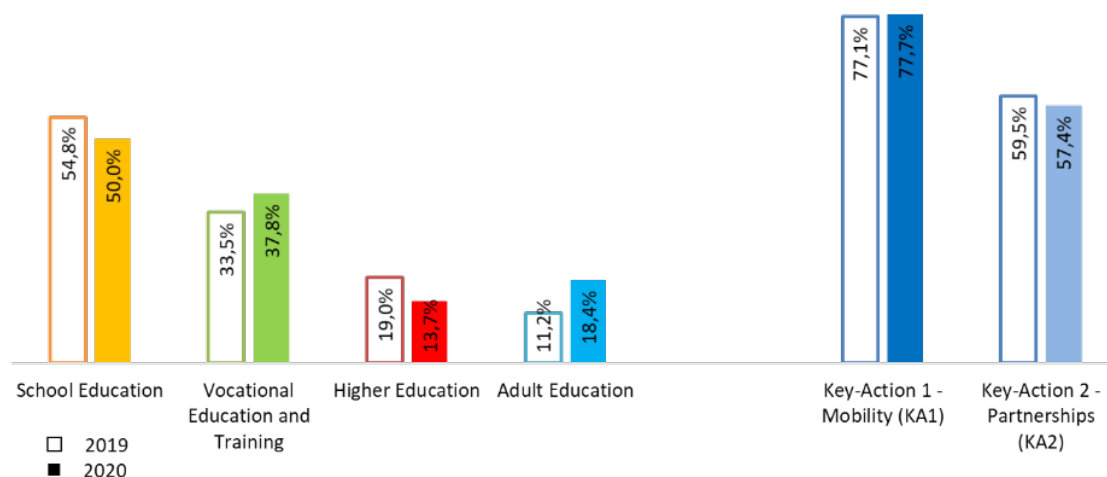
Relative percentages of Key Action 1 (Learning Mobility) and Key Action 2 (Strategic Partnerships) remain unchanged and are compatible with the actions' weight considering that mobility in School Education was organized mostly through KA2 exchanges.

Circa 89% of respondents said they had ongoing projects in 2020, a relevant factor for this analysis as it is a highly atypical year, marked by the Covid19 pandemic, with disruptions to the normal project cycle management and to the overall Programme., Additionally, the preparation of the new Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027 and all novelties associated in some way, influenced the evaluation produced by the beneficiaries.

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It could also be added that January, when the survey was conducted, was the worst period of Covid19 incidence in Portugal, corresponding to what is now called the 3rd wave of pandemic.

Given this, and because it is a transition period between Multiannual Framework Programmes, this edition of beneficiary satisfaction assessment included three blocks of new questions, whose main objectives were:

i. Measuring the impact of the pandemic considering the implementation of projects and overall project management, the relationship of beneficiaries with the National Agency, as well as the service provided by the NA;

ii. Address measures related to horizontal priorities of the new Programme, also foreseen in the PTNA E+ET Transition Plan, namely inclusion and synergies between European funds;

iii. Anticipate the potential participation of current beneficiaries (2014-2020) in the new Programme (2021-2027), specifically in the 2021 Call.

1. Access and information about the Programme

As in previous years, the Agency's e-mail and website remain main sources of information about the Programme for more than 85% of the beneficiaries, as well as the Programme information meetings, which seem to have gained more popularity in 2020 (online since March). Reinforcement and scope of remote and online communications to meet a wide-ranging set of requests and (new) needs, given the context of the pandemic and the imminence of the new Programme, probably explain this focus on (online) events.

The use of NA's Facebook also grows by around 7% compared to 2019, contributing to reinforce the relevance of institutional channels and sources originated from the NA for accessing information about the Programme, especially given the estimated age characteristics of Erasmus+ project representatives, as the main users of these tools, mostly institutions' staff. However, the acknowledgement of these sources and channels invokes their continuous enhancement and improvement, which continues throughout 2021, accompanying the launch of the new Programme (shown in other evaluation dimensions). The development of a communication strategy enabled the Agency to be consistent – in form and content – with the needs and characteristics of different sectors, stakeholders, and target audiences.

Information sources - multiple answer (%)
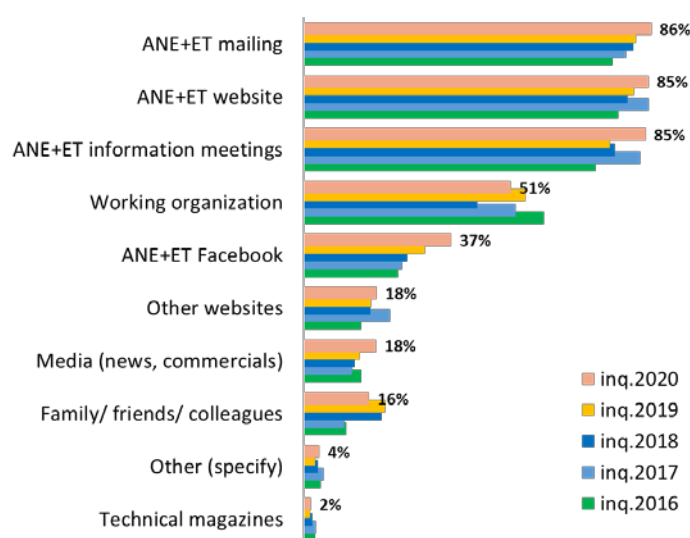
2. Communication, service, and general quality of service

The survey addressed five dimensions related to service and communication, giving relevant information on the relationship of beneficiaries with the Agency's staff work and the assessment of the communication tools and resources used to establish contact and disseminating the Programme. A constant   evolution of all parameters is shown, with special relevance to the general quality of the service (average of 4,68 on a scale of 1 - very unsatisfactory to 5 - very satisfactory) and to the general contacts and service (4,67), which have obtained, since 2016, values very close to the maximum point of the scale, thus demonstrating high approval of the service provided.

Average satisfaction per parameter: min. 1 – max. 5

Inq.2016 ■ Inq.2017 ■ Inq.2018 ■ Inq.2019 ■ Inq.2020

Parameter	Inq.2016	Inq.2017	Inq.2018	Inq.2019	Inq.2020
ONLINE Programme promotion events					4.52
PRESENCIAL Programme promotion events	4.36	4.31	4.43	4.48	4.60
Contact and overall attendance	4.47	4.52	4.50	4.66	4.67
PTNAE+EF Website	4.09	4.01	4.19	4.27	4.38
Overall quality of service provided	4.48	4.53	4.64	4.64	4.68

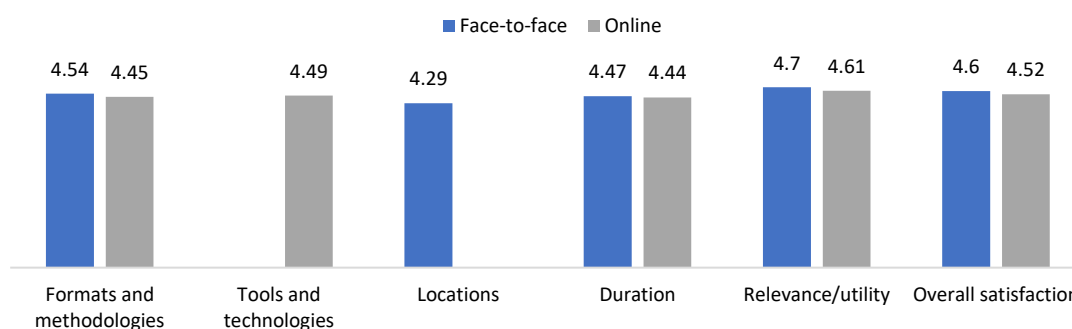The results also show the positive evolution of the assessment of the NA's website, despite having the lowest average (4,38) in the set of these five dimensions, continuing, therefore, to keep NA's attention and to suggest specific needs for improvement in issues such as navigation, including access and speed of consultation (4,16) as well as the website organization (4,24), which remain with the lowest average values in this section.

Online meetings for Programme dissemination and promotion held during 2020 were considered and included as a new parameter in the survey. These activities obtained a very positive evaluation, not much different from the evaluation of face-to-face meetings. There were 22 face-to-face meetings organized up to March, with about 1560 attendants and 29 online meetings from March to December, with approximately 4300 attendants, overall including the call dissemination sessions, application support, monitoring or other themes. Equivalent evaluation was shown either in each meeting's satisfaction survey (rated 4,6 average, both for the whole face-to-face and online events), as well as in the rating in the present survey. The beneficiary's survey shows that quality standards of the Agency's communication and dissemination actions were kept from March 2020 on, and it also shows that the IT response was compliant with the pandemic technological transition and adaptation demanding needs. The relevance/usefulness of the events (4,61), tools and technologies used (4,49) and the model and methodologies (4,45) of the meetings are some of the indicators showing positive feedback on the performance in this challenging period.

Programme dissemination and promotion: face-to-face *vs* online events in 2020
(Average satisfaction: min. 1 – max. 5)

Legend: ■ Face-to-face ■ Online

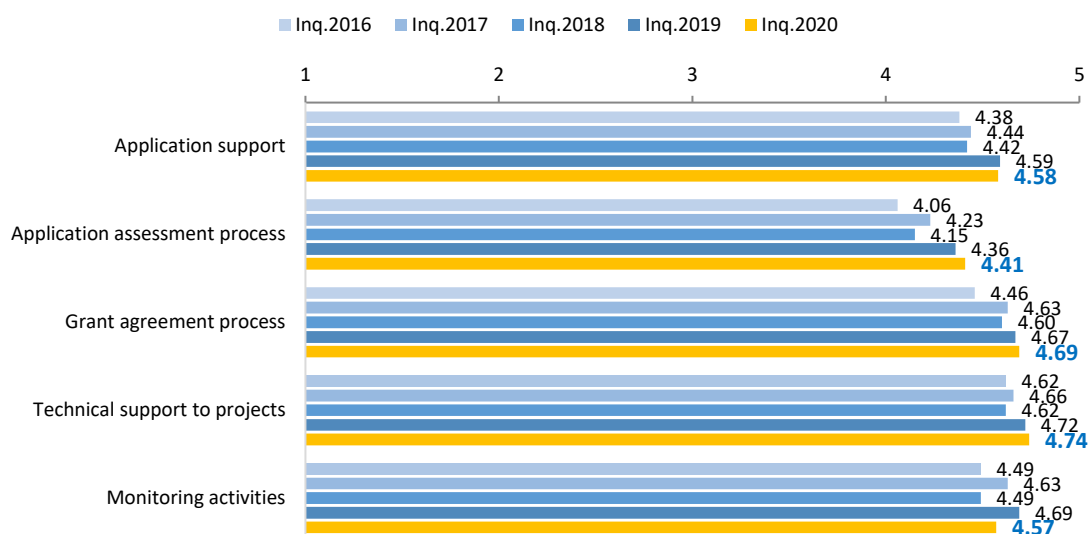|	Formats and methodologies	Tools and technologies	Locations	Duration	Relevance/utility	Overall satisfaction
Face-to-face	4.54		4.29	4.47	4.7	4.6
Online	4.45	4.49		4.44	4.61	4.52

3. Application, selection, and implementation of projects

The five indicators related to the support for the application and overall implementation of projects show a positive evolution of beneficiary satisfaction throughout the different stages of the project life cycle, with average values close to the maximum point of the scale.

The evaluation of applications is usually more controversial and gathers less expressive values (around 4,4 on average), although improved in 2019 and 2020. Technical support for the implementation of projects (4,75), followed by the contracting process (4,69) continue to gather the most positive average ratings.

Average satisfaction per parameter: min. 1 – max. 5

Legend: ■ Inq.2016 ■ Inq.2017 ■ Inq.2018 ■ Inq.2019 ■ Inq.2020

	Inq.2016	Inq.2017	Inq.2018	Inq.2019	Inq.2020
Application support	4.38	4.44	4.42	4.59	4.58
Application assessment process	4.06	4.23	4.15	4.36	4.41
Grant agreement process	4.46	4.63	4.60	4.67	4.69
Technical support to projects	4.62	4.66	4.62	4.72	4.74
Monitoring activities	4.49	4.63	4.49	4.69	4.57

Almost all satisfaction analysis indicators grow or remain unchanged compared to 2019, except for those that assess the monitoring of projects, contrary to the upward trend observed in the previous year. Project monitoring results are closely connected to the pandemic context and allow to highlight:

- The burden of mandatory suspension of *in situ* monitoring actions and the adaptation of monitoring procedures for online and at-a-distance, with the underlying challenges both in terms of formats, methodologies, duration, and also dependant on the learning curve of those involved; and,
- That despite this adaptation, the support provided in general and specifically the technical support for the execution of the projects (with an average satisfaction of 4,74), are reinforced, exposing, in a way, the possible compensation induced by NA staff to the ongoing circumstances, given that face-to-face monitoring and support activities were impossible to carry on.

The degree of satisfaction of beneficiaries with the instruments and platforms of the European Commission for registration, application, and management of projects, has shown, since the first edition of this survey, less satisfaction rates on the set of questions presented, highlighting worries of beneficiaries in the use of such tools. However, the evaluation gets, in 2020, the most positive average values of the four years (2016-2020). In this progression, obvious technological improvements can be seen, but also a latent learning

process on the part of the beneficiaries, which is expected to be helpful in the transition to Erasmus+ 2021-2027.

In fact, many of these platforms will remain in use, albeit in an integrated and optimized way, avoiding dispersion of information and segmentation of project management by the beneficiaries, issues that are continually raised, and which remain among the most expressive, shown in comments and suggestions for improvement of the Programme.

EC IT tools rating for project application and management
(Average satisfaction: min. 1 – max. 5)

Inq.2020   Inq.2019   Inq.2018   Inq.2017   Inq.2016

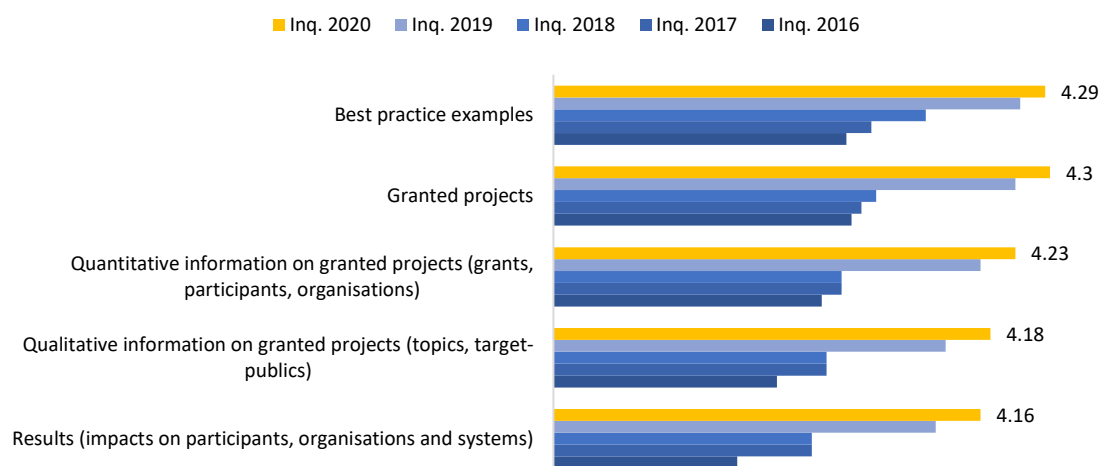| Tool	Rating
ORS (Organization Registration System)	4.03
EPRP (Erasmus+ Project Results Platform)	4.08
OLS (Online Linguistic Suport)	4.13
Mobility Tool+ (mobility reporting)	4.27
eForms (application forms)	4.19
EU Login (European Commission Authentication Service)	4.07
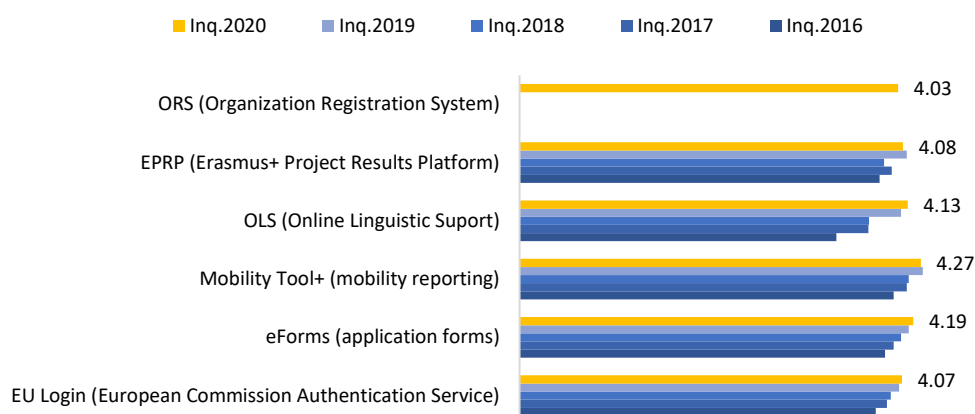
4. Results, relevance of projects and evaluation of participation in the Programme

- Information available about Erasmus+

The five indicators analysed in the following graph show positive rating in issues such as the access to information about the Programme, namely about granted projects and, among these, about objectives, subjects and topics, results, and best practices, among other information. Progress in these indicators between 2016 and 2020 can be highlighted, regarding both the institutional experience in the implementation and conclusion of Erasmus+ projects on the beneficiaries' side, and also as a consequence of the NA dissemination work, including quantitative and qualitative information on projects granted in Portugal, regarding Erasmus+ decentralized actions.

Data highlights the relevance of information provided about the Programme and granted projects, displaying appreciation and recognition, and reinforcing transparency in the use of EU funds, but also enhancing the potential for replication and innovation, as a framework for the internationalization of learning and cooperation opportunities. Within these circumstances, NA has already underway the reinforcement of mechanisms and actions to enhance communication and dissemination of the Programme and its results in 2021, including plans such as the Transition Plan to 2021-2027, as well as the Strategic Communication Plan for 2021.
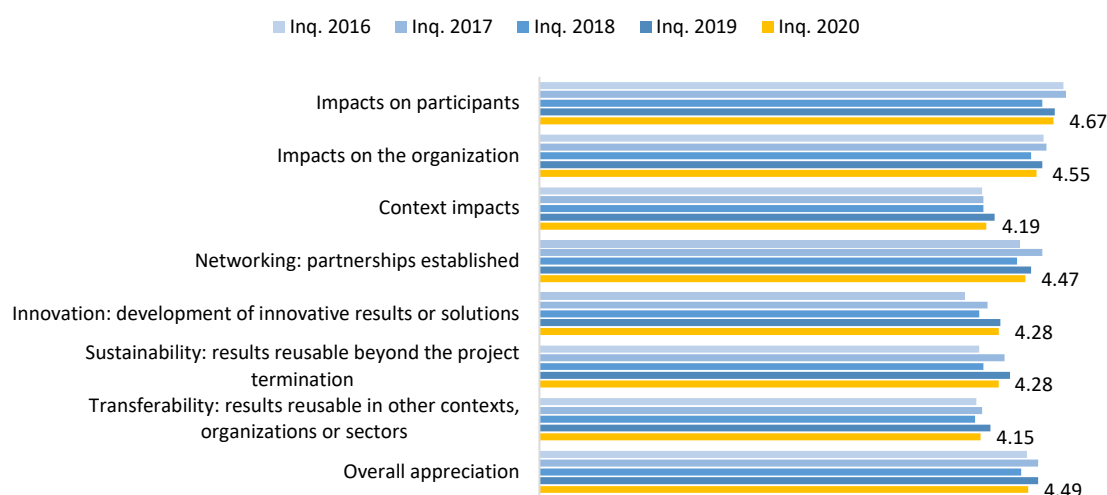
Available information on implementation and results of the Programme
(Average satisfaction: min. 1 – max. 5)

Inq. 2020 Inq. 2019 Inq. 2018 Inq. 2017 Inq. 2016

Category	Value
Best practice examples	4.29
Granted projects	4.3
Quantitative information on granted projects (grants, participants, organisations)	4.23
Qualitative information on granted projects (topics, target-publics)	4.18
Results (impacts on participants, organisations and systems)	4.16

- Relevance of the results and participation in Erasmus+

The overall evaluation of the relevance of participating in Erasmus+ maintains the high values of previous years, around 4,5 average. All dimensions of participation in the Programme have been evaluated positively since the first survey, in 2016, with average results always above 4 and rather irrelevant annual variations. Effects on individual project participants continue to be the most valued results highlighted by beneficiaries, considered more immediate and tangible, keeping a very high relevance score (4,67 average) in the set of expected results. This is followed by the impact on the institution (4,55), networking and establishing partnerships (4,47) and the development of innovative solutions and results (4,48), together with sustainability (4,28).

Relevance of participating in Erasmus+
(Average relevance: min. 1 – max. 5)

Inq. 2016 Inq. 2017 Inq. 2018 Inq. 2019 Inq. 2020

Category	Value
Impacts on participants	4.67
Impacts on the organization	4.55
Context impacts	4.19
Networking: partnerships established	4.47
Innovation: development of innovative results or solutions	4.28
Sustainability: results reusable beyond the project termination	4.28
Transferability: results reusable in other contexts, organizations or sectors	4.15
Overall appreciation	4.49

Other results of participation in the Programme, as refereed by institutions, are close to the categories analysed above, and emphasize the positive effects of this experience on the participants (with the reinforcement of transversal skills linked to citizenship and inclusion, among others) and on each institution (as an engine of internationalization and pedagogical and scientific innovation).

Relevance of participation in Erasmus+: other aspects mentioned (free translation)

Issues	Positive	Negative
Participants citizenship skills inclusion, other	• "The personal and professional lives of young people who were able to experience mobility are positively impacted. The issues that are valued by the young participants go beyond purely professional aspects. The universe of these young people was definitely transformed." • "I emphasize the fact that participation in an ERASMUS project is, for many young people, the first contact with the notion of European citizenship." • "Contributes to the development of a variety of skills of students and teachers and also supported a greater awareness of European Citizenship." • "Contributes to inclusive education for low-sighted and minority youth." • "Improved proficiency in multiple languages." • "Increases social and language skills in participants."	"It has not always been easy to involve teachers in projects, there is a reluctance to participate, and this is where our institution most needs to work. Students are, however, very open to partnerships with European schools."
Institution internationalization Innovation	• "Contributes internationally to the development of ocean literacy (SDG14)." • "Contributes to improve the quality of teaching and learning; to the innovation of pedagogical practices." • "The school became more active, innovative and open to other experiences." • "Contribution to Internationalization at Home and to the development of Quality procedures." • "Internationalization of the institution and professional training of its staff."	

- Contribution of projects to the objectives of Erasmus+ 2014-2020

The promotion of European values (4,71) and European cooperation in the field of education and training (4,48) are the most consensual attained objectives of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 among participating institutions. Other remaining objectives seem to be more sector-associated, although not mutually exclusive, as shown by the average results in the table below.

The reduction of school dropouts (3,46) is an objective seemingly more relevant to Portuguese projects of School Education and Vocational Education and Training; participation of adults in lifelong learning (3,07), shows a significant association to Adult Education and VET. Beneficiaries participating through the Higher Education sector consider that their projects have contributed above all to promote learning mobility accomplishment among young graduates (3,89). The VET sector seems to attribute relevance to more Erasmus+ objectives than any other sector, highlighting, in addition to the aforementioned, the contribution to the employability of young people at the end of secondary education (3,59).

Projects' relevance to the objectives of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 (average: min. 1 – max. 5)

Erasmus+ Objectives 2014-2020	Average assessment		Key-action		E&T Setors			
	Inq. 2016-2020	Inq. 2020	Mobility (KA1)	Partnerships (KA2)	School Education	Vocational Educ. & Training	Higher Education	Adult Education
Contribute to promote European values…	4,68	⇧ 4,71	4,71	4,81	4,74	4,68	4,75	4,69
Contribute to European cooperation in education and training 2020	4,45	⇧ 4,48	4,48	4,54	4,40	4,59	4,72	4,38
Reduce early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 to below 10%	3,39	⇧ 3,46	3,59	3,37	3,66	3,88	2,70	2,90
Ensure that 15% of adults participate in lifelong learning	3,00	⇧ 3,07	3,00	3,07	2,84	3,08	2,89	4,15
Ensure that 20% of higher education graduates and 6% of 18-34 year-olds with an initial vocational qualification have spent some time studying or training abroad	3,14	⇧ 2,99	3,13	2,95	2,57	3,50	3,89	2,40
Reduce underachievement of 15-year-olds in reading, maths and science to below 15%	2,89	⇩ 2,87	2,93	2,91	3,41	2,85	2,11	2,18
Ensure the share of recent graduates in employment to at least 82%, in 1-3 years	2,85	⇧ 2,86	2,92	2,79	2,58	3,59	2,43	2,65
Ensure that 40% of people aged 30-34 complete some form of higher education	2,67	⇩ 2,59	2,63	2,54	2,42	2,68	3,28	2,10
Contribute to sustainable development of Higher Education in Partner countries	2,59	⇧ 2,53	2,55	2,51	2,21	2,57	3,58	2,40
Ensure 95% of children participate in early childhood education	2,10	⇨ 2,06	2,12	1,93	2,20	1,96	1,77	1,74

5. Inclusion and synergies horizontal priorities

A new block on Inclusion and Synergies was included in the 2020 survey, addressing and seeking to anticipate practices of institutions participating in the Programme. These are two horizontal strategic priorities for the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 Programme, and to which the National Agency has been giving specific attention in recent years, namely through internal working groups and the implementation of specific actions, with proposal of strategic documents for both dimensions.

As for the inclusion practices:

- About 42% of beneficiaries declare they have an inclusion strategy/plan, in accordance with the Erasmus+ Programme and/or with existing regulations; about the same percentage (40,4%) declare they are preparing such a strategy, showing that most beneficiaries acknowledge its relevance, in line with national and European strategic approaches, and in order to ensure inclusion and equity in education, together with equal access to lifelong learning;
- Among those who answer "other situation" (see table below), there are multiple interpretations on the subject and whereas many consider it as a specific approach to the Erasmus+ project, others relay on a pre-established legal framework and more focused on the concept of inclusive education; a third group establishes a relation with the inclusive nature of the institution; few, however, refer to inclusion as a multi-layered social and sociological process and instigator of the expected institutional framework;
- Therefore, it seems worthwhile, within the scope of the promotion and dissemination actions of the new Programme, to clarify objectives and definitions that make *inclusion* a priority of Erasmus+ 2021-2027; it is crucial to enhance potential beneficiaries' participation and to promote the quality and relevance of the future projects reflecting this dimension and its priorities.

Other situation: approaches to inclusion within project logic (free translation)

• "I think the issue of inclusion is very present in the way projects, Programmes and events are organized."
• "Our school group has a multi-disability unit, but at the moment I do not have the information to answer this question."
• "According to the results of these projects, we intend to include, in a next project, training for inclusion of students with Special Education Needs."
• "The institution I am representing does not work directly with young students. However, it considers vulnerable people (young people, women, migrants and people with disabilities) in everyday work."
• "The institution intends to adopt inclusive practices, depending on the existence of potential stakeholders and the legal framework established (for inclusive education)."
• "The institution bases its practices on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006); in the Basic Law for the Prevention, Qualification, and Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (2004); in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic (1976); and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)."
• "The institution is regulated by decree-law 54/2018 of 6 July, amended by law 116/2019 of 13 September in the context of inclusive education. Furthermore, its inclusion strategy comprises the implementation of good practices in this field and the training of human resources."
• "The organization has inclusion goals in its strategic axes. European projects compete for this inclusion even if that is not formally embodied in a document."
• "In accordance with current legislation."
• "It is a pilot school within the scope of Inclusive Education in the Azores."
• National Programme of EMAEI [Multidisciplinary Support Team for Inclusive Education] "Logic of organizational culture ('DNA')."
• "It is part of its DNA, as it established itself the mission of social integration of vulnerable groups through the promotion and innovation through solidarity economy (which is based on a set of principles, such as: economic, social, environmental, education, culture, participation, ...)."
• "The institution has, given its nature, the issues of inclusion at the heart of its mission, as it develops its activity in the area of disability."

Considering the synergies between funds as a horizontal dimension, the dispersion of responses indicates not only a variety of situations including other sources of funding than Erasmus+ for 37,5% of the beneficiaries, but also some lack of knowledge (or lack of will to disclose information) about the use of this resource for a significant percentage, as 27,5% declares not knowing if the institution has projects granted by other EU funds. It also should not be overlooked that more than 70% of the sample is made up of Erasmus+ project coordinators, and only 22% describe themselves as institution directors.

Does the institution develop, or has already developed, projects financed by the European Social Fund, Horizon 2020, or other EU funding? (%)
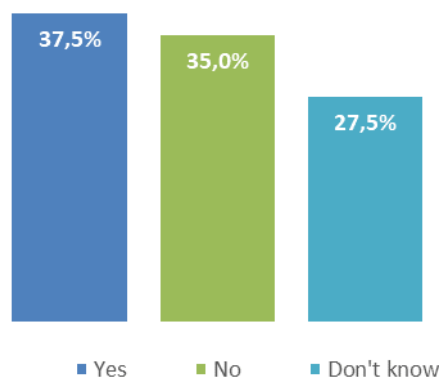
Crossing the variables in question, it is possible to verify that directors do answer affirmatively to this question (48,8%), but project coordinators, teachers or trainers are likely to answer more conservatively, namely choosing "I don't know". It might also be plausible to consider that complementary resources are used by these institutions, yet not disclosed for fear of misunderstandings about the risk of double financing (however the survey is anonymous).

In short, among the beneficiaries who claimed to resort to complementary funds:

- 53% are public institutions;
- 43% come from Norte, 22% from Lisboa (AML) and 23% from the Centro (NUTS II);
- 73% are education institutions;
- 57% are institutions participating in KA1 (Learning Mobility projects)
- 63% work with the Human Capital Operational Programme (POCH, funded by the European Social Fund) as the main source of financing; followed by Horizon 2020 (27,4%) and POISE (26%) the Social Inclusion and Employment Operational Programme also funded by the ESF.

In fact, these figures appear to be aligned with the results of ex-post evaluations and EC impact assessments of beneficiaries and other stakeholders, stating that the activities in sectors that have received relatively less funding should be strengthened, contributing to reinforce the inclusive character of the Programme for the next 2021-2027 period. Stakeholders also appeal for more synergies with the European Social Fund (ESF+) for better dissemination and effective exploitation of results.

6. Participation in the Programme in 2020 and 2021

The last set of questions introduced in 2020 sought to assess impacts of the pandemic on project development, on the relationship of beneficiaries with the National Agency and on the evaluation of the service provided by the Agency. Various and complex challenges and effects on projects were produced by the COVID19 pandemic, some already mentioned in the present paper.

For the vast majority of beneficiaries (81%), the main impact of the pandemic was the postponement of implementation or completion of projects, generating significant contractual changes for 70%, as shown, in fact, by the huge increase in the Agency's work for the proper referral of all projects in this situation (namely producing grant contract amendments). The most common situations reported correspond to the postponement or rescheduling of activities, with the provisional cancellation of mobilities, and, therefore, to an extension of the implementation of projects, as stated in the following comment from a beneficiary:

"It cannot be said that the implementation of projects has been compromised. The activities have been postponed and extended, but towards the conclusion of the projects, since their postponement has been allowed".

The pandemic negatively affected collaboration with partners (61%) and constrained the preparation of applications (59%), and although 31% agree, and 39% fully agree with the statement that the pandemic negatively affected "participant engagement", only one beneficiary explicitly mentions the risk of "low demand for mobilities for the year 2020/2021" as a result of an atypical year of 2020.

On the positive side, the analysis of the following graph shows that, despite the pandemic and its negative and multidimensional impacts, and considering the normal progression of Erasmus+ projects, participation in the Programme in 2020, promoted or contributed to the development of:

- New partnerships, for 41,3% of beneficiaries;
- New opportunities in project development, to 60,5%;
- Alternatives to physical mobility and/or in-person activities, to 60,5%;
- New forms of communication with partners and participants, to 74,9%;
- New forms of communication and monitoring by the National Agency, to 75,7%.

How the pandemic affected project work in 2020
**(% Agree or totally agree)**
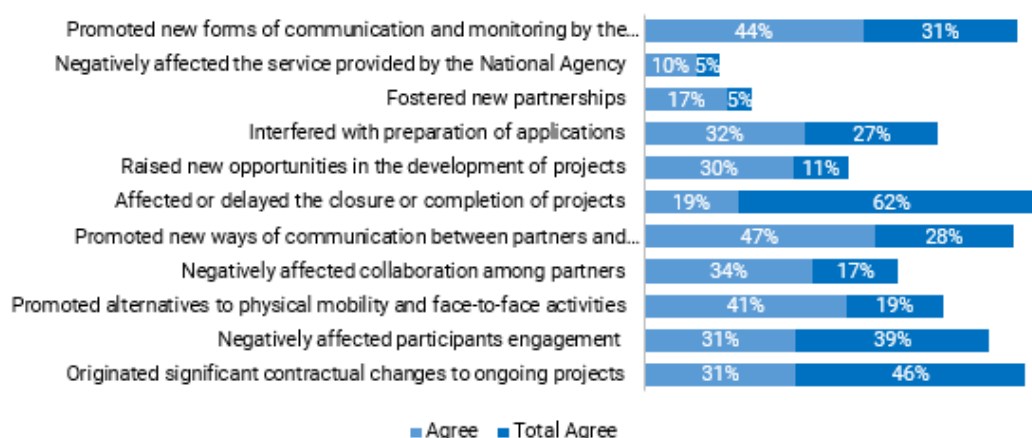
The relationship established between beneficiaries and the National Agency seems to be strong, given the fact that 66% believe that the pandemic did not affect negatively the service provided by the National Agency - however 15% believe that it did.

Adaptability and responsiveness of services, technology improvement to meet the transition to online communication, and the continuous search for alternatives to pursue project activities and objectives, all seem to have formed a kind of cement, that although fragile seems to have enhanced flexibility, safeguarding individual participants and mitigating risks to the successful project implementation. The following observation from a beneficiary gives us an account of this:

"Regarding the KA2 projects, which were ongoing at the beginning of 2020, most were postponed, but there were also projects that tried to adapt to online and in this sense several online meetings were held, and the projects continued. KA2 projects that started in the last quarter of 2020 have been adapted to online support."

Despite challenges posed by the new 2021-2027 Programme, at a time of many uncertainties, the added value of participating in Erasmus+ continues to be evident, given the willingness of more than two thirds of the beneficiaries to apply for the new Programme as soon as in 2021. There were 26% of beneficiaries who stated that they "did not know" or could not yet comment on future participation in the new Programme. However, by that time (January 2021), the Programme was not yet approved and still the pandemics was a strong restraint for future planning.

Participation in Erasmus+ 2021 (%)

- Yes - No - Don't know
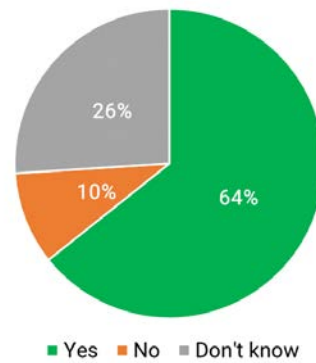
Analyzing by sector, participants from the Higher Education sector (88,7%) and from the Vocational Education and Training (78,1%), are surer to participate. Among the institutions that say they do intend to apply for the new Programme, in 2021, are:

- 52% are public institutions;
- 42% are from the Norte, 22% from Lisboa (AML) and 21% from the Centro (NUTS II);
- 82% are education institutions;
- 71% have projects within the School and Vocational Education and Training sectors.

7. Service and Programme Improvement Suggestions: a sum up on the participation in Erasmus+ Education and Training Programme 2014-2020

The most common suggestions are towards administrative and financial simplification, including application forms and project management procedures, more budgetary flexibility enabling transfer between budget headings, and optimization of online application management platforms and project implementation.

The expression of beneficiaries' satisfaction with NA service relates to readiness and support provided during 2020 (shown in most of the comments). Comments seem proportional to the need for a support reinforcement on project management technical aspects, through more regularity of meetings and information updates. These are aspects to which the pandemic has clearly given greater visibility, due to the increase in guidance and clarification' requests. Requests for clarification were mostly related to the implementation procedures related to Programme rules (for instances on amendments and virtual mobilities), but also requests for guidance related to national authorities' indications, as the process depended on pandemic evolution in the national and transnational context.

This situation of continuous support and uninterrupted communication, associated with the preparation of the new Programme, exposed the centrality of communication processes and the relevance of access to information on time.

The Agency and Erasmus+ (EC) websites and platforms became critical, and beneficiary institutions increase appeals for technical improvements and updating, as these are indispensable sources and data bases for different parties and audiences, alternative or complementary to phone calls and email.

In addition to enhancing the website, availability of supporting documentation (FAQ, among others) and the development of a permanent online chat room, are some of the beneficiaries' suggestions for improving overall communication, improving access to specific support. These are issues that will be addressed with the CRM implementation, focused on streamlining support and communications between beneficiaries and the National Agency.

A last dimension, always present, but with lesser expression this year, concerns the assessment process, covering both the assessment of applications and final reports, with specific references to the improvement and simplification of reporting instruments; clarification of the priorities and criteria governing the selection of applications; and the production of more concrete and constructive recommendations and indications for the applications which end up not being selected.

Among the new dynamics instituted, the informative actions in online format continue to gather the satisfaction of the participants, suggesting its maintenance, whenever possible, in the post-pandemic period.

Most referred aspects on service and programme improvement (categorized):

- Administrative simplification of the Programme, especially the application forms (clearer, concise, and less redundant);
- Programme rules and project management, namely greater flexibility in budget management;
- Technical support, contact and information, enabling availability of more support documentation, reinforcement of specific actions focused on the financial management of projects and the new Programme (monitoring meetings), depending on the needs of different audiences and sectors;
- Communication and website: reinforce general dissemination of information about the Programme; improve organization, navigation, search and updating of information;
- EC Platforms: improved access and usability, integration in a single platform;
- Application assessment: clarification of criteria and their publication.

Suggestions and comments from beneficiaries for improving the Programme and the National Agency's service are aligned with the results for the survey's dimensions, as well as with results produced in previous years, fundamentally associated with the Programme's regulation and operationalization, but also regarding the challenges posed by the new horizontal priorities of inclusion, digital Erasmus and synergies.

The issues analyzed go far beyond the present summary, including aspects that enable keeping the general satisfaction shown by the beneficiary institutions, also including relevant suggestions to improve service and quality of Erasmus+ implementation in Portugal, for 2021-2027.

Career Counseling – important factor in orienting of the high schools students for deciding of their studies and future profession

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore career counseling in high school in some dimensions such as career counseling duration, roles in career counseling, school activities that are dedicated to career counseling, preparation, identification of needs, support from the parents and professional development of career advisory. Research questions include: (1) Career counseling is developed during three years of high school or only in 12th grade? (2) Whom is responsible for school career counseling: homeroom teacher, teacher of social subjects, other teachers, school principals? (3) What is the daily, weekly, monthly or annual teaching time of career counseling? (4) How do the career counselors prepare before activities with students at school? (5) How is done the monitoring and evaluating of the career counseling? Results of this study are important for teachers and schools principals, for specialists of different levels of pre-univeristy education, for directors of local and national educational institutions. Study showed that students career counseling is implemented mainly in the 12th grade, but partially also in 10th and 11^{the} grade. It is recommended that schools principals, homeroom teacher but also teachers of other subjects to involve in their work career counseling in all the high schools classes as an extracurricular skill that will support students in their orienting for deciding for career in their last grade of high school.

From the study it resulted that more responsible for career counseling is high school are the homeroom teacher and school principal. It is recommended that career counseling should include a wider and bigger range of actors. The study found that career counseling of the students in high school is developed mainly in extracurricular activities or in special activities with students. This result implicates school principals and homeroom teachers that career counseling in addition to extracurricular activities and to specific activities with the student should be developed as integrated part of other activities within teaching hours in specific subjects, as well as outside the teaching process, both in school and in various community activities.

From the study resulted that in general, career counseling of the students is developed in the form of free conversations and there are not prepared specific issues or used specific literature. This study also found that in general the needs of students for high school career counseling are identified through the questionnaires developed in schools. This implies school principals and homeroom teachers to plan and develop research instruments for the identification of the student needs. From the study it resulted that parents are supportive towards their children in the selection of the career especially collaborating with the homeroom teachers and school principals. It is recommenced that school directories organize specific activities with parents focused on career counseling.

The study found that the majority of the school principals have participated in training focused on student career counseling. This implies leading institutions of pre-univeristy education in center and local level to increase the opportunities to offer professional development activities not only for schools principals but also of the school teachers.

Key words: career, counseling, education, orienting, study program, profession

1. Introduction and literature review

Now a days, world of the professionals is undergoing towards great and unforeseen changes. They have a greater impact than outside changes in the framework of work activities. Changes are connected with the concept of profession in itself, that historically has defined the basis of the education system and as for consequences also of the work activities. In practice, changes in the world of professionals have multiple impacts. They affect not only school system of professional education that are oriented according to this concept, but also they change the concept of professional orienting and career counseling.

So called atypical careers, inputs, and flexible transitions into transitional periods between school and the world of work become norms or rules. Changes in the world of professionals bring consequently also changes in the request for qualification and modify the request for professional orienting and career counseling. Expressions and terms like as orienting, education and career counseling contain different dimensions. Career counseling include both situation and process or the product. Career counseling can show also the status and orienting of the individuals as well as activity or influence that someone can be oriented without taking into consideration in what way. Career counseling implies or includes a series of steps. They have a wide dimension from the identification of the needs, informing for education and profession until individual career counseling. Here it is included both interior understanding of the professional orienting which represent aspect of their personality and external understanding which represent aspects and point of view in real world and professions. Process includes monitoring or evaluating of the education in the career counseling as well as practical activities in the process of selection of the profession and decision-making. In career counseling are included concrete preparations for the future profession, working experience, internships, offers for concrete support in decision making which maximizes the effort for the selection of the proper profession. Career counseling can be developed both inside and outside the school environment. In this process are included teacher, school principals psycho-social specialist as well as parents and community members. Each child every day deserve a dedicated supportive time to talk about their aims and dreams for their future career. (Lapan, 2005). This means that career counseling should be done in all academic years and not only in high school or specifically in 12th grade. Pupils should build knowledge and skills for their future career in all the grades. The conversation that teacher do with pupils can change their future. (Hatch, 2007). Teacher are not only education professionals but also persons with experience, this way they can influence supporting pupils in their orienting and coaching for future career. In high school that is thee highest level of pre-univeristy level pupils identify their preferences for the selection of the career. According to Super (1957) the main duty is the crystallization and specification of the educational preferences leading to the future profession. More than 70 % of the high school students dream for specific profession, The trend "university for all" derives from the needs of the labor market pupils should be educated with a variety of career, including also employment in which a university diploma is not necessary needed. High school students have a need for emotional support to minimize the stress of this transistor period. Pupils should be education with the skills of self conscience, conscience for employment and decision making skills.

Career counseling and curricula

What is the specific space that career counseling has in pre-univeristy education curriculum? Based on curricular framework (2015) career counseling interacts with three main competences: 1. life competences, entrepreneurship and environment, 2. Personal Competences, 3. Citizenship competences. Some of the skills that pupils gain from these main competences are: 1. Exploring of the opportunities for education, professional preparation and counseling, 2. Demonstration of the organizational and working in groups skills, 3. Planning and management of the project, 4. Identifying and evaluating of the sources, 5. Making choices and decisions, 6. Participating in democratic processes, 7. Contributing in problem solving, 8. Demonstrating competences for selection of the career (Curricular framework, 2015). Which is the specific curricula field responding to the career counseling of the pupils in pre-univeristy curricula? Based in the Curricular framework (2015) and in core curricula (2018) resulted that the curricula areas containing knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and career counseling competences is the subject "Society and environment". Some of the skills and competences that pupils learn from the implementation of the subject "Society and environment" (IZHA, 2018) are: 1. Being active citizenship, informed and responsible, 2. Developing democratic and multicultural competences, 3. Evaluating the consequences of society's interaction with the environment, 4.

Creating premise for the initiatives and entrepreneurship, 5. Developing citizenship bases. How are the knowledge, skills and competencies of career counseling distributed at different levels of the pre-univeristy education curriculum? In the scale 1 and 2 of the curricula the pupils learn about decision making process, know and understand her/his self, society and world. In the scale 3 and 4 of the curricula, are integrated knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. In the scale 5 and 6 emphasis is placed on development of competences in a balanced way (Curricula framework 2015).

The fact that knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for career counseling are treated in the subject "Society and environment", this does not mean that they are not object from other curricular subjects. Career counseling constitutes an obligation not only for teachers of the subject "Society and environment" but also for all the teachers of other subjects. How career counseling is developed in curriculum subject of other countries? Career counseling in other educational systems is developed in different forms (Eurydice, 2018). (1) In some countries is developed together with entrepreneurship orientation as an integrated curricula. (2) In some other countries is developed as an integrated curricula with curricula of other social subjects. (3) In some other career counseling curricula are developed extracurricular skills thought other subjects and curricula. In support of forming of the knowledge and competences of the pupils for career counseling, is the identity of the adolescent, as concept developed by the author Marcia (1980). Taxonomy of adolescent identity according to Marcia, is composed of 4 stages: (1) unformed identity, in which the pupil is not engaged in activities or in series of aims, values and beliefs; (2) Precursor identity, in which the pupil is engaged in activities or in series of aims, values and beliefs; (3) Identity in formation, in which the pupil clarifies the meaning of values, aims and beliefs; (4) Formed identity, in which the pupil categorizes and solves important issues that have to do with their future career and not only. Career counseling is very important for pupils as a multidimensional dimension. Some of aims for career development in the form of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and competences are: 1. to develop in depth knowledge, 2. to develop exploring skills for future study program, 3. to empower decision making skills, 4. to construct and implement career plan, 5. to develop and raise awareness for possible options after graduation, 6. to orient understanding of the career at pupils, 7. to develop planning and exploring competences, 8. to develop techniques for effective management of the career, 9. to orient pupils towards problem management practices. One of the models of career counseling for pupils is following. (Law & Watts, 1977)

Career counseling model of the authors Law and Watts, represent a comprehensive and multidimensional model in which is included: 1. Self esteem, in which the pupils make an evaluation of the skills and interests for the future of the career; 2. Career research, in which the pupils explore all the alternatives of future studies connected closely with his / her desired profession; 3. Decision making, moment is which pupils after having reviewed skills, interests and alternatives take a decision; 4. Action plan, including planed activities to implement its final decision. To assist to the self evaluation and research for the career from the students side,

a list of questions can be helpful: 1. What are your interests?; 2. What do you want to do?; 3. What are your skills?; 4. What kind of careers are more suitable with his / her skills and interests?; 5. How will you prepare for the career?; 6. Think about the experiences that you liked?; 7. What kind of schools, study programs do you like?; 8. Prepare a list of the clubs, schools organizations in which you participated?; 9. Prepare a list of social and civil activities that you have been doing?.

One of the most important moment of evaluating of the study opportunities in one specific study program or university is the evaluation of the impact of different variables in registering in desired study program: 1. subjects to be developed during the program; 2. academic achievements; 3. class ranking; 4. test results; 5. life experience, plays an important role in selection of the university. To maximize the possibility of selection of the study program or desired university, the pupils are supported to: 1. read books focused on career than can match the interests with skills, 2. talk to the career advisors, 3. navigate in different websites of different universities, faculties and study programs, 4. visits universities premises, faculties, departments. If the schools need to evaluate the needs of the pupils for knowledge, skills and competences on career counseling or to measure their level of preparation, following instruments are proposed: (1) Career Maturity Inventory (CMI); (2) Career Adaptability Inventory (CAI); (3) Self-Directed Search (SDS) and Strong Interest Inventory. The main aim of this study is to is to explore career counseling in high school in some dimensions such as career counseling duration, roles in career counseling, school activities that are dedicated to career counseling, preparation, identification of needs, support from the parents and professional development of career advisory. Research questions include: (1) How many years of high school studies does the career counseling include? Career counseling is developed during three years of high school or only in 12th grade? (2) Whom is responsible for school career counseling: homeroom teacher, teacher of social subjects, other teachers, school principals? (3) What is the daily, weekly, monthly or annual teaching time of career counseling? (4) How do the career counselors prepare before activities with students at school? (5) Is there any career counseling need assessment? (6) How is done the monitoring and evaluating of the career counseling? (7) Are professional development activities planned with a focus on school career counseling? Results of this study are important for teachers and schools principals, for specialists of different levels of pre-univeristy education, for directors of local and national educational institutions. They can serve also to the researchers in the field of education science to replicate the same or similar studies in the future with diverse study samples.

2. Methodology

Methodology used in the study "Career Counseling – important factor in orienting of the high schools students for deciding of their studies and future profession" is based in mixed methodological research approach, where qualitative and quantitative approaches interact with each other. Used instruments in this study include: 1. structured questionnaires, 2. focus group. The format of the structured questionnaire and of the focus groups contain dimensions and statements that focused in the components of career counseling for high schools students, such as duration, roles, schools activities, preparation, identification of the needs, parents support and the professional development in career counseling. Study sample is composed from the respondents high school principals what participated in the annual forum of Tirana European University (N=87). Respondents – high school principals coming from different cities of Albania enabling a representative sample. High school principals represent both public and state high schools enabling layered sample. Selection of the respondents in the development of the questionnaires and in focus groups was not random and intentional involving different principals in the country. Focus group was realized in an understanding atmosphere and free exchange and ideas through respondents. The results of the focus groups discussions were summarized in synthetic manner and used as a base for finding analysis. For data gathered from the structured interview was used descriptive analysis meanwhile for data gathered from the focus groups was used typological analysis. One of the study limitation includes the self reporting instruments implemented in the study, structured questionnaire and focus groups.

If the data would be generated through other instruments can be suggested alternative results and conclusions.

3. Results and discussions

3.1 Results of quantitative analyses

Table 1 – Values of frequencies by gender

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	1M	41	47.1	50.0	50.0
Valid	2 F	41	47.1	50.0	100.0
	Total	82	94.3	100.0	
Missing	System	5	5.7		
Total		87	100.0		

Frequencies values according to gender show that from the respondents sample of the high school principals that participated in the study 50 % of them are female and 50 % of them are male. As a conclusion, study sample that represent about 100 most important high schools in pre-univeristy system is gender balanced.

Educational level

Table 2 – Values of frequencies according to educational level

Educational level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	1BA	1	1.1	1.3	1.3
	2MA	76	87.4	95.0	96.3
Valid	3Dr.	3	3.4	3.8	100.0
	Total	80	92.0	100.0	
Missing	System	7	8.0		
Total		87	100.0		

Frequencies values according to educational level show that from the respondents sample of the high school principals that participated in the study, 1.1 of them possess a Bachelor degree, 87.4 of them

possess Master degree and 3.4 % of them PhD. The majority of the high schools principals possess aster degree.

Experience in school leading

Table 3 – Values of frequencies according to experience in school leading

Experience in school leading

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent	Cumulative Percent
	1 -1	8	9.2	10.7	10.7
	2 1-5	41	47.1	54.7	65.3
Valid	3 6-10	10	11.5	13.3	78.7
	411-20	14	16.1	18.7	97.3
	521-30	2	2.3	2.7	100.0
	Total	75	86.2	100.0	
Missing	System	12	13.8		
Total		87	100.0		

Frequencies values according to experiences in school leading show that from the respondents sample of the high school principals that participated in the study, 56.3% of them have from 1-5 years of experience; 27.6% of them have from 6-20 years of experience and only 2.3% of them more then 20 years. It results that less then the half of the high schools have from 1 to 5 years of experience meanwhile less then the half have more then 5 years of experience in school leading.

Duration of the career counseling during high schools

Table 4 – Frequencies values according to the duration of career counseling during high school

Frequencies values according to duration of the career counseling during high schools show that from the respondents sample of the high school principals that participated in the study, 72.4 % of them claim that students / pupils career counseling is developed mainly in the 12th grade, but includes also 10th and 11th grade; meanwhile 18.4 % of them claim that students / pupils career counseling is not developed   in the 12th grade, nor in the 10th and 11th grade; 2.3% of them are undecided.

As a conclusion, based on the study sample resulted that 2/3 of high school principals claim that career counseling is developed mainly in 12th grade and partially in the 10th and 11th grade.

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 I totally do not agree	8	9.2	9.9	9.9
	2 I do not agree	8	9.2	9.9	19.8
	3 I am undeceided	2	2.3	2.5	22.2
	4 I agree	22	25.3	27.2	49.4
	5 I totally agree	41	47.1	50.6	100.0
	Total	81	93.1	100.0	
Missing	System	6	6.9		
Total		87	100.0		

Career advisor (homeroom teacher / school principal)

Table 5 – Frequencies values according to the career advisor variable

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 I totally do not agree	2	2.3	2.4	2.4
	2 I do not agree	2	2.3	2.4	4.8
	3 I am undeceided	2	2.3	2.4	7.1
	4 I agree	33	37.9	39.3	46.4
	5 I totally agree	45	51.7	53.6	100.0
	Total	84	96.6	100.0	
Missing	System	3	3.4		
Total		87	100.0		

Frequencies values for the career advisor show that from the respondents sample of the high school principals that participated in the study, 89.6 % of them claim that homeroom teacher and school principal develop career counseling for high school pupils; 4.6 % of them think that homeroom teacher and school principal do not develop develop career counseling for high school pupils, meanwhile 2.3 % of them are undecided. This means that homeroom teacher and school principal are responsible for career counseling process.

School activities where career counseling is developed

Table 6 – Frequencies values for the variable: school activities where career counseling is developed.

From the respondents sample that participated in the study, resulted that 81.6% of them claim that pupils career counseling is developed mainly in extracurricular activities or in specific activities with pupils; 6.9% of them claim that claim that pupils career counseling is not developed in extracurricular activities or in specific activities with pupils; meanwhile 3.4% of them are undecided.

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent	Cumulative Percent
	1 I totally do not agree	4	4.6	5.0	5.0
	2 I do not agree	2	2.3	2.5	7.5
	3 I am undeceided	3	3.4	3.8	11.3
Valid	4 I agree	33	37.9	41.3	52.5
	5 I totally agree	38	43.7	47.5	100.0
	Total	80	92.0	100.0	
Missing	System	7	8.0		
Total		87	100.0		

Daily / weekly / annual duration of career counseling

Frequencies values for the variable of daily / weekly / annual duration of career counseling show that from the respondents sample of the high school principals that participated in the study, 64.3% of them claim that duration of the career counseling sessions with pupils in high school last 1 hour in a week mainly in 12th grade; 17.2% of them claim that it is not developed 1 hour in 12th grade even not in 10th or 11th grade, meanwhile 9.2% of them are undecided. As a conclusion, the duration of career counseling sessions last 1 hour a week and mainly in the 12th grade of the high school.

Career counseling preparation

From the respondents sample of the high school principals that participated in the study, resulted that 82.7% of them claim that during career counseling sessions are not prepared specific topics or used specific literature, but mostly are organized free conversations with pupils; 11.5% of them claim that specific topics are prepared and is used specific literature, meanwhile 9.2% of them are undecided. As a conclusion, in general pupils career counseling is organized in forms of free conversation and during these sessions are not prepared specific topics or used specific literature.

Identifying the needs for career counseling and evaluation

Table 7: Frequencies values of the variable: identifying the needs for career counseling and evaluation

From the respondents sample of the high school principals that participated in the study, resulted that 73.5% of them claim that in their schools are identified the pupils needs for career counseling mainly through questionnaires fulfilled in the school premises; 9.1% of them claim that pupils need for career counseling are not identified; 11.5% are undecided. As a conclusion, it results that the needs of pupils are identified especially through the questionnaires fulfilled in school.

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent	Cumulative Percent
	1 I totally do not agree	1	1.1	1.2	1.2
	2 I do not agree	7	8.0	8.5	9.8
	3 I am undeceided	10	11.5	12.2	22.0
Valid	4 I agree	31	35.6	37.8	59.8
	5 I totally agree	33	37.9	40.2	100.0
	Total	82	94.3	100.0	
Missing	System	5	5.7		
Total		87	100.0		

Parents support in the process of selection of career

From the respondents sample of the high school principals that participated in the study, resulted that 88.5% of them claim that parents are supportive towards their children in the process of selecting of study program and this is done in close collaboration with the teacher and the school principal; 2.3% of them claim that parents are supportive towards their children and only 4.6% of them are undecided. As a conclusion, parents support their children in the process of selecting of study program closely collaborating with teachers and school principals.

Professional development for career advisors

Table 8: Frequencies values of the variable: professional development for career advisors

From the respondents sample of the high school principals that participated in the study, resulted that 71.3% of them claim that school principals participated in trainings on career counseling of the pupils in high school; 12.6% of them claim that they have not attended traingins on career counseling; 13.8% are undecided. As a conclusion, it results that the majority of the high school principals participated in training focused in pupils career counseling.

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent	Cumulative Percent
	1 I totally do not agree	4	4.6	4.7	4.7
	2 I do not agree	7	8.0	8.2	12.9
	3 I am undeceided	12	13.8	14.1	27.1
Valid	4 I agree	38	43.7	44.7	71.8
	5 I totally agree	24	27.6	28.2	100.0
	Total	85	97.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.3		
Total		87	100.0		

3.2 Results of qualitative analyses

Discussions of the respondents in focus groups confirmed results of the quantitative analyses concluding that student career counseling id developed in high school mainly in 12th grade and partially in 10th and 11th grade. The main persons responsible in high school career are homeroom teacher and school principal. Career counseling is mainly developed in extracurricular activities or in specific activities with pupils. During the focus groups it was confirmed that the duration for the career counseling with the high school pupils is about 1 hour in a week and mainly in the 12th grade, not including 10th and 11th grade. Confirming the result from the quantitative analyses the discussions in the focus groups claimed that career counseling is developed in the form of free conversation and is not prepared specific topic or used specific literature. In general the needs of the pupils for career council are identified especially through the questionnaires fulfilled in school premises. Parents are supportive towards their children in the process of deciding the study program collaborating with the homeroom teacher and school principals. The majority of the high

school principals have participated in trainings focused on career counseling. Both methods used derived in same conclusions.

4. Conclusions and implications

Conclusions of this study are based in results obtained from the qualitative and quantitative analyses. One of the limitations of the study is that in the sample are not included all the schools in Albania. One other limitation is that for the collection of the data are used self reporting instruments. The study found that more then a half of the high school principals have until 5 years of experience in school leading, meanwhile less than a half of the principals have more then 5 years in school leading. This implicates pre-univerity institutions than in their policies for the election of the high school principals take into consideration this important factor that affect in the quality of school management derivating in undesired results. Study found that career counseling is developed in high school mainly in the 12th grade and partially in 10th and 11th grade.

The fact that pupils career counseling is developed mainly in the 12th grade is considered insufficient and include a close range of time in which they have to take one of the most important decision, their future career. It is recommended that school principals, homeroom teacher but also other teachers include in their work career counseling in all the classes of high school as an extracurricular skills which will support pupils in their orientation for deciding of the career in the last year of high school. Study also showed that homeroom teacher and schools principals are the main responsible persons for this process. It is recommended that career counseling should include a large number of actors. Here can be involved teachers of all curricula subjects, schools social workers, parent and community members, experts of different field can be invited from the school in specific career counseling activities. Study found that career counseling of pupils in high school is developed mainly in extracurricular activities or in specific activities with pupils. This result implicates school principals and homeroom teachers that career counseling in addition to extracurricular activities and to specific activities with the student should be developed as integrated part of other activities within teaching hours in specific subjects, as well as outside the teaching process, both in school and in various community activities.

From the study resulted that in general career counseling of the pupils in high school is developed in the form of free conversation and there are not prepared specific topics or used specific literature. It is recommended that aside from free conversation with the pupils career counseling advisers prepare different topics including: theoretical topics, different presentations, leaflets and posters, multidimensional materials in a way that career counseling activities be a planned activity, previously prepared and to to avoid spontaneity. The study found that in general the needs of the pupils for career counseling are identifies in high school specifically through the questionnaires fulfilled in school. This implicated the school directories and teacher to plan and develop research instrument to identify pupils needs for career counseling. As identifying instruments can be used questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, checking list etc. From the study resulted that parents support their children in the process of selection of the study program / career closely collaborating with teachers and school principals. It is recommended that school directories organize different activities with parents focused in career counseling, This way parents can support in a structured way the selection of the future career for their children. Study found that the majority of the high school principals participated in the trainings focused of pupils career counseling. This implicates pre-univerity leading institutions in local and central level to increase the opportunity of offering professional development activities not only for schools principals but also for teacher aiming at influencing the quality of developing of career counseling.

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