Mobility, Education and Employability in the European Union

Inside Erasmus

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Valentina Cuzzocrea
and Airi-Alina Allaste

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'In Search of…' New Methodological Approaches to Youth Research (2015, Cambridge Scholar Publishing) together with K. Tiidenberg. She also recently co-edited an edition of the journal, *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, with present co-author David Cairns.

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Introducing Erasmus

The freedom to move between different countries for work, study or other purposes is one of the definitional features of life in the European Union. This personal and professional liberty explains why, alongside ensuring the circulation of goods, capital and services, the European Commission has engaged in a sustained process of opening-up the internal borders of the EU. Free movement is expected to take place on a fairly regular basis among relatively large sections of the European population rather than being restricted to a small minority of privileged citizens, a practice helped by a removal of bureaucratic barriers and the building of social, economic and cultural ties between individuals from different societies. Added to this development is a concerted effort to educate young Europeans about the life possibilities created by mobility, including the provision of exchange platforms that enable circulation to take place within education and training systems.

Through such means it is hoped that intercultural understanding between people from different countries can be created, in addition to moving towards intensified forms of political unity and shared economic prosperity. In practice, this has involved the investment of billions of euros in programmes designed to create more, and better quality, intra-

European mobility, with particular emphasis on the youth population. The impact to date has been considerable, with millions of young European citizens supported through the maintenance of mobility platforms and funding of projects. In this book, we will take a close look at the most high profile framework designed to support this nascent mobility culture, Erasmus, with a view to understanding how different forms of Erasmus mobility are practiced among difference sections of the European youth population.

Despite having attained a high level of visibility, building Europe through Erasmus mobility is not a straightforward task. The programme, especially in its current expanded format of Erasmus+, is in fact a complex initiative. While student exchanges may be the most well-known examples of intra-European circulation from the point of view of EU policymakers (Brooks and Waters 2011, pp. 69–76), the present iteration of Erasmus also seeks to support mobility in other sections of the youth population, including young people interested in civic engagement projects or voluntary work placements. Ensuring that all these actions work together and function effectively, and maintaining quality within exchanges, is a major challenge. There is also the controversial issue of who funds Erasmus. While the key actions of the programme are ostensibly financed by the Commission, resources are allocated to intermediaries rather than awarded directly to citizens. Any understanding of Erasmus must therefore consider what goes on within intermediary institutions as well as looking at what takes place in the lives of individual programme and project participants.

In identifying a rationale behind the Commission's approach to what is its flagship mobility programme, it can also be argued that there is basic multiplier principle underlying investment in Erasmus, with emphasis on stakeholders within tertiary education and the youth sector, who are required to include a sufficiently large and diverse range of young people in the various actions that comprise the programme. This position puts these stakeholders in a powerful position, as they effectively get to decide who become mobile and define what takes place during exchange visits. In the course of this book, we will meet some of these key figures, including a number of the of the people who manage incoming and outgoing exchanges within universities (Chap. 4), alongside examining perspec-

tives from participating students (Chaps. 3, 5 and 6). We also engage with young people involved in forms of exchange that contribute to another core youth policy objective at European level, namely active citizenship (Chap. 7), followed by an assessment of the management of 'quality' within Erasmus+ mobility projects (Chap. 8).

Learning and Mobility

A common feature of these different forms of Erasmus mobility is that they need to be appreciated as a platform for the learning of mobility, implying a strong link between education and intra-European circulation. This book is not, we should add, an orthodox account of how universities and training organisations work; we will not, for instance, focus on relationships between teachers and students, curriculum development or the acquisition of recognised credentials. Significant though these issues are, our discussion highlights the perhaps unique to Europe opportunities for learning that are created in the course of the international exchange visits Erasmus supports. But in keeping with the expanded scope of the current Erasmus+ initiative, we do consider learning within both formal and informal learning environments, with students and mobility project participants respectively.

Despite the diversity of Erasmus actions now in place, there are common programmatic elements. During a fixed period of time spent abroad, it is expected that the mover will engage in learning processes related to enhancement of their employability, linking learners with the labour market, and the strengthening of what is sometimes termed 'interculturality' in reference to interactions within a group of people from a diverse range of national backgrounds that lead to mutual respect for each other's differences. In simple terms, to become more employable and be more culturally aware of diverse aspects of citizenship in Europe are what all Erasmus participants should be learning.

The emergence of these faculties is accomplished through concurrently bringing together groups of international students, project participants and volunteers via Erasmus. While diverse, these modalities share a common approach in bringing together peers from different countries and

regions and encouraging them to educationally mingle. In doing so, each participant acquires an international point of reference, or range of different national points of reference, that enables a more spatially expansive view of future possibilities in life to emerge. This includes learning about the possibilities of working and studying in different European societies and meeting with people from a range of cultural backgrounds to learn more about their lives. The international learning habitus is hence a site in which a spatially reflexive form of learning can emerge; a locale that is both created by mobility and extols the virtues of intra-European circulation as a means to realize personal and professional development (see also Cairns 2014; Cairns et al. 2017).

In more prosaic terms it is anticipated that during an exchange visit by a student, trainee or volunteer, there will be not only be formal education within the classroom or laboratory but also informal or non-formal learning among peers, and perhaps also with members of the host community. Additionally, the possibility exists for knowhow in respect to how to live and work in another country being generated. It may be that through a study visit or work placement an Erasmus student acquires the skills and capacities that open up access to the next stage in an education or work trajectory, with their field of opportunities widened to encompass not only home-based jobs with an international dimension but also working and studying abroad. For this reason, we believe that participating in Erasmus involves thinking more expansively about future possibilities, whether this involves physical relocation to another European country or becoming aware of how to conduct business with people from other nations. It is through this means that Erasmus participants obtain a better understanding of the potentialities of life in a European community characterised by spatial openness, something we regard as the programme's greatest contribution to social, political and economic stability in the region.

With Erasmus+, we now have more explicit recognition of the potential value of non-formal learning, with particular emphasis on the use of mobility projects. In regard to application, we can detect a desire to address the social agenda of Erasmus, with emphasis on issues relating to active citizenship, extending to encouraging civic engagement and enhancing youth-appropriate political participation. These projects, as

we shall discover in Chap. 7, have at least one major limitation, in the participant base tending to consist of young people who are already civic-minded and politically engaged. Such individuals may strengthen and better focus their political conscientiousness through Erasmus, but we cannot say that joining a mobility project is a point of inception for participation. For this reason, the ability of Erasmus+ to reach a more diverse range of European young people is limited, ironically, by the lack of appeal of the values which the European institutions extol, such as respect for diversity and tolerance, and the strength of other European values noticeably absent from EC policy discourse: materialism, individualism and outright hedonism.

The Erasmus Ethos

While we do wish to stress its contribution to supporting ties between European citizens of different nations and the symbolic strengthening of the EU, one thing we will not do in this book is provide an extensive account of the history of the Erasmus programme. This is due to the fact that this task has already been undertaken with the help of one of the authors of this book in a previous publication (Feyen and Krzaklewska 2013; see also Corbett 2005; Pépin 2007). We do however advise readers interested in Erasmus history, and more recent developments, to consult this book. Suffice to say, the recent history of Erasmus and the emergence of student mobility programmes in Europe is, to say the least, an intriguing one, culminating in the current 'taken for granted' status of the programme. It is in fact remarkable that the initiative came into being in the first place considering the amount of hostility towards the idea of a large scale cross-border youth exchange scheme from countries such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom, all of whom at one subsequent point in time or another could arguably be termed major beneficiaries of the programme (Feyen 2013, p. 30). Nevertheless, a few basic facts do need to be brought to light in order to explain the underlying ethos of the programme. This is so that we might appreciate what Erasmus means for policymakers, stakeholders and participants, before outlining some of main features of the expanded Erasmus+ programme.

Named after the Dutch humanist and philosopher Erasmus Desiderius (1465–1536), better known as Erasmus of Rotterdam, the programme formally began in 1987, although antecedent initiatives have existed in the form of smaller scale intra-European exchange platforms since the 1970s, such as the Joint Study Programmes.[1] While it is important to appreciate the difficulties in reaching agreement on the format the student exchange platform would take at European political level and how it should be funded, we are more interested in the fact that Erasmus is a programme with an underlying philosophy: a core set of values that reflect the political motivation behind its creation, including the task of legitimising the European institutions (Feyen 2013, p. 22). Student mobility was seen by European policymakers at this time as a means to imaginatively stimulate interest in European cooperation and a way of putting a youthful face on organisations perceived as old, cold and aloof by the European public. This is, in short, an example of what would now be referred to as institutional branding, as well as demonstrating the desire of the EC to establish a specifically European 'demos' (Klose 2013, p. 41) within which its values, including the valorization of mobility, could prosper. Therefore even in its nascent stages, Erasmus had a geo-political significance not present in other forms of student or youth exchange.[2]

What the existence of an underlying philosophy designed to legitimate the European institutions means is that the outward image of Erasmus as a 'fun' and convivial activity with material and cultural benefits serves a very practical, and quite serious, political purpose for the EU (Krzaklewska 2008, p. 90). We can therefore answer the question as to what is it European policymakers get out of supporting an expensive programme like Erasmus: it provides a highly visible symbol of a youthful Europe working, or rather studying and training, together. And the greater the number of participants in the programme, the stronger the signal to the European public that the EU institutions are working effectively and responsibly.

Erasmus is designed to not only bring young people together but also integrate groups from across the diverse nations of the EU and external countries participating in various aspects of the programme, helping people to become more tolerant and have a better awareness of common European values, with some indicators sourced from official Erasmus statistics presented in the infographic slide reproduced below
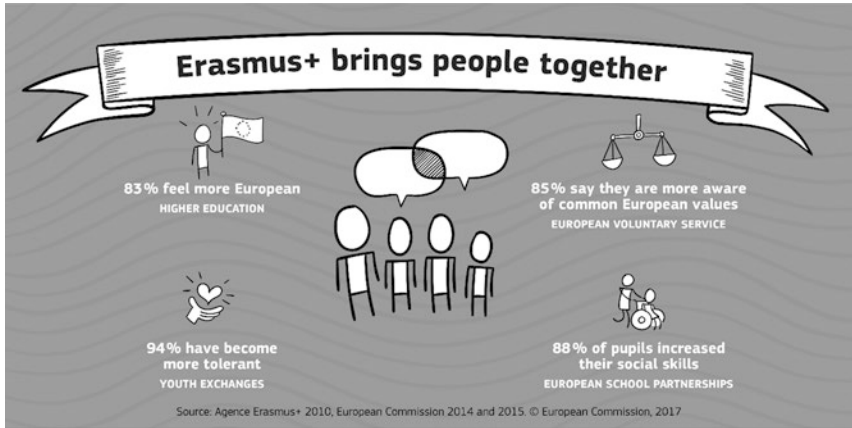
Fig. 1.1 Erasmus+ brings people together

(Fig. 1.1). It is however not always clear from reading Erasmus statistics just what is meant by 'common European values' or what constitutes 'tolerance' or an increase in social skills, although reference is made in official reports to promoting diversity, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue as well as respect for human rights (e.g. European Commission 2017, p. 76). These are potentially laudable aims, but issues that deserve to be explored though in-depth qualitative exploration rather than statistical soundbites. The extent to which these outward signs are being translated into deeper societal changes is therefore open to question due to the ambitious nature of this goal, the complexity of the process of identification with Europe and a lack of clarity in respect to key terms of reference.

Less ambiguously, the programme can be said to have been a major quantitative success until now, particularly among undergraduates, with numbers participating rising incrementally since the first exchanges in 1987. Even taking into account the fact that as the EU has grown, with the number of countries within the Erasmus fold expanding considerably from the initial 11 nations in 1987 (Brown et al. 2014), that in the region of nine million exchanges have taken place over a course of 30 years is extremely impressive, as is the wide range of actions now supported during the Erasmus+ phase. This includes volunteers, trainees, undergradu-
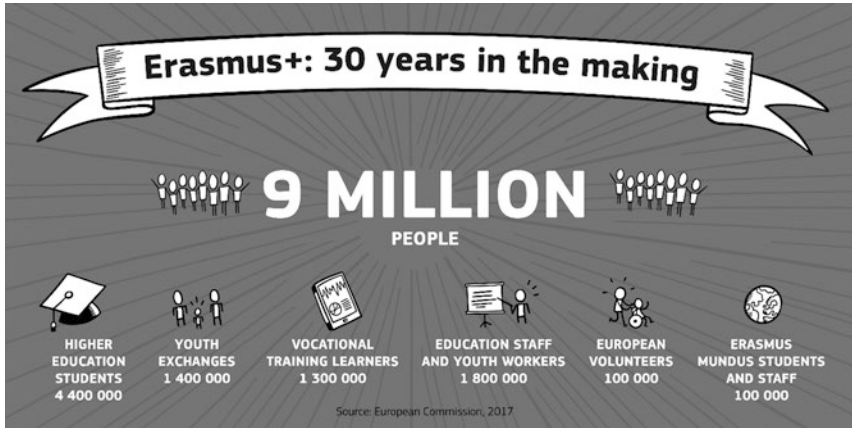
Fig. 1.2 Erasmus+: 30 years in the making

ates, postgraduates as part of Erasmus Mundus, academic members of staff, youth workers and other sections of the youth population with specific social needs (see Fig. 1.2).[3]

More recently, the goals of Erasmus have become more closely aligned with addressing societal challenges within the EU, such as the rise in youth unemployment that followed the 2008 economic crisis (European Commission 2016, p. 5) and providing language support for refugees from outside Europe (European Commission 2017, p. 9); issues that did not feature in the aims of the programme as set out in its original articles in 1987, which were largely focused on the academic development of students and the strengthening of cooperation between universities across the European community in a process of what Brown et al. (2014, pp. 12–13) term 'normalising mobility'. However, in respect to these original aims, it has to be said that they have been realized to a major extent considering the 'normality' of foreign exchange visits within tertiary education.

Extra-EU 'migrants,' as refugees and asylum seekers are euphemistically referred to in media discourse, are somewhat tangential to traditional Erasmus fields such as undergraduate exchanges. However, refugees and asylum seekers are now being explicitly targeted for policy interventions via mobility projects in Key Action 3 of the programme,

including structured dialogue between young people and stakeholders (European Commission 2017, p. 8). In regard to youth unemployment, considering that this is a situation threatening the future job prospects of millions of young Europeans, including skilled and qualified youth (Cairns et al. 2016), the scope for Erasmus interventions is more expansive, including the idea of making students more employable through participating in exchanges (see Chap. 2). Additionally, we might want to consider the EU's long-standing commitment to 'active citizenship' in sustaining European social and political cohesion (Wood 2013, p. 127), including voluntary placements as part of programmatic elements that formed part of the *Youth in Action* programme than preceded Erasmus+ (see Chap. 7).

At a more general level, the EU also wishes to address certain aspects of social inclusion via Erasmus, such as supporting students with fewer opportunities and providing online linguistic support for aforementioned incoming refugees (Fig. 1.3). This links with a desire to promote equality and inclusion through facilitating access to Erasmus for participants from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' and among those with 'fewer opportunities compared to their peers [and] whenever disadvantage limits or prevents participation in transnational activities,' with specific reference made to disability, young people with learning difficulties and those facing pov-
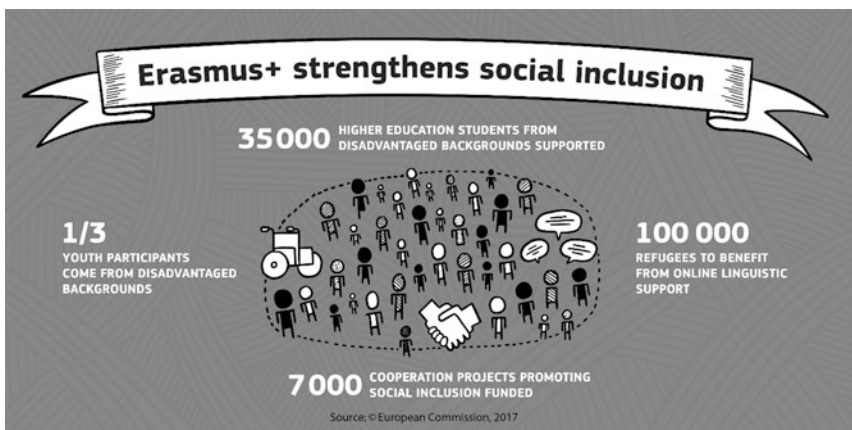

Fig. 1.3 Erasmus+ strengthens social inclusion

erty, cultural exclusion or social obstacles (European Commission 2017, p. 9). In other words, the EU seeks to address the needs of young people facing different forms of extreme hardship through various elements of Erasmus+ rather than those who simply lack social and economic resources.

While no doubt motivated by good political intentions and a desire to keep Erasmus relevant to the European public through addressing topical concerns such as the influx of refugees into countries such as Italy, Germany and Greece, particularly following the 2015 refugee crisis, broadening the scope of the programme inevitably has implications for its ethos, as well as potentially changing the meaning of the Erasmus brand. Suffice to say, in grouping together initiatives with an explicit social remit, defined by what may be a very high threshold of disadvantage, what the programme signifies for European policymakers, and Europeans, will start to change.

Rather than being a symbol of European unity and a pro-active means of fostering harmony within the EU, Erasmus may come to embody a political reaction to the challenges facing young people at the margins of society, greatly limiting the socio-demographic inclusivity of certain mobility actions. In other words, the programme loses its relevance to young people outside categories defined as priorities by politicians, possibly generating consternation among traditional Erasmus consumers. However, this change of emphasis can also be interpreted as a positive development, in overcoming the idea that Erasmus is a programme largely for students, most of whom are assumed to be from relatively privileged backgrounds, thus making mobility a means for reproducing rather than overcoming societal inequalities (Murphy-Lejeune 2002).[4]

At a political level the EU can therefore be said to be taking something of a gamble, but it may be a wager worth taking for policymakers if the programme acquires the ability to generate 'political capital' (Bourdieu 1986; see also French 2011) for the EU; in effect, a form of legitimation through being seen to be socially relevant. However, we have not, as yet, reached a position where refugees and asylum seekers have supplanted EU students within Erasmus: we can in fact confirm that participation rates in the undergraduate exchange programme seem to be as high as ever, even increasing slightly since the start of Erasmus+ in 2014 (Fig. 1.4).
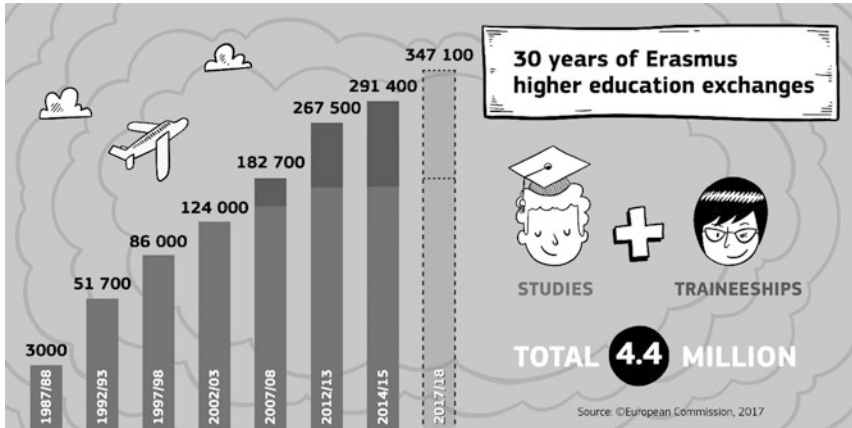
Fig. 1.4   30 years of Erasmus higher education exchanges

From this particular infographic, it might be argued that the popularity of Erasmus among undergraduate students and work placement trainees is set to continue along an upward trajectory, with in the region of 4.4 million exchanges now having taken place since 1987. And outwardly, Erasmus still represents a good news story for European policymakers. Later in this book, we will explore what lies beneath these participation trends, addressing the question as to what motivates students to participate (Chap. 3) and asking what is it that they gain from the Erasmus experience (Chaps. 5 and 6). Therefore, despite the fundamental changes initiated with Erasmus+, we will not neglect the traditional and still popular aspects of the programme.

Erasmus in Theory

Having considered some of the underlying principles behind the programme and how they are changing over time, we also wish to appreciate Erasmus with reference to its place within the broader framework of geographical mobility, extending to fields such as migration and its role in supporting intra-European free movement. This task involves discussing Erasmus at a theoretical level as opposed to simply describing its most prominent features or mapping flows of incoming and outgoing mobility.

While we might think that this is a relatively straightforward task, Erasmus and the student mobility field in general is not well integrated into a broader theoretical context. That most studies of the programme rely on statistical analysis of administrative data rather than conceptually guided exploration leaves much research disconnected from existing knowledge fields. As Botas and Huisman (2013, p. 742) note, in consequence, studies of Erasmus lack a theoretical foundation. Attempts to place the programme within recognisable 'Migration Studies' precedents also flounder due to doubts as to whether student circulation actually contributes to migration processes. We cannot, for example, view exchanges as peripatetic sabbaticals akin to that of a gap year or what King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) term the 'European year abroad' since Erasmus has a geopolitical significance such forms of mobility lack. This is just one reason why in another recent publication, the relationship between student mobility and migration has been defined as tenuous (Cairns 2017a).

Another issue relates to the relatively short duration of most exchanges, less than a year for undergraduates and even shorter in regard to work placements. And that there is a guaranteed return to the sending society moves Erasmus further away from migration paradigms. The circulatory character of Erasmus is in fact a defining feature and serves a crucial educational purpose through reducing the risk of disruption to educational progress, with exchanges being integrated into existing degree courses. While it is not inconceivable that an Erasmus student could 'over-stay' in the host country, this would effectively mean an abandonment of studies to date as well as risking losing out on financial support due to not having met the conditions of their scholarship. This is an important political consideration in the present climate of anti-migration sentiment in some European countries, as this arrangement provides a very effective deterrent against settlement.

We should also acknowledge that the programme is unambiguously marketed as a mobility exercise rather than a form of migration or even a proto-migration stage. To view Erasmus as migratory is therefore without basis in fact and out of step in regard to policy discussion. Going even further, we can argue that Erasmus constitutes a means of doing mobility differently, or a kind of anti-migration, a situation enabled by the relative openness of the EU's borders. This is in fact a massive achievement on the

part of Erasmus and the people who work within the programme, and one that receives surprisingly little publicity despite the potential for making political capital. But perhaps it is simply taken for granted that Erasmus is not a generator of intra-European migration and there is no need to remind the European public or national governments of this fact. We can therefore argue that it is more credible to view Erasmus as an alternative or even a deterrent to migration rather than an incipient example of such a form of population circulation.

Quantifying and Qualifying Erasmus

In looking at how prior studies are able to advance our understanding of Erasmus, various authors have illustrated the growing popularity of the programme and other forms of learning exchange, especially through the mapping of student mobility trends (e.g., Teichler et al. 2011). This work serves an important political purpose, providing policymakers with an indication of quantitative success, as do other studies drawing on data from Eurostat, OECD and the European Labour Force Survey (e.g. Kelo et al. 2006; de Wit et al. 2008; Souto-Otero et al. 2013).

Leaving aside the work of independent scholars, and the significant number of postgraduate theses conducted on themes relating to student mobility, dedicated studies at European level include the Erasmus Impact Study (Brandenburg et al. 2014), employing a cross-national web-survey approach combined with focus group evidence in selected countries. Significantly, the study also acknowledges the significance of exchanges for tertiary education level institutions in contributing towards internationalization as well as the role played by mobility in supporting employability among individual movers (see Chap. 2). Looking at other research, perhaps the most influential text remains Murphy-Lejeune's *Student Mobility and Narrative* (2002). This work differs from many subsequent studies in including exploration of the meaning of mobility for participants and societies, viewing the student traveller as a new form of European 'stranger.' This visitor occupies a liminal space between the sending and the host societies, representing a break with the idea of intra-European mobility as oriented around settlement.

In evaluating this work in terms of its theoretical value, we can deduce that with the main focus in research being on issues relating to outcomes from the student mobility experience, including the Erasmus Impact Study, there is less recognition of what shapes participation, especially in regard to vital issues such as gender, social class and personal/familial migration history. While we are made aware of gender imbalances in mobility take-up in some studies (e.g. Böttcher et al. 2016), such themes are not generally followed-up by researchers due to an emphasis on the personal growth dimension of exchange visits. In other words, an individualized rather than a socially-connected view of mobility predominates. For this reason, the fact that Erasmus visits typically take place as part of a group of international peers, and involve informal and non-formal forms of learning within such groups, is neglected as is recognition of internal learning processes that are, in sociological terms, inherently reflexive. This explains why in prior work on student mobility, we have emphasised the developmental qualities of student and graduate circulation using terms such as 'spatial reflexivity' as opposed to locating Erasmus within a more traditional individualization-inspired youth transitions framework (Cairns et al. 2012, 2017; Cairns 2014).

That academics have struggled to understand Erasmus is therefore partly due to the limited focus of student mobility research and a relatively weak evidence base, with quantitative data analysis lacking sufficient socio-demographic depth. These failings are particularly obvious when looking at Erasmus data published by the EC which does little more than provide basic indicators of recent trends in participation over time and between countries. That such statistics in their publically published form are denuded of socio-demographic variables is therefore frustrating, and perhaps a bit suspicious, leaving us to speculate about factors such as the impact of social class on Erasmus participation and the gender dimension of educational exchanges (see also Finn 2015).

Erasmus and Free Movement?

Returning briefly to the issue of 'free movement', identifying the contribution to Erasmus to the intrinsically European form of this practice is also difficult. We cannot, for instance, codify Erasmus mobility in itself

as free movement for some quite obvious reasons. As we shall learn in later chapters of this book, undergraduate exchanges are not 'free' in the sense of being organised on a laissez faire basis by individual movers. Rather they are regulated by the existence of learning agreements between host and sending institutions (see Chap. 4). They also come at a substantial financial cost to the mover and their family. The low level of Erasmus scholarships means that there is a de facto contribution required from the participant, partially privatising the cost of this form of circulation (Cairns 2017a, b). Crucial tasks such as managing how the transition between countries takes place are also delegated to institutions; for example, as we shall discover in Chap. 5, the Erasmus Student Network greatly assist in the process of finding accommodation and integrating movers into local communities and peer networks. Erasmus exchanges are therefore to be codified as institutional mobility, not free movement.

There is however still a relationship between Erasmus and free movement, albeit a somewhat tenuous one. The programme effectively promotes the idea of visiting other EU and neighbouring countries for work, study and even leisure purposes, but without providing ideas as to how to settle there. Emphasis is rather on the idea that circulation is possible, with a suggestion that it may even be profitable in the long term should paths to new opportunities be established. In this sense, a significant contribution to a culture of free movement can be made, but indirectly and deferred into an indistinct future. For this reason, Erasmus in its many forms can be regarded as constituting a preliminary stage in a globalized, or at least Europeanized, career, but that is all.

As a final word in this introductory chapter, and to finish on a more positive note, we do want to stress the importance of Erasmus in stimulating the imaginations of young Europeans to become free movers, and living exemplars of one of the defining aspects of being an EU citizen. While the idea that everyone should freely move is a somewhat idealized not to say unrealistic proposition due to the high cost of circulation and its uncertain outcomes, people are at least being given the freedom to dream about what is possible. This in itself should be regarded as a significant development, and the imaginative power of Erasmus should not be under-estimated.

Notes

1. Feyen (2013, p. 21) provides an alternate explanation of the programme's title, explaining that the term was coined by the coordinator of the Joint Study Programmes, Adam Smith, from the phrase 'European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students'.
2. Other notable early achievements include the establishment of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the Bologna process, which have helped ensure a degree of harmonization between tertiary educational level institutions in different countries, and accounts for the codification of Erasmus mobility by the EC as 'credit mobility' (European Commission 2015).
3. All EU member states fully participate in all the actions of the Erasmus+ programme, along with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey. Other partner countries can participate in specific actions such as the Erasmus Mundus postgraduate degree programme, subject to specific criteria or conditions, including nations in the Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership, South-Mediterranean and the Russian Federation.
4. Another area of interest for Erasmus+ is sport (see, e.g. European Commission 2017, p. 12), however discussion of this issue did not feature in any of our research projects on various aspects of the programme.

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2

Erasmus and Employability

In this part of our book, we will consider one of the conceptual foundations underlying the Erasmus programme: the idea of using intra-European circulation as a means of enhancing employability. This is a complex matter. While in the previous chapter we outlined some contextual issues surrounding Erasmus, including its contribution to supporting the political institutions of the European Union, to advance our understanding of employability we need to engage more directly with the theoretical foundations of education and training systems, and the significance of mobility as practiced by European youth to its development. This involves looking beyond 'employability' as portrayed by policymakers and within stakeholder agencies, including education and training institutions, and considering what the term actually means in regard to supporting the enhancement of labour market competencies, focusing on the example of the internationalized learning habitus.

This is a necessary prerequisit task for this book. Despite the popularity of the term, it has no clear meaning. It is in fact regarded as an almost magical means of helping young people, especially graduates, successfully enter and move within the labour market. It is this 'magic' that makes its acquisition, or rather its enhancement, desirable. This may also explain

why the term has consistently featured in policy discourse relating to Erasmus and other education and training initiatives: the way to make Erasmus mobility appear beneficial in regard to supporting young people's careers is to advertise the programme as a site for employability enhancement.

This promise is made clear in the introduction to the most recent version of the Erasmus Programme Guide published by the European Commission, with the first objective of a mobility project expected to be to:

> Support learners in the acquisition of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) with a view to improving their personal development, their involvement as considerate and active citizens in society and their employability in the European labour market and beyond. (European Commission 2017, p. 33)

Such a clear statement of intent reminds us of how Erasmus differs from other forms of intra-European circulation. It is a quite purposeful attempt to stimulate professional development, with employability being a key part of this process. Without this learning dimension, exchange visits would be little more than holidays subsidized by the European taxpayer. Furthermore, Erasmus is to be a collective experience that will ultimately contribute to the development of the EU. This means that we are not just talking about enhancing individuals' occupational profiles: Erasmus is about making Europe more employable.

More explicitly, educational profiles and future career prospects should be improved upon completion of a mobility exercise, alongside the acquisition of values such as an increased sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and awareness of what the EC terms the 'European project' and 'EU values' (European Commission 2017, p. 29; see also Chap. 7). To ensure Erasmus mobility functions in these respects, a lot of hard work needs to take place not only on the part of individual movers but also trainers and educators in host institutions, and the people who manage incoming and outgoing mobility (see Chap. 4). This is a major challenge, considering that unlike policy initiatives at national, regional or municipal levels, Erasmus introduces the difficulty of having to work with institutions from a range of different countries, each with its own distinct social,

economic and political characteristics. Therefore, what constitutes enhanced employability will differ according to factors such as the regional labour market chances of the individual mover.

In the remaining part of this chapter we will take a more detailed look at employability as it relates to Erasmus. As a first step, we will try to establish a stable definition of employability reflecting how the concept is utilized within the context of Erasmus, using established ideas from the sociological lexicon. Moving on from this point, we will examine some policy elements of the Erasmus+ initiative that involve attempts to systematically enhance employability. This includes not only undergraduate exchanges but also the potential for participation in mobility projects to contribute to the enhancement of this elusive but extremely valuable property.

Employability in an International Learning Context

As we have intimated in the opening paragraphs, employability is a concept much used in discussion of education and training systems; a somewhat generic term covering various aspects of the process through which people are equipped for the labour market. However, ubiquitous usage has created difficulties in regard to understanding what educators and trainers mean by the term and what it is they actually need to do in order to the enhance employability of European youth. This is a situation not helped by the fact that definitions used by education and training agencies tend to be descriptive rather than theoretical, not to mention somewhat elastic, for example:

> The combination of factors which enable individuals to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and to progress during [a] career. [The] employability of individuals depends on (a) personal attributes (including adequacy of knowledge and skills); (b) how these personal attributes are presented on the labour market; (c) the environmental and social contexts (i.e. incentives and opportunities offered to update and validate their knowledge and skills); and (d) the economic context. (Cedefop 2008, p. 77)[1]

What this represents is a demonstration of what employability is at European policy level at an extremely basic level. There is no actually stating of what the 'factors' that enable individuals to progress are or what the secret 'combination' is. The elements that encourage the emergence of employability are described using generic terms such as 'personal attributes', 'environment and social contexts' and 'economic contexts'. We therefore have the basis of a definition rather than an actual characterization of employability itself. As it stands, this definition is opaque, changeable and lacking gravitas.

In beginning to fill-out what constitutes employability, we can with reasonable ease elaborate upon the 'knowledge and skills' dimension as some of these aspects are not hard to identify: gaining qualifications and other forms of accreditation, completing training courses, becoming proficient in foreign languages, undertaking a work placement or simply gaining a better understanding of how a workplace functions. The common element in these actions is that their successful realization improves labour market chances through making people desirable to employers. But this is still a descriptive view, neglecting recognition of the process taking place within learning environments.

Employability Actors

To overcome this limitation, we need to consider the link between the skills acquisition process and an ability to enter and remain within a labour market. To make this happen, there needs to be a connection between (potential) employees and employers. The process of co-ordinating the needs and wishes of these two actors is absolutely integral to enhancing employability. In regard to who helps make this connection, we can point towards (at least) two sets of additional parties. The first is relatively prominent: educators and trainers who should be able to convey to those in education and training what employers want in terms of skills and abilities. The second party is less perceptible, consisting of the people who oversee regulation of labour markets, including policymakers.

Policymakers play an indirect but extremely important role in employability through, making decisions about funding education and training

institutions, investing in infrastructure and regulating working conditions. However, they are also subject to outside influence, for example, from lobbyists or the media who may seek to influence labour market regulation for the benefit of vested interests. Taking into account the different roles played by these actors, we can now say that employability involves linking together (potential) employees and employers, with input from mediating parties such as educators and trainers, all of whom are dependent upon the existence of labour market conditions conducive to job creation and job security.

Individuals seeking work must therefore work hard to become employable through engaging with educators and trainers, while employers must provide suitable and sufficient opportunities, guided by legislative demands. That all four parties are required to work together explains the complexity of employability. Neither is the process of enhancing employability passive, since all four sets of actors must be making a simultaneous effort. Without meaningful input from any one of these parties, employability fails to emerge, making this property fragile and vulnerable.

Employability as Synergy

What we are suggesting is that employability is a form of synergy that emerges when these parties successfully co-ordinate their efforts to create employment. Regarding where this process takes place, we can identify learning and training environments where the acquisition of formal credentials takes place, including universities. We can also hypothesise that there is a more subtle introduction to the world of work taking place, whether this be business, industry, science, the public sector or another occupational field. This may entail educators and trainers letting young people know that employment is *not* like student or school life and that expectations and attitudes need to be adjusted accordingly. Employability is therefore not *just* about accreditation but also teaching people to understand what employers want and how to orientate oneself towards meeting these expectations. While this task can be undertaken via informal and non-formal learning outside the classroom,

including interactions with peers and members of local communities, helping to formally explain social networking can play a crucial role in the employability process; for example, educators transmitting information about how to act within a workplace as well as news about possible opportunities.

Using Erasmus as an example, we can see that there is potential for an undergraduate exchange or involvement in a *Youth in Action* type project (see Chap. 7) to contribute to employability, albeit with a Europeanization dimension not present in initiatives grounded in national or regional contexts. Exchange students and project participants need to fulfil their learning responsibilities while employers ought to recognise the value of international experience. Educators play the crucial mediation role between these two parties, telling students what employers require of incoming staff, while the EU is an external arbiter of sorts in supporting the programme.[2] Facets of employability supported by Erasmus vary according to issues such as the exchangees' field of study or the theme addressed in a project, but a common feature relates to an ability to work internationally. This is not just a matter of improving fluency in a foreign language but extends to making contact with a culturally diverse range of people and better appreciating the values of other societies; qualities observed in other forms of student circulation and conceptualized as a form of 'mobility capital' (Hu and Cairns 2017).

Another vital consideration is that we cannot talk about the creation of employability in terms of a young person being a blank slate. Among groups such as students and graduates, and no doubt elsewhere, this quality already exists. In fact, very few people can be considered not to possess any significant degree of employability; perhaps children and the retired who are not expected to work for certain moral or legal reasons. It therefore becomes redundant to talk about the number of people in specific population who have 'employability' or a desire to produce a greater number of employable individuals. What educators and trainers do is cultivate an already existing quality. To understand employability we therefore need to accept that we are engaging in a process of skillfully managing qualities that are already present through building capacities and dispensing educational qualifications. This explains why policy discourse emanating from agencies such as the EU

always makes reference to enhancing or strengthening employability, not creating it.

On the part of individual learners, there is also a requirement to make effective decisions about which capacities and credentials to focus upon, and the task of locating an appropriate learning environment. The range of options can be considerable, not to mention confusing, and there may not be a clear idea as to which paths actually help improve labour market chances. There is the additional wildcard of personal choice and the selection of learning options according to what may be an extremely subjective criteria; with the exception of societies wherein occupational pathways are effectively proscribed at a very young age, young people will generally make decisions about future employment according to what appeals to them most rather than following an employability maximization principle. The input of 'employees' into the equation can therefore be hard to anticipate. Understanding employers' contribution to employability is another elusive element. This is a diffuse group, involving a large range of organisations spread across a wide geographical area, whose input may be difficult to obtain. The relationship between employers and educators/trainers may also be tenuous; for example, how do they actually learn about what employers require of future workers? But it is only when alignment exists between these parties, enabled by other external influences, that synergy happens and people find themselves entering and hopefully staying within the labour market.

Estimating Employability

While employability has been extensively referenced in academic publications and policy documents, a degree of pragmatism prevails in regard to how this quality is to be measured. For instance, language learning has historically featured prominently in the analyses of various authors about Erasmus and other forms of international student exchange (Coleman 1998; Mattern 2016), as does the idea of equating employability with what are termed 'soft skills', encompassing social and cultural awareness of what is required in the workplace (Krzaklewska 2010). Much work on employability however tends to focus on student

perspectives (Tomlinson 2008; Tymon 2011) or employment outcomes (Parey and Waldinger 2011), limiting what we can conclude about the process itself in terms of examining the inputs from students and employers.

A major exception is the Erasmus Impact Study, with an approach that emphasises student orientations towards work and employers' perspectives (Brandenburg et al. 2014). The employability variable for students in this study is built from selected personality traits of respondents, specifically 'Tolerance of Ambiguity', 'Curiosity', 'Confidence', 'Serenity', 'Decisiveness' and 'Vigour'. These are qualities that most of the surveyed employers found important for the recruitment and professional development of their employees (Brandenburg et al. 2016, p. 14). This is an approach to employability that hence endorses our view that this faculty emerges from an imaginative negotiation between future employee and employer. In the case of the Erasmus Impact Study, the emergence of employability is demonstrated in a range of abstract values among students and the identification of more concrete traits from employers, notably an 'Ability to Adapt and Act in New Situations', 'Analytical and Problem-Solving Skills', 'Communication Skills', 'Planning and Organisational Skills' and 'Team-Working Skills' (Brandenburg et al. 2016, p. 15).

While policymakers may be most interested in the results emerging from the analysis, the value of the Erasmus Impact Study for researchers is in recognising the multi-faceted nature of estimating employability; in this case, emphasising the inputs from students *and* employers. We should not however neglect the intermediary role played by educators and trainers. With Erasmus, there is the specific goal of cognisance of international trajectories for future work, training and study, including circulation between different EU member states. Using terms borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., Bourdieu 1990), this idea has been discussed in relation to the spatial movement of undergraduates and the process through which they become able to enter a global field of work and study opportunities (Cairns et al. 2013). In helping this process happen, the learning institution can fulfil a function that supplements formal teaching through maintaining a mobility favouring habitus, including the provision of practical information about how to move and where to

go in order to find the most appropriate opportunities. This can extend to providing access to individuals with prior mobility experience to act as role models, making students aware of what is required of them should they be seeking work abroad, providing insight into issues such as lifestyles, values, dispositions and expectations of everyday life in other countries.[3]

Following on from this position, for Erasmus, the quality of the educational institution and of the learning exercise matters a great deal. This is particularly true when an institution is able to demonstrate the value of acquiring an international perspective on work to students seeking to become more employable. Just as family members and friends are able to show how moving abroad opens-up access to a better range and sometimes a better quality of opportunities, institutions that host Erasmus students can give incomers the chance to develop a more global, or at least a more European, outlook. Equally important is the experience of living and studying alongside students from other European countries and interacting with people from the host community in projects and placements. While it is tempting to dismiss international conviviality as little more than having fun, this can in fact be a very effective means of learning about the reality of life in other countries, in addition to making contacts with people who may help support subsequent episodes of international work and study (Feyen and Krzaklewska 2013).

In defining pathways to employability, we can therefore see that Erasmus occupies a very promising and perhaps under-appreciated position, with the additional dimension of providing an entrée to various forms of intra-European circulation including work placements, internships and actual jobs (Cairns et al. 2017). Employability hence becomes conjoined with internationalization in the programme, with exchange visits representing a means of opening-up spatial horizons. Such a position also places emphasis on finding international employers and linking them with internationally employable graduates. This means that skills and credentials must be internationally transferable, explaining the existence of ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) within Erasmus (European Commission 2015), and the emphasis on capacities such as foreign language proficiency. Such internationality makes employability via Erasmus arguably more valuable, or at least valu-

able in a different manner to nationally-grounded skills, although this property may be difficult to acquire due to the spatial complexity of the relationships involved.

Theorising Employability

As noted at the outset of this chapter, the word 'employability' is extensively used in discussion of education and training systems, and in works published by the EU pertaining to Erasmus. However, as we also revealed, there is no coherent or shared idea as to what the term signifies beyond describing certain expectations of how the employability enhancement process should function. The lack of a theoretical grounding for 'employability' has led to an ad hoc approach in regard to supporting this process among policymakers and stakeholders in the education and training fields. In this section of our discussion, we will try to move beyond a position where employability is defined somewhat retrospectively, describing what has happened within education and training, and move towards a more prospective approach that can help us provide clarity for initiating the process of enhancing employability in future policy and practice. A first step is to recognize employability as a process that takes place during a learning experience, Erasmus or otherwise, rather than focusing on outcomes emerging from education and training stages that have been completed. This means looking at employability at a more abstract level than is usual in discussion of education and training systems at European level, and considering the idea that employability can be understood as a reflexive learning process.

Taking a reflexive approach to employability in Erasmus involves acknowledging the internal processes that take place during stays abroad rather than looking for signs of anticipated outcomes at the end of exchanges; a departure from the theoretical positions taken in prior studies of Erasmus. For example, the researchers who designed the previously cited Erasmus Impact Study took what was basically a psychological approach to employability, focused on finding evidence of the emergence of attitudinal indicators relating to orientations towards work and qualities associated with internationalization, supported by the use of statisti-

cal analysis. This is a good way of making international employability quantifiable for policymakers and stakeholders, who can observe the extent to which these aspects of employability have been enhanced among students who have completed Erasmus, with additional reference to the extent to which such attributes are consistent with what employers are looking for in employees. But in taking this approach we learn less about *how* employability was enhanced during an Erasmus exchange, not to mention aspects of employability that do not fit the list of personality traits previously detailed. Also missing is observation of the interaction between different parties in the employability equation, especially the role played by international peer groups, although arguably this issue could be explored via focus groups.

A reflexive approach to international employability recognises both the internal process of change and the social interactions that take place between and within peer groups. What happens amid a cohort of Erasmus students during exchanges, work placements and voluntary activities undertaken contemporaneously matters to seeking an understanding of how to support internationalized employability. Erasmus is not simply a case of being immersed in another country or a different community in isolation. A mental repositioning of oneself and one's aspirations is taking place through 'working' with educators, trainers, international peers and people within the host community.

If the idea is to move away from work and study trajectories defined by a national or regional grounding and onto a global plane, then an external point of reference is required in order to endorse ideas that show the correct way to do it. This process is not just about learning a foreign language and becoming more aware of business opportunities abroad but also understanding the nuances and idioms of other countries, and becoming acquainted with how people actually behave, and work, in other cultures. But it is not only a mental process that is initiated. There are tangible elements that underpin this aspirational shift: making actual contact with people in and from a range of different countries, some of whom may come to play an instrumental role in subsequent mobility exercises and cross-border transactions.

Reflexivity during Erasmus, or other forms of educational exchange for that matter, provides a representation of the idea that there is a need

to open-up minds during stays abroad, with specific emphasis on widening the spatial parameters of ambitions. However, the exchange visit itself is just the beginning of a process that may lead an individual to work in foreign places and meaningfully interact with people from a geographically diverse range of locales in their subsequent careers. The practice of reflexive mobility, when learnt effectively, can potentially extend throughout the rest of the life course; not just during education, training and the early stages of a career but until retirement. And that students and trainees are concurrently undergoing equivalent processes during exchange visits makes international employability a shared experience. This is the potential contribution of Erasmus to the establishment of a culture of free movement within the EU: making the European youth population, or certain select members of the European youth population, better able to envisage future spatial circulation in their lives (see Chap. 8).

Reflexive Mobility?

As we noted in one of our previous books, the concept of reflexivity was used extensively by a previous generation of sociologists in an attempt to make sense of how people construct their identities in late modern societies (Cairns et al. 2017, p. 19; see also Cairns 2014). Popular theorists such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck adapted the concept to help explain how lifestyle choices were made in late modern societies under the rubric of 'reflexive modernization' (e.g., Giddens 1991; Beck et al. 1994). This became a prominent and influential perspective, attempting to explain how certain individuals map and plan their lives through the contemplation of different possibilities.[4]

Our approach is markedly different in regard to context, with our main concern being learning environments with an international dimension in the present day. Erasmus constitutes one specific habitus which provides a site for the emergence of a form of reflexivity tied to mobility. This is because it is a learning environment populated by people who are practicing mobility, who are also becoming aware of future applications of intra-European circulation in their professional careers and personal lives. Within this context, there is an opportunity for

intertwined intercultural exchange and personal development that may extend to an expansion of professional aptitudes. Such a process, what we might term a form of internationalised employability, is however dependent on the individual receiving validation from international peers, and perhaps also educators and (more indirectly) employers, with additional social support from agencies such as the Erasmus Student Network (see Chap. 5). A sense of employability thus emerges from the learning experience during the course of an exchange visit, with an enhanced state of job readiness recognised by these actors, who essentially perform the function of validation mechanism. This explains why reflexive learning is always a collective experience, and underlines the importance of undertaking Erasmus exchanges and participating in mobility projects alongside other learners undergoing the same process.

Furthermore, there is another reflexive process enabled by the collective framework of the programme. Although this is sometimes discussed in terms of Europeanization or the spreading of European values, it would be more accurate to say that Erasmus encourages a cohort effect based on shared mobility experience to emerge. Erasmus cannot 'make' Europeans or define a youth generation in terms of specific European values but it can bring certain like-minded people together, who can then mutually re-enforce their shared liking of Europe. The convivial nature of exchanges thereby enables cosmopolitan identities to take a more concrete form, with exchange students enhancing their international employability inter-dependently. Whether by accident or design, the collective nature of Erasmus exchanges is a very clever piece of mobile learning.

A less tangible, but no less important attribute concerns acquiring an element of self-confidence about the future; it is almost as if a new sense of destiny is created. While this may be mistaken for arrogance, a degree of optimism is always required to see through the practice of reflexivity, extending to self-rationalization when initial failure is encountered. Unsuccessful attempts need to be mentally re-branded as challenges to be overcome, and when they are overcome, redefined as success. Lessons are thereby learnt through hardship as part of a trial and error philosophy, a process sometimes conceptualised in terms of resilience. It is not simply

a change in attitude that is needed but a determined effort to ensure a more profound transformation takes place. And this process takes place during a sustained period, with the typical undergraduate exchange lasting between three and twelve months, with its impact felt for many subsequent years.

Bringing this part of our discussion to a close, we can (re)define international employability in Erasmus as a form of reflexivity due to the platform being a site for internal and peer referential learning. In our research context, it is practiced during tertiary education or within mobility projects by students, trainees and volunteers during foreign exchange visits. In principle, an international learner becomes more aware of what is required in order to succeed abroad, with one reference group being fellow exchangees. In practice, to be internationally employable means having a better awareness of the possibilities of working abroad and working with people from abroad. There is hence a kind of circularity in mobile learning related to the physical act of living outside a country of origin tied to a mental repositioning process taking place at the same time.

Employability in Practice

In the final section of this chapter, we will discuss examples of how employability is being encouraged in different aspects of Erasmus, essentially providing a preview of what is to come in the later chapters of the book as well as an illustration of the employability learning process previously discussed, focusing on universities and non-formal learning contexts respectively. In the first case, we will consider the views of educators, including individuals involved in the management of undergraduate mobility, moving on to look at mobility projects taking place as part of actions previously associated with the EU funded *Youth in Action* initiative but now integrated into Erasmus+. While this selection may seem somewhat ad hoc, we wish to demonstrate that a desire to enhance employability is transversal in the programme.

Undergraduate Employability

To begin, we will look at what is to most people the most familiar aspect of the programme: undergraduate exchanges. This is a form of what the EU codifies as 'credit mobility' as students receive ECTS recognition for the work they undertake during stays abroad (European Commission 2015, p. 8), as part of Erasmus+ Key Action 1: *The Mobility of Individuals*, which covers the 'mobility of learners and staff' (European Commission 2017, p. 11). The stated aims of this type of circulation include a desire to 'improve the level of key competences and skills, with particular regard to their relevance for the labour market and their contribution to a cohesive society,' with additional reference to the internationalization of tertiary education institutions and co-operation between international partners (European Commission 2017, pp. 26–29).

Policy discourse on Erasmus is less forthcoming about how employability aims are to be put into practice. There is mention of a need to improve the quality of teaching and learning of languages, but we need to bear in mind that most Erasmus participants are not language students. Improving fluency is a bonus dimension of an exchange visit rather than the main purpose. We cannot therefore define international employability in Erasmus as being only linguistic. Neither do people generally enter the labour market more readily solely on the basis of having improved their fluency in French, German or Italian. The 'definition' of employability implied within undergraduate exchanges hence reflects the situation identified earlier in this chapter, with policies lacking a clear and comprehensive understanding of what exactly is required.

In regard to what is happening within the undergraduate exchange programme, Chap. 4 will take a look at the management of incoming and outgoing mobility using material gathered from a recently completed project conducted in Portugal. Significantly, discussion of the link between Erasmus and employment was present in the interviews conducted with university staff members. For example, the following extract is taken from an interview conducted with the Head of International Relations at one of Portugal's largest private universities, explaining how her institution makes links with the workplace:

[…] we have training, and we give support at international level for employment. Then we have one office, which is in charge for training in employment at national level, then we have another one that is in charge for the entrepreneurship projects. To support our own students and to regulate, to create their own businesses. And then we have since last year, a new office that is the result of the new law for international students' recruitment in Portugal. So we have the new office, that is, the admissions office.

The university is therefore acting as a point of reference and font of information in regard to employment, with emphasis on the international dimension of work. It is also interesting that reference is made to giving support to entrepreneurship, and that the emphasis is very much on entering the field of business. We can therefore deduce that *certain* practical aspects of employability are being encouraged via this office, with the most prominent example being specific aspects of developing a business career. However the most important finding from the interviews was the high degree of pragmatism in regard to meeting the policy goal of enhancing employability through Erasmus. Mobilizing the 'employability' signifier in project applications is viewed as an effective way of accessing additional funds from the National Erasmus Agency, an important matter where shortfalls are being experienced due to university budget cuts. This situation is explained by the mobility coordinator of one of Portugal's most prestigious public universities:

I think some months ago, that Erasmus had cuts, budget cuts. Severe budget cuts. The university, itself. If we are talking only about one project, the traditional [undergraduate] one let's say for Europe, then I would say that our budget was cut. But then we submitted a project in consortia with other universities in Portugal, focused on employability. To get more traineeships, more scholarships for our students that want to go for placements. And also for teachers and for officers that work in the international office or in other areas in the university.

If we were being cynical, we could argue that 'employability' discourse is being used to protect the employment of Erasmus officers rather than improve the labour market chances of undergraduates, but this practice

is no different from how other agencies within the Youth Sector operate. Securing funding is the bottom line. We therefore need to be realistic and acknowledge the importance of Erasmus as a funding stream for universities and, as we shall explore later in this book, a font of support for a range of stakeholders involved in the organisation of mobility-related projects (see Chaps. 7 and 8).

Discussing this matter further with incoming and outgoing mobility officers, the enhancement of employability among students was related by a colleague of the above interviewee to the amorphous area of 'soft skills.' Specific reference was made to an aspect of employability we have already noted, enhanced language skills, with level of fluency tested before and after an exchange visit via on-line evaluations. The reason for doing so was specifically related to what employers are looking for in new recruits:

> It's a component that employers value more, so [...] a mobile student, is said to have more employability opportunities. Has more potential to be employed in the future. So all these combine together, I don't know if this makes sense, but it's our perspective.

It is less clear how international relations departments obtain their information regarding employers' expectations. It may be that the link between Erasmus students and employment is not being made as firmly as it might be, and that decisions are taken without reference to robust evidence on employability enhanced by mobility. If reflexive learning practices are indeed taking place, they also need to be measured through comprehensive evaluation rather than short online questionnaires. What this situation means is that is a lot of 'good work' taking place within Erasmus frameworks may be passing undocumented and unrecognized, somewhat negating the positive impact exchange visits can make on students' lives.

'Youth in Action' Employability

Looking at employability elsewhere in Erasmus, reference is made to this property in respect to other aspects of the programme. As we will come

to discuss in Chap. 7, initiatives that previously formed part of the *Youth in Action* programme (2007–2013) are now under the Erasmus+ umbrella. The understanding of employability here is however somewhat vague. For example, in its programme guide, employability was conceptualised in *Youth in Action* somewhat descriptively as something pertaining to 'creating more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market' (European Commission 2012). The onus was therefore on encouraging inclusive access to labour markets as opposed to engaging in a process of skills enhancement and capacity building.

Readers already familiar with the *Youth in Action* programme will know that it integrated a broad range of mobility projects, typically orientated around the Erasmus core themes of interculturality and employability, expressed in terms of creating opportunities for young people to acquire competences. Also emphasised was the instrumental use of non-formal and informal learning with a European or international dimension. The former refers to learning situated outside the formal educational curricula while the latter relates to activities young people undertake on a voluntary basis that aim to foster personal, social and professional development. The *Youth in Action* programme guide also acknowledged a strong lifestyle dimension to informal learning, with activities integrating a leisure dimension, and these actions intended to be complementary to formal education, constituting an additional rather than a substitute for formal sites of learning (European Commission 2012, p. 6).

Due to factors such as the short duration of projects, the enhancement of employability is likely to be limited. It may be that these mobility projects provide opportunities to activate the convivial dimension of learning about work, thus providing a means of passing on values and understanding in respect to the workplace. Also emphasised are activities organised by the European Voluntary Service (EVS), involving unpaid participation in projects engaged with areas such as youth work, cultural activities, social care and environmental protection. The empirical material discussed in Chap. 7, taken from interviews with past participants, also stresses the civic value of such exchanges, although there are indications of employability being supported in the accounts of the respondents. The contribution of these projects is, to borrow a term from the previously cited *Youth in Action* programme guide, 'complementary', not

just in regard to formal education but also other sites for employability. It may be that they provide an orientation period or an opportunity to think differently about future directions. That mobility projects strongly emphasise the social dimension of Erasmus may also mean participants becoming more attuned towards the idea of working in spheres that make a positive contribution to society. Therefore, taken in isolation, spending two weeks abroad in a project or several months abroad as a volunteer might not amount to much in regard to becoming job-ready, but being within a contemplative space, in this case a structured but non-formal learning environment, might open-up the possibility of insights into future career directions emerging.

Conclusions

In reaching a conclusion, the nagging suspicion exists that employability, specifically international employability, as supported by the Erasmus programme is not being adequately treated in the current range of mobility actions, one reason being a reluctance to appreciate what employability means in theory and in practice. What we have argued is that while the term is over-used, its realization is under-developed, often without much thought about what actually needs to take place in order to enhance the employability of learners. This enhancement process is a complicated and delicate matter, requiring a great deal of considered input from potential employees and employers, mediated by the contributions of educators and trainers and dependent on effective policymaking in regard to regulating the labour market. To fully appreciate employability and how it is made, we must begin to look at the contributions of all these parties and the process of bringing them together for the mutual benefit of individuals and societies.

While taking a modest view of international employability, equating it with a measurable increase in foreign language capacity, may make sense from an evaluation point of view, such a limited approach can only yield limited results. More emphasis needs to be placed on strengthening the relationship between the (potential) employee and employers. In the two examples we cited in the closing part of the discussion, relating to employ-

ability in undergraduate exchanges and *Youth in Action* mobility projects, we also acknowledge the role of educators and trainers, many of whom may need more guidance, as well as the support of the European institutions. What Erasmus does seem to do well is create opportunities for international conviviality, which may help spread knowledge about working internationally. We can therefore see some value in what is currently taking place, in both formal and informal learning, about both of which we shall learn more in the proceeding chapters.

Notes

1. This position is ably demonstrated by the online Cambridge dictionary which boldly declares that 'employability' is 'the skills and abilities that allow you to be employed,' without elaboration. See http://dictionary. cambridge.org/dictionary/english/employability
2. The Erasmus Programme Guide does not actually provide a definition but recognises that employability involves making links between graduates and the labour market (European Commission 2017, p. 150).
3. In practice, research with students planning to undertake outward mobility for work and study reveals that other environs such as peer and family networks may actually function more efficaciously as mobility habitus, particularly were parents or siblings have prior experience of living in different countries (Cairns et al. 2013).
4. Contemporaneously, other reflexivity theorists, including Margaret Archer (2008, 2012), emphasized the interplay between structure and agency and the idea that there is an 'internal conversation' taking place that validates and contextualizes choices.

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3

The Erasmus Impetus

In previous publications, we have defined international conviviality as a driver of participation among students, with the communal nature of the Erasmus being one of the reasons for the programme's longevity (Feyen and Krzaklewska 2013; Cairns et al. 2017). In this part of our discussion, we develop this theme further and explore motives for participation from the standpoint of young people wishing to engage with the programme. Even acknowledging the fact that Erasmus is a product of European Union policymaking, a topic of discussion throughout this book, the programme itself would not have continued to function if there had been an insufficient level of interest from students. Their views are therefore placed at the centre of our discussion for the duration of the chapter.

Motivations for undergraduates to enrol in exchanges can of course be linked to class background, mobility being seen as a particularly valid practice by the privileged (Andreotti et al. 2013), more specifically as a kind of institutionally organised gap year for youth (Vogt 2018). Students may also feel the pressure to follow an internationalization logic that prevails within universities (see also Brooks and Waters 2011). But the idea of moving while studying is also very much present in personal imaginings of the future: for example, a recent research project using Italian data

investigated forms of mobility that have become 'anticipated', including the wish to move abroad though Erasmus (Cuzzocrea and Mandich 2016). The findings of this study suggest that mobility is at times seen as an entry ticket to bypassing uncertainty and difficulties at home, providing what are in effect alternative life chances. Even more generally, a willingness to be mobile is portrayed as an important trait of cosmopolitan, postmodern youth.

The reasons for moving abroad thus become related to the desire to have a different kind of life: doing something on the outside that leads to biographical change on the inside. If we take this proposition seriously, it becomes easy to see the appeal of the Erasmus programme, something that has led us in the past to focus on the study of how 'mobility intentions' emerge, with young people asked to identify how to leave and where they think they will move (e.g. Cairns and Smyth 2011). The possibility of Erasmus, as opposed to individuals, fulfilling this transformative function leads us to rethink some of the basic assumptions prevalent in youth mobility literature, including the idea of the decision to move abroad being a product of weighing up push and pull factors. Traditionally, the former relate to prevailing conditions in the sending society, typically adverse social and/or economic conditions that act as constraints on personal and professional development. In contrast, pull factors refer to the attractiveness of the other place, again, with specific emphasis on social and economic factors. Within the youth phase, the mobility decision-making process is less explicitly oriented around issues such as salary levels or welfare conditions, but rather more lifestyle focused, albeit with recognition of the importance of enhancing employability (see Chap. 2). We can therefore deduce that deciding to participate in Erasmus might be the product of feeling constrained at home in terms of possibilities within a current educational habitus and the prospect of finding space in which to reflect and re-orientate oneself towards different goals in another country.

Putting this into simpler terms, what we will explore in this chapter is the impetus to participate in Erasmus, revisiting some established ideas from relevant literature, refreshed through the use of material from two different empirical sources. Firstly, we make use of written motivation statements produced by candidates for the programme in an Italian university. This material is used as naturally occurring data to investigate

what sort of justifications students believe evaluators expect them to make, thus making themselves into a mirror for established institutional discourses. Secondly, we have conducted interviews with young people who have recently completed Erasmus exchanges, with our analysis focused on how their motivations changed as a result of the experience. Using this material, we are able to illustrate the Erasmus impetus as it exists among prospective Erasmus students and what happens to this desire during a stay abroad, providing what we hope will be an original perspective on this issue.

Push and Pull Factors in Written Motivations

Our empirical material enables us to compare and contrast how the logic of employability within Erasmus is framed among different people and at different times. As a first step, we will analyse ideas from the written motivation statements. This material was gathered at a university in Sardinia, Italy, in a university that has long-standing participation in Erasmus. In regard to 'motivations', we are basically referring to the statements provided by Erasmus applicants to the sending institution. The nature of this material, as written discourse, is different to that of interview transcripts, in that candidates have an opportunity to organize and edit their justifications, a process that involves pragmatic considerations being incorporated so that a place may be more readily obtained. There is hence a kind of 'natural artificiality' inherent in this material that tells us as much about what applicants perceive the programme is looking for as it does about their personal motivations.[1]

That this material is drawn from the application process means that this is a form of naturally occurring data, albeit non-representative in the sense that we are focusing on one case study institution and can only use what the university has permitted us to analyse. What we do have are 300 motivation statements as inserted into the Erasmus application form by students between 2015 and 2017. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students were included from a variety of degree programmes at the university. These 300 statements were randomly selected out of a larger sample of approximately 500 cases. Permission to consult and use the

material for this book was obtained from the university, although the statements did not contain names or biographical details of the student applicants.

What this material constitutes is a means to obtain an original perspective on motivation to participate in the programme, with analysis aimed at identifying key ideas mobilised in the application procedure. This allows us to examine students' initial perceptions of Erasmus and how a dialogue is initiated between potential participants and an institution. Additionally, we can view the procedure as an introduction to the world of applying to European institutions for money, a procedure that may be repeated many times subsequently depending upon later education and career path choices. We therefore have the chance to look at first formal experiences of accessing European grant funding, a procedure which is in itself part of the socialisation into competitive education systems and international labour markets.

Push Factors

As a means of introduction, we can illustrate some of the main themes emerging from the students' statements. Firstly, in looking at 'push factors', we have a very strong endorsement of cultural factors, specifically the idea that other places have something different to offer compared to the home region; for example:

> I'd like, in the first place, to learn to relate to other cultures given the difficulty that one has here in Sardinia. Living in a relatively small island, there is not enough exchange of new ideas.

We can see here a direct reference to the 'small' nature of Sardinia. This theme is expounded upon in another statement which makes specific reference to the lack of 'space' for young people:

> I live in a country which leaves increasingly less space for young people, which makes it hard to see a worthwhile perspective of what our future will be. I do not want to be content with Italy, despite how beautiful it is. The

world is certainly too big to be able to know it all, but step-by-step, one can broaden and improve his or her views, and one can only do this by travelling, exploring and being thirsty for knowledge.

It is important to note that this is not a negative typification of the departure point. On the contrary, Sardinia is regarded as 'beautiful'. What is sought is something different, or something extra, rather than an escape being narrated in terms of negative experience. Motivations can also be multiple, as demonstrated in the following account:

> The motivations which push me to participate in the Erasmus experience are several and all tied to the end of making myself a person who is increasingly aware and equipped with a mental mind-set broader than what an island can give. I am a very curious girl, I love my land, Sardinia, but I am also convinced that in order to be able to appreciate that, and judge, I must be able to confront it with different cultures that allows me to develop a major critical spirit.

This final statement underlines the need for contrast in these young people's lives. We might therefore argue that what can be gained is a better appreciation of one's home rather than, or as well as, an understanding of other places, enabled by a shift in geographical location.

Pull Factors

In looking at the factors that attract these young people abroad, professional concerns are very prominent. For example:

> I'd like to enrich my CV with an experience before being inserted into the world of work. I believe Erasmus changes a bit your life and opens your mind to new countries. I want to be given this possibility because 2017–2018 will be my last academic year before graduation.

This account is consistent with some of the employability themes we looked at in the previous chapter, and foreshadows a theme to be explored in Chap. 5 of this book, namely the idea that Erasmus offers soon-to-be-

employed young people a kind of moratorium experience. It is therefore interesting to observe that while a desire to leave Sardinia can be expressed in terms of cultural limitations, moving abroad is associated with enhancing work readiness. Several references were also made to the importance of the English language in this process:

> I would like to participate to this experience in order to improve my English language fluency, to have the possibility to confront myself with a culture different from my own, to understand, being on the spot, see how various juridical systems work differently when applied in our country.

Finally, we also need to bear in mind that there are certain academic pathways that more or less require mobility episodes to take place, or where a major benefit can be made from a stay abroad:

> I have decided to participate in this experience because I would like to continue my studies in a foreign country, considering that the course in Biomedical Engineering in [city] does not offer a postgraduate degree. Studying abroad is a great opportunity which must be taken seriously and that allows personal and professional growth. This is accompanied with a direct confrontation with a new culture and a new language.

This situation relates specifically to graduates seeking postgraduate opportunities not present in home universities. We can therefore see that the mobility impetus changes as an educational trajectory progresses, with additional and perhaps more complex considerations emerging at later stages.

Motivations: Recurring Themes

What we are basically highlighting here is that there are different motivations. Many of these we already know about through reading Erasmus literature. While there are different themes in this research field, one recurring idea is concerned with the idea that Erasmus students possess the ability to help engineer a new European ethos, one that is grounded in civic consciousness (e.g. Papatsiba 2006). The experience of mobility

is viewed as a specific aspect of youth citizenship, including the fact that they do not locate themselves on either side of a geographical boundary, constituting a kind of 'unicum' (Ieracitano 2015, p. 110).

This conceptualization is similar to the idea that what we are witnessing is the construction of 'the new mobile European' (Recchi 2013). A question raised by this literature concerns the necessity of mobility in order to become a European citizen, in a context were mobile Europeans are assumed to be the 'champions' of citizenship (Recchi 2013, p. 12). This can lead researchers to ask just how pro-European can Erasmus students become, or if they were already staunchly pro-European before participating in the programme, if they are able to 'lubricate' the European labour market through obviating European borders, being ready and available for whatever opportunities may arise (Wilson 2011). This ideal is placed into a framework emphasising attention on civic duties (Mitchell 2012), with the assumption that there should be a closer correlation between 'European' and 'the EU' (Wilson 2011, p. 1117).

In explaining why these academic tropes have emerged, it may be that educated young people, being in a state of status flux, are seen a potential ambassadors for an ideal type of European identity by certain theorists. As such, the European institutions might also think that they can take advantage of the fact that students are in a 'natural' state of identity reformulation. We cannot however assume that learners are necessarily interested in this role, particularly should they be shown to be more concerned with the process of discovering themselves rather than their continent. Events of recent years, especially the spectre of Brexit, have also somewhat dented prospects for European unity, implying that dis-unity and separation may be the future rather than more integration between EU member states.

Rather than concern with European identities, what we have actually found emerging in the motivation statements is a recapitulation of what are now classic themes in student mobility literature: personal development, academic progress, linguistic development and cultural exploration (see Maiworm and Teichler 1997; Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Krzaklewska 2008). Looking at one of these issues, improving foreign language fluency, we find copious numbers of students seeking to use Erasmus mobility for this end.

> I would like to participate because I believe it is a big occasion to get to know new places, new people, new cultures, and a new language above all else. I think it is a great starting point for personal growth far away from home. I believe that all this could help me to be not only a better graduate and [better] professional, but also a better person.

It is interesting that the development of this faculty is linked to personal development and all-round self-fulfilment, as well as professional concerns. We would therefore argue against a separation of these two faculties. This is also expressed in terms of independence and becoming more mature:

> My fundamental aim is to improve the language, certainly thanks to an immersion in the host country I have the possibility to learn it more quickly. No doubt Erasmus will help me to win the friendship of people from all over the world and develop new and diverse cultural skills. Thanks to this experience I will have the opportunity to put myself at stake, and really understand how much I am worth. This surely will make me more mature and more independent. This is because of having to go alone to a foreign country: far away from parents and usual friends one is compelled to learn and overcome obstacles on one's own.

In summarizing this debate, we would argue for a need to ground our understanding of Erasmus in fundamentally human terms, as opposed to mirroring EU policy discourse or popular academic research tropes. Ideas of independence, autonomy and maturity are at the core of these justifications for seeking Erasmus mobility, with a development of one's own capabilities associated with the construction of an ability to explore the wider world rather than making a tangible contribution to strengthening EU institutions or bringing to life a shared European identity.

Employability and the Erasmus Impetus

In looking at employability as a normative category, Garsten and Jacobsson (2004, pp. 276–277) have discussed what is required for such a category to function after being 'established, normalised and internalised'. This involves both education and training, and for the unemployed, labour

market activation. And as we also noted in the previous chapter, policy agendas need to focus on enhancing existing capacities, since practically all people possess a work aptitudes of some sort, also taking into account subjective factors such as having the right attitude and how people present themselves to employers. It is also clear that across Europe, national education systems wish to encourage the right attitude towards work, with mobility programmes forming one means of doing this.[2]

'Employability' itself has become something of an educationalists mantra, although not necessarily accompanied by a grounding in the complexities of the process, and we can detect some signs of this discourse having been taken on board by Erasmus applicants. But what is also clear is that these young people have little or no coherent idea about what an employability enhancement process entails. Take the following example:

> What pushes me to be wanting to do this experience is fundamentally the will to demonstrate to myself and to others that I can handle life all by myself, even in a place far away from home, outside of my comfort zone. I am sure that this adventure will enrich me in everything, in the human experiences as well as in the study ones. Surely it is an important decision which, useless to deny, scares me a bit. Despite this, I know that applying is the right choice for what concerns my education as a Law student, as a European citizen, and, undoubtedly, as a person.

While there is nothing particular alarming about this statement, it is characterized by vagueness, lacking grounding in specific decisions or measures to be taken. What we have instead are familiar ideas such as 'comfort zone' and 'human experiences'. In other words, this is a very formulaic stating of an objective that actually requires innovative planning and reflection to be achieved. What is more candid is the acceptance of insecurities and weakness. Such a position is however inconsistent with how employability ought to be represented, since young people are meant to demonstrate confidence and assurance to employers.

Reflecting on this approach, it becomes apparant that projecting a degree of honesty may be seen as important, in defining the starting position for improvements in personal and professional circumstances to take place, although this may not necessarily be useful in the process of

enhancing employability. We can also observe this approach in the motivation statements of those who have already participated in Erasmus learning processes:

> Having already had a period of Erasmus mobility, I can say I have made the best choice of my life. It is an experience that makes you grow a lot, both from the academic standpoint, because it puts you in contact with different methodologies, and from the human point of view given that one finds oneself having to deal on his or her own for everything. Even now, one month after my first experience, I am continuing to learn, and this makes me even more conscious of the fact that there is always something new awaiting us. And this motivates me to want more, because knowledge is an advantage, and I want to be advantaged.

The Erasmus student is therefore a work-in-progress. Those who have had prior Erasmus experience find themselves seeking more as the task of self-actualization is incomplete. While this might be viewed as a justification for the current Erasmus+ approach of having mobility opportunities at different stages of education and training trajectories, there is also a risk that the programme creates incomplete subjects: people who have taken on board some aspects of employability, or interculturality for that matter, but not enough to completely re-orient their careers in a more spatially diverse direction.

Motivations Revisited: A Retrospective Viewpoint

The material on written motivation is an interesting source for what students will write in order to meet official approval. Yet, that these motivations are produced within an institutional setting means that they may not be revealing the 'real' reasons for wanting to participate in the programme; this might also explain the vague or even elusive quality of some of the ideas we have brought to light. To explore this matter further, the second part of this chapter will analyse interview material that also focused on motivations, conducted with students who have already com-

pleted their exchanges and are now at a point where they are deciding what to do next with their completed, or very soon to be complete, degree. In doing so, we can take a retrospective view of motivations and consider the extent to which it was possible to realize aspirations within a framework of institutional exchange, including the efficacy of formal and informal learning processes.

The interviews were conducted during summer 2017 in a regional university in Germany, partly in person and partly via skype. These students, found at an Erasmus student day, were both former Erasmus students and prospective candidates. Personal contact was followed by an invitation to be interviewed via email, sent via the international office of the university. Seven students were interviewed via this process. This method does not enable the construction of a representative sample, meaning that we have to take into account potential 'biases', such as the fact that attending a student day could in itself be viewed as a sign of pre-existing interest in the programme. We also need to consider that these students are based in a country that is geographically central in Europe, which provides a 'natural' advantage for mobility exercises, something that contemporaries in outlying regions do not enjoy. That German students have a strong adherence to Erasmus mobility is also clear from looking at published statistics (see Chap. 1), although the university itself hosts many students from rural areas, where the potential for intercultural encounters may be limited.

Changing Motivations?

Our initial impression of the motivations of the interviewed students is that a much greater degree of strategic planning is observable compared to the positions revealed in the motivation statements. While this may be due to a shift in spatial location, from Italy to Germany, it might also be that the popularity of student mobility in the latter country has led to its practice becoming somewhat taken for granted. Erasmus has, for want of a better word, become mundane. One reason for this relates to prior experience of mobility especially for those who have lived within a border community, where living across borders is a familiar practice. This is

demonstrated in the case of Hans, a German Erasmus student with plans to study in Hungary:

> I was born in Aachen, close to the border between The Netherlands and Belgium, so maybe this is also one reason why I was abroad, I was just growing up next to the border, so going abroad, and it's just something absolutely typical to me. I'm very familiar with going abroad because many friends of mine lived next to the border and I grew up in a little town […] directly beside the border with The Netherlands, with one very famous street where the left hand side is Germany and the right is in The Netherlands. So of course some friends lived on the right side, some other friends on the left side, so it was just totally familiar that you go abroad.

Going abroad therefore signifies familiarity rather than dislocation due to the close proximity of other countries. In regard to what happens to motivations for Erasmus among mobility habituated students, it seems that they become less concerned about developing new skills or enhancing employability and more oriented around personal issues. For example, one female interviewee had a rationale for doing Erasmus in Poland that was less about developing intercultural skills and more about satisfying her own interests.

> It was not very pragmatic, it was really not much about liking the city or something, because we [the interviewee and a long-time friend] both have never been to Poland before, so it was really pretty much all the same to us, we didn't know any other cities, we didn't really know any history or culture, anything of Poland, but we really felt like getting to know something new and because of my background in Luxembourg I already knew a lot of […] France, I have been to Spain several times, so I have been to a lot of places in Western Europe […]

What seems to (re)define Erasmus motivation is prior experience of mobility, including a personal history of intra-European migration. That this student undertakes mobility with a friend also has implications for engagement with the host society, and other exchange students, a point she discussed extensively in the interview. The programme is thus used differently for those who already know how to practice mobility and

those who are moving abroad for the first time, a theme we will develop in Chaps. 5 and 6. Individually driven and collectively practiced mobility have different meanings. Suffice to say, an exchange visit made by an experienced traveller risks becoming inherently touristic or even an exercise in narcissism, particularly when shared with a close friend or partner, totally losing sight of employability and interculturality due to an extensive focus on personal exploration.

Another factor that seems to change orientations towards exchange visits relates to incoming students to Germany from countries of origin where Erasmus is relatively novel. This is demonstrated by Mira from Serbia, who also holds a managerial position in a student international organisation. She relates how this prior involvement helped her throughout the whole Erasmus experience:

> I always say that [the association] helped me get the Erasmus because in Serbia Erasmus is very competitive, so only the top students can get it, which was the case of the generation of people that went to [my] university […]. So, it was only the ones who were very good students, plus they had to have some extracurricular activities, some very impressive ones, so it […] helped me to come up with a very nice application and also help me with every other aspect, because I was in contact with the Erasmus students, I know what they look for, what they feel, what they would like to improve or not, so basically I knew, for example, how to take the best advantage of Erasmus. So I didn't waste any time, I knew it was also the time for me to get into a different education system, so what I did, because I had already passed all the exams at my university, so I actually didn't need that many credits, I took some classes that I couldn't take anywhere in Serbia, so I took three classes that don't exist in my country, and that's from like the educational part. For my personal part I tried to have a very busy schedule, to travel almost every second week, sometimes almost every week and I also took the classes, so it would give me freedom, you know, to travel on Friday or on Monday, something like that.

Being in such a position clearly puts an exchange student under additional pressure to perform and set a good example, but also opens up the possibility of taking advantage of educational opportunities not present at home. In this way, we can see that there is more value in Erasmus for such students, in contrast to those from societies wherein exchange visits

have been routinized. Another source of inspiration that can provide a change of emphasis during an Erasmus visit is observation of the talents possessed by other people. Returning to the account of Hans, he explained how this can be inspirational:

> I met a lot of extremely high potential people, one person who is speaking five languages, planning a diplomatic career, with that CV you just have an open mouth, you just wonder how they did that in their lifetime, and this was something also very interesting to me because you just were floored […] by these people, and you know, this is what you did in your life and this is what they did their lives. […] in comparison to those you know, they are doing everything for their career, and this was something new to me, a personal thing that became clearer or nearer to me […] to the point that I decided to myself that I'm willing to do this and to be engaged in my career, but only to a certain point as […] I want to have a family, I want to have kids, or children, and to have a life full of quality in different aspects, and so these high engaged career people to me do not have that living quality.

We can therefore observe the value of a 'role model', in part as a source of inspiration but also as kind of warning. Crucial to this evaluation is the idea of what constitutes quality of life. Hans does not want to be an achiever at any cost. While on the one hand he rejects the idea that having a good life is associated with free time, making reference to his lack of interest in the 'partying and drinking culture' of Erasmus, he also values family life and doing things like taking a walk along the Danube.

Conclusion: Contrasting Motivations?

What we are trying to demonstrate in this chapter, but obviously not prove given that we do not have sufficient evidence, is diversity in motivations for undertaking Erasmus, with contrasts between nations and, perhaps, across regions within participating countries. A major differential appears to be pre-existing level of employability. The aspiring Italian students we looked at previously were not ready to start competing in the labour market in many cases, while the interviewees discussed above were quite close to being

job-ready, or at least better able to produce reflections about what is needed by the labour market, where there is a high level of competition, and how they cope with this demand. It is also noticeable that there is a contrast in attitudes towards the fact that Erasmus is funded by European taxpayers. The interviewees were focused on extracting the maximum amount of funds out of Erasmus for their own benefit while the candidates where trying to demonstrate what they could contribute to the programme.

This is not a criticism of these students, who are probably just demonstrating a realistic attitude, as well as conforming to the individualized, neo-liberal attitudes that prevail within many European societies. Seeing Erasmus as a revenue stream is in fact a common practice and something that we will observe in subsequent chapters of this book in regard to universities (Chap. 4) and civil society organizations (Chap. 8). It may also be that the rather florid approach of the Erasmus applicants is a reflection of not yet having being exposed to some of harsh realities of life, and having to re-position oneself as just one competitor among many seeking support from agencies such as the European Commission for the project of self-realisation. In any case, the distinction between 'career oriented' and 'experience oriented' Erasmus students, put forward by Krzaklewska (2008), probably deserves to be enriched by additional nuances and meanings given the changing nature of labour market challenges.

Looking back at the motivation statements there also seems to be a generic faith in the fact that the mobility experience will be beneficial, somehow, whereas the interviewees have more direct applications in mind. It may be the case that before an exchange takes place, it is imagined as kind of moratorium period prior to the start of full adulthood. This idea has been defined in Psychology literature as being a 'niche' in which a young person can find his or her place through self-experimentation (Erikson 1968). In this process, time-taking is conceptualized as something that allows young people who are not yet ready yet to assume 'an adult role' to delay doing so by 'provoking lightness' and 'playfulness' (Erikson 1968, pp. 157–185). In this phase, emphasis is put on spending time with friends, engaging in leisure and lifestyle pursuits (Brannen and Nilsen 2002, p. 520). Exchange visits can in theory be used as moratoria. However, the Erasmus 'format' we introduced in the previous two chapters intro-

duces personal and professional imperatives. Exchange students are thus put into a position wherein there is a danger of oscillating wildly between wanting to have the time of their lives and enhancing practical labour market readiness skills.

The interviewees who participated in this study, while sometimes advocating having a good time, and a time of discovery during the exchange, distance themselves from a hedonistic party culture often associated with Erasmus students, and are eager to discuss their own goals within the boundaries of the programme's framework. While this can be a bias of the sample, which as we said, was strongly self-selected in regard to engaging with people who actively wanted to talk to us about their opinions and experiences, the difficulty of meeting the aims of having a good time and becoming ready for work might explain the emphasis on foreign language learning, since this in some ways ticks both the conviviality and employability 'boxes'. Whether or not Erasmus actually creates moratoria during exchange visits is another matter. The benefit of conducting interviews with those who have completed Erasmus tell us something about what actually happened rather than what people think will take place. This is a theme that will be explored further in Chaps. 5 and 6, but for now we can say that students may become a lot less idealistic when confronted with challenges awaiting them in the labour market.

While a great deal of expectation exist in relation to the political and civic goals of the programme (see also Wilson 2011), our material shows that other dimensions of motivation, guided by individual interests, are also be important and arguably, conceptually more interesting, particularly when revealing links with the neoliberal logic that informs the employability focus of the European institutions; creating competition for jobs rather than creating jobs so as to minimize costs for employers. We can therefore see a kind of repositioning of the self through mobility, although not necessarily in a manner that will please European policy-makers concerned with having a more explicit recognition of European values and the addressing of social problems via Erasmus; perhaps they do not appreciate that individualized success is more of a European value than tolerance or civic conscientiousness. Young people, therefore, do not

go abroad via Erasmus on a whim, and neither do they necessarily create value for European societies in terms of communal activities and political participation.

Notes

1. One specific element that is important to underline here is the aforementioned pragmatism of the statements, namely the fact that this material is meant to convince a committee that the applicant is worthy of receiving funds.

2. For instance, university graduate career booklets can be considered a means for demonstrating the correct attitude. For an exploration of this theme in the UK and Italy, see Cuzzocrea (2009).

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4

Managing Erasmus

The Erasmus undergraduate exchange programme represents a high profile example of intra-European student mobility and a means of imaginatively uniting the European Union through tertiary education. While not the only mobility platform open to students, it is perhaps the most famous, having facilitated the exchange visits of literally millions of young Europeans since 1987 (see Chap. 1). As we might expect, it takes a considerable effort to sustain levels of circulation, a task that in practice involves the management of incoming and outgoing mobility at host institutions. This is, for the most part, a task undertaken by people employed in the International Relations departments of their universities, alongside academics from the faculties who deliver the actual teaching and mentoring. While significant in regard to the contribution made to Erasmus and other mobility platforms, the work of these individuals has, until now, passed largely unnoticed in the student mobility research field. In consequence, we know very little about the challenges entailed in maintaining the Erasmus platform and ensuring that exchanges are value-laden for participants in terms of their personal and professional development. This prominent oversight will be addressed in this chapter.

Our discussion draws on results from a recently completed research project on social inclusion in the Erasmus undergraduate exchange programme, with qualitative interviews conducted at eight tertiary education level institutions in Portugal.[1] These interviewees provide an often frank insight into how Erasmus functions from an organisation's perspective, giving us a very different take on the programme compared to perspectives based on statistical analysis (e.g., Kelo et al. 2006; de Wit et al. 2008; Teichler et al. 2011) or student perspectives (e.g. Murphy-Lejeune 2002), and indeed our own previous work on this topic (Feyen and Krzaklewska 2013; Cairns 2014). As such, we can complement the insights of the proceeding chapter, which explored students' motivations for participating in Erasmus, and also provide a foundation for the following two chapters which focus upon the student mobility experience.

The research findings discussed in this chapter include an elaboration of the processes through which undergraduate exchange visits are organised, encompassing financial governance within the programme and the means through which people cope with the pressure to maintain circulation levels so as to avoid losing funding from the Erasmus National Agency. In taking what has previously been termed a 'meso level' outlook on Erasmus (Cairns 2017) we can also move towards a better understanding of what shapes Erasmus participation trends at ground level, making a valuable contribution to our appreciation of social inclusivity in core aspects of the programme.

Research Context

The interview material used in this chapter formed part of a project entitled 'International Student Mobility: A Socio-Demographic Perspective,' conducted between 2015 and 2018 at ISCTE-University Institute of Lisbon.[2] Its main focus was on the question of social inclusion and the Erasmus undergraduate exchange programme in Portuguese universities, including the extent to which students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds were able to participate. With the geographical context being Portugal, the study presented an opportunity to examine how Erasmus was coping with the turbulence that followed the

economic crisis of 2008, including rising unemployment and wide-spread job precariousness, particularly among tertiary educated youth (Alves et al. 2011). This work also provides a litmus test of sorts in regard to the social agenda of Erasmus+, as well as an assessment of the extent to which employability is being enhanced among Portuguese students, including those from families still suffering from the after effects of the crisis.[3]

It is not our intention in this chapter to provide a blow-by-blow account of the Portuguese economic crisis and the cult of austerity, or how the crisis affected students and graduates, particularly since this issue has been explored in prior publications (e.g. Cairns et al. 2014). Rather, we want to focus on how Erasmus participation is being maintained within universities at a time when institutional budgets are being cut and many families, with 'children' who are Erasmus-eligible, face financial hardship. In doing so, we wish to bring to light the challenge of participating in Erasmus for 'ordinary' individuals and institutions, including the responsibility to manage the stays of ever-increasing numbers of incoming students.

Erasmus Participation

Before proceeding to discuss our empirical material, it is worth looking at the broader European context in which Erasmus in Portugal operates. As the EU makes clear in its policy discourse (see Chap. 1), the programme is viewed as a major success story by policymakers due to a high volume of traffic in students and other groups such as work placement trainees and volunteers, providing a valuable symbol of European integration. However, this does not mean that incoming and outgoing mobility flows are at equivalent levels across countries. The EU's own statistics illustrate considerable regional variations, implying that a 'one-for-one' policy is not in force to balance levels of incoming and outgoing exchanges (European Commission 2015).

The extent of this disequilibrium is illustrated in Fig. 4.1, relating to the 2014–2015 academic year, bringing to light what are in effect net participation rates: the number of incoming students to a particular des-
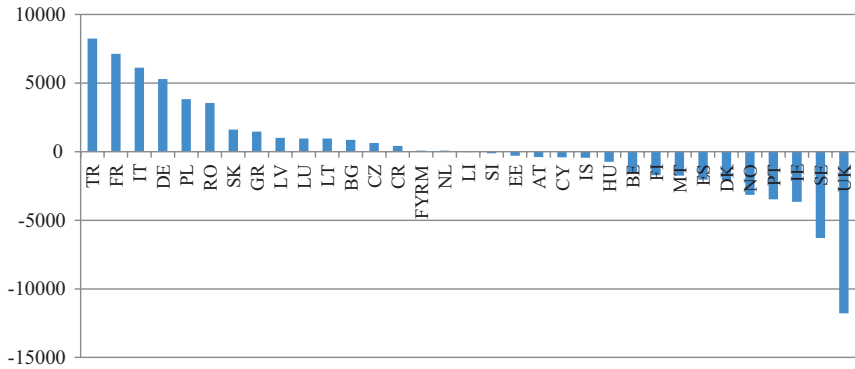
Fig. 4.1 Net participation in Erasmus (students and work placements) 2013–2014. Source: European Commission (2016)

tination country deducted from numbers outgoing from this nation. This way, we can establish the extent to which there is an equitable balance between levels of incoming and outgoing students, and identify regions in which there are pronounced imbalances. Although it is not a perfect means of assessing differentials, especially when we take into account the varying sizes of student populations and the popularity of exchange platforms other than Erasmus in some countries, we can identify quite distinct participation patterns.

While there is a sizable middle ground of countries with relatively well-balanced flows, at the extremities there are major disparities between levels of incoming and outgoing mobility, creating the impression that we have 'sending' and 'receiving' countries within the Erasmus fold. At one extreme we find France, Italy and Germany, alongside Turkey, where numbers outgoing far outweigh incomers, and at the other, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Republic of Ireland and Portugal. The implication is a somewhat uncomfortable one: that this form of Erasmus mobility is following a core-to-periphery dynamic (see also Böttcher et al. 2016). Reasons for this imbalance are varied, but Portugal is one of the countries in which there are many more students coming than going, meaning that our research should provide an opportunity to explore this issue.
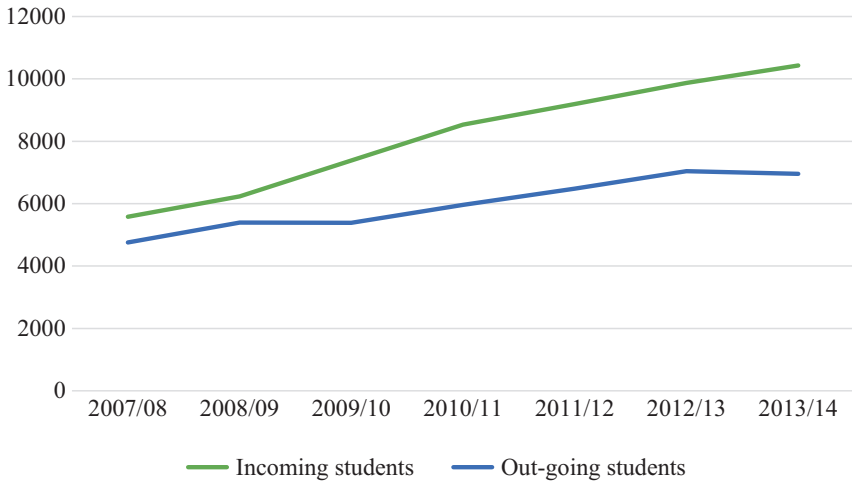
Fig. 4.2 Incoming and outgoing Erasmus mobility to and from Portugal 2007 to 2014. Source: European Commission (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015)

Other sources of statistical data published by the EU also show that the gap between levels of incoming and outgoing mobility has been growing over time in Portugal. Figure 4.2 provides an overview of participation levels between 2007 and 2014, the time during which Erasmus formed part of the Lifelong Learning Programme, an initiative that aimed to create links between people, institutions and countries in the fields of education and training (European Commission 2007).

In trying to explain this growing participation gap in Portugal, in their analysis of Erasmus data, Sin et al. (2016) stress the difficult circumstances facing local students and their families after the 2008 economic crisis. This situation may extend to participation in higher education per se: while access does seem to have significantly widened in the years prior to the crisis, including an expansion of mobility exchange programmes, this progress ended just as austerity policies began to severely reduce household incomes (Magalhães and Amaral 2007; Heitor and Horta 2014).

While the economic crisis may help account for the diminished appeal of outgoing mobility among Portuguese undergraduates, the growing popularity of Portugal as a destination for overseas studies, given its status

as a crisis-hit country, is perverse. We can observe from Fig. 4.2 that during the most intensive period of the crisis (2011–2013), coinciding with the imposition of austerity measures by an International Monetary Fund led troika, more Erasmus students than ever were arriving. While this state of affairs may be attributable to the perception of Portugal as a holiday destination, and the under-reporting of the crisis outside Portugal, it does raise concerns mobilized in prior studies of student mobility that imply exchangees lack empathy or understanding of the host society, to the extent of occupying a voyeuristic and aloof position in relation to the native population (Murphy-Lejeune 2002).

The purpose of this brief statistical interlude is not to claim that the Erasmus programme is purposefully engineering inequality in the undergraduate exchange system. It would in fact be naïve to expect there to be perfectly balanced levels of exchange between countries when we take into account the popularity (and unpopularity) of certain countries, the allure of the most prestigious centres of learning and, among students and their families, differing levels of social and economic capital. Inequality in terms of an ability to access various aspects of tertiary education existed prior to the advent of Erasmus and will no doubt continue after it is gone. What we wish to highlight is that the current imbalances create vulnerability in regard to the symbolic value of the programme, which is too easily criticised for strengthening the educational profiles of the already strong rather than supporting those who may be more in need of enhanced employability (Cairns et al. 2017, pp. 84–85). Furthermore, the gap between policy rhetoric emphasising the value of Erasmus to addressing social inclusion and this situation suggests a lack of success in integrating a social inclusion dimension into the undergraduate exchange programme, an issue that we obviously want to explore further in the remainder of this chapter.

Methods

In conducting interviews with university staff members, many of whom have 20 years or more experience of managing Erasmus and other exchange platforms, we are able to learn from the people who arguably

know most about what shapes participation trends within their regional context. Rather than cite statistics, they are able to say what has limited or encouraged students to take part, and also what makes for a successful Erasmus exchange. Additionally, we can begin to appreciate the challenge of managing incoming and outgoing mobility from their point of view as opposed to making inferences from students' perspectives, including recognition of the internal pressures to contribute towards strengthening a university's international profile.

In regard to methodological approach, while the choice of Portugal as a national context was grounded in the need to reflect the priorities of the agency funding the research (see Note 2), as well as being a country in which there is a considerable gap between levels of incoming and outgoing mobility, more latitude existed in deciding on research sites. As a basic principle, target institutions needed to represent diversity in regard to academic profile, covering both the large, prestigious public universities and typically smaller in size private institutions. Half the selected institutions were also outside the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, covering the north and south of the country, enabling us to study regional diversity.

Fieldwork began in February 2016, continuing until late November of the same year. An initial shortlist of 20 institutions was drawn-up in regard to the process of finding interviewees, with eight universities selected relative to the availability of key individuals and the need to maintain regional balance. In total, 22 interviews were conducted and while this is not a representative sample, since there is no data to create a sampling frame for such a respondent pool, the depth of the material ensured that the main research questions could be explored.[4]

Coordinating Erasmus

In the first part of this analysis, using this interview material we will look at some prominent issues in managing the Erasmus student exchange programme in Portugal. At the outset it should be noted that this is just one of many mobility platforms coordinated by International Relations departments. In the case of the universities visited, all provided support for various platforms, simultaneously, with different destinations and

contrasting institutional demands. As explained by the Mobility Coordinator of one of the two large metropolitan universities in the city of Porto visited:

> […] if you want to go to Europe, you want to go under Erasmus+. If you want to go under Erasmus+ but outside the European Union, you want to go under international credit mobility. Or if you want to go within Santander, or to a certain university that we have an agreement with or even as a free mover, that is possible. We tell them about all the opportunities that we have.[5]

We cannot therefore say that Erasmus occupies a unique position within International Relations departments. It is just one possibility out of a range of mobility choices open to Portuguese students, meaning that Erasmus must compete for time and resources with other programmes. Choice is also mediated by practical concerns such as the signing of bilateral learning agreements with foreign universities. This is a core element in ensuring student mobility happens since an exchange cannot take place without one.

How these agreements come to pass is explained by the following interviewee, one of the two managers of an International Office in one of Lisbon's private universities, with important considerations in the process of deciding who to contact including the language issue:

> The majority of [Portuguese] students are leaving for European countries, mostly Spain and Italy. […] And in terms of the agreements and partner universities and countries, we try to maintain links with the countries like Italy and Spain because you know that, for our students, it would be easier in terms of language. But we also have new partners in, for instance, Norway. […] we send and we also receive, we receive quite a lot of students now from Eastern European countries, like from Poland and from Slovakia, the Czech Republic. In fact this year we are able to offer a class in English, the Master's Degree Programme in Business, we have 13 students coming. […] students come and go to different degrees, like International Relations, Psychology, Business, Law, Architecture, whatever.

Compatibility in terms of courses offered is in fact another prominent factor. Establishing and maintaining learning agreements is a major ele-

ment of this work: working with other universities to locate courses relevant to outgoing students in addition to expanding the geographical scope of exchanges. The difficult nature of this work leads us to ask why universities make such efforts to sustain Erasmus. One reason is that other programmes, that are not comprehensibly financially supported, can be assisted indirectly by the sharing of resources, a situation explained by the International Coordinator of a large public metropolitan university in Lisbon:

> I would say that definitely Erasmus+ now and Erasmus Mundus are the big, big programmes. The funding programmes that we are working with. But also we work with a great number of mobilities that are in the framework of bilateral agreements. So they are not funded, but they are a huge amount of the total number of students, whether we are talking about mobility exchange students or degree seeking students. International degree seeking students that we also try to support.[6]

This is an important consideration, revealing that Erasmus can be a keystone programme in the institutional management of student mobility at specific universities, helping to explain why they participate even though, unlike 'degree seeking students,' tuition fees are not received for hosting incomers. Through this means, Erasmus can generate goodwill within institutions and fulfil a pivotal role in the global development of student circulation.

Incoming and Outgoing Mobility

Two of the most time and resource consuming aspects of managing Erasmus are the regulation of incoming and outgoing mobility. While in the smaller institutions, members of staff may combine these roles into a single job, the expansion in popularity of student mobility to and from Portugal has meant the more common scenario is one of having separate individuals taking responsibility for each of these tasks. This situation is explained further by the following interviewee, the Executive Coordinator at a large university institute in Lisbon:

Until 2004, we used to work with incoming and outgoing together […] but there was a time in 2004 that we had to divide it, different people dealing with different issues, and sometimes it is one person and sometimes it is another person […] and it was a bit confusing. Then we managed to do incoming, outgoing and eventually [one] person for incoming in case we have any kind of difficulties. Like the day-to-day issues.

In regard to outgoing mobility, pertaining to students enrolled at the sending institution who wish to go abroad, managing this process for undergraduates is fairly routine: those who want to go abroad generally inform the outgoing mobility officer of their preference in terms of country and institution, then proceed towards the application process at the designated time in the academic calendar. The application procedure itself is explained by the outgoing mobility officer of a large regional institution:

What the students have to do, first of all […] we have a month of application, so that the students can make the application. Usually it's in January. They make the application, and they can go out after September in that year. […] sometimes they ask, what are the universities where they can go to? […] Usually they talk with the course director. […] And then we contact the institution where the students want to go. […] Also, we help by giving them some information about the city, or colleagues that have already gone to that university, for example, so that they can speak together. To get some information about accommodation; how is the city? We try to give all the support, and try to give the student that's a bit afraid […] we try to show the student that it's a good experience. […] Not only for to know another culture but to know how the universities work. For them, it's a good experience to know how they learn outside and to compare with our university.

We can see that a certain amount of persuasion, or reassurance, is necessary in order to sell the programme to a student, emphasising the cultural aspects of an exchange visit, and confirming that they will receive practical help with issues such as accommodation on arrival. The provision of information and confirming that students are aware of deadlines are two other prominent considerations, as is making sure prospective

outgoers are aware of the demands awaiting them in their host university in regard to academic performance.

Managing incoming mobility is, arguably, a greater undertaking, involving a great deal of effort on the part of the host university. What happens to new arrivals is explained by the Head of International Relations at a large private university:

> The first thing we do with our incoming Erasmus students is to give them a friendly mother. So they normally come to the office when they have problems. Then what we try to do is to put them with teachers that we know are more prepared to deal with international students […]. This means that if I have three classes for the same subject, one in the morning, one in the afternoon and one in the night, I would choose the teacher where I want to put the student. Then we have several types of meetings with the directors of the departments. Then we have the teachers who will receive the students. So then, we try to do this. Then we have several meetings with the students. And also with teachers. We have a meeting at the end. And I think that they [incoming students] are really comfortable, because when they are leaving, they say 'I want to stay and I want to come back.' And we have a large number of, for instance, placements from our former Erasmus students and international students.

Taking responsibility for incoming students therefore involves a considerable amount of pastoral care, a workload that increases incrementally according to the number of students hosted. International Relations departments do however receive some external support. Most notable is the contribution made by the Erasmus Student Network (see Chap. 5), which helps students find accommodation and organizes social activities.

Balancing Participation

Levels of Erasmus participation are a significant determinant of workload at a university, and varied across the eight institutions visited. The highest level of movement was predictably found at the larger institutions, with in the region of 2000 outgoing and 1000 incoming Erasmus students

each year in one university alone, while smaller institutions may have a few hundred incomers and only a handful of outgoing students. But in all institutions, numbers incoming outweighed the volume of outgoing mobility, with the imbalance between the two often quite pronounced.

In accounting for this imbalance, a range of factors were identified by interviewees, some of which are consistent with what other authors have stated on this issue (González et al. 2011). Incoming students are thought to be attracted by the image of Portugal as a tourist destination, one that has until recently enjoyed a relatively low cost of living compared to other European capitals (see also Malet Calvo 2017). Universities also extol the quality of their courses and the friendliness of the welcome overseas students can expect, and that many courses are offered in the English language.

In defining levels of outgoing Erasmus mobility, the issue is more one of what is limiting participation in Portugal. All interviewees agreed that the meagre amount of financial support on offer to students serves to severely constrict participation, which becomes limited to those prepared to make significant personal financial sacrifices to supplement grant funding or students who have families which can afford to subsidise mobility, a situation by no means unique to Portugal among Erasmus participating countries (Orr et al. 2011).

Significantly, an insufficient level of grant support is an issue that affects all institutions, as the Head of International Office at a large size private university in Lisbon explained:

> If you go with 350 € per month, you will have the chance to pay the accommodation, but what about the other things? So the thing is, your family can give you plus 300 €, and you will have 350 € to manage your month. You need to pay transports, you need to buy your food. Then you have nothing. How can you be really involved in your placement? You can't. […] sometimes the families can support them. But if they can't, they will not go.

The implication is that under-funding limits participation among Portuguese students and compromises the quality of stays abroad for those who do manage to travel, restricting the capacity to develop profes-

sionally and socially. And without this ability to engage in non-formal learning outside the classroom, the prospects for enhancing employability are restricted. The outgoing mobility officer at the large regional university cited earlier was keen to elaborate on this issue, and provide some creative solutions involving help from families and friends:

> Yes, most [support is from] the families. And they also, usually, they used to go with two or three other students, with friends. Usually they get together, for example, the accommodation, they try to get an apartment as it is cheaper. Or they go to the residence of the university. That usually is cheaper. But it's the family that is the major support. We don't have another scholarship besides the Erasmus, so it's imposed on the family, the parents.

Another creative tactic relates to the practice of sending institutions waiving or reducing tuition fees among outgoers. While Erasmus students do not pay tuition costs at their host university, they must still cover expenses at home, including fees and accommodation, not to mention loss of income for those who work while studying. This is a useful tactic, and an approach that other institutions might consider following should it prove financially viable.

In estimating the financial cost of participation, from a Portuguese point of view Erasmus scholarships do seem remarkably low: at the time of writing, 280 € in countries deemed to have a low cost of living to 330 € in more expensive regions, with an additional payment of 100 € to those from families in receipt of social security.[7] Given this situation, it is no surprise that for many Portuguese students their Erasmus experience stops once they read the small print in the application form. As the Head of International Relations at a medium-size private metropolitan university in Lisbon explained, 'we notice that in a way, Erasmus is for the better off' (see also Cairns et al. 2017, pp. 84–85). The ability to tackle the issue of inclusive access to the undergraduate exchange programme would therefore appear to be limited by this financial stumbling block, a situation that is appraised by the outgoing mobility officer of a small regional university in the north of Portugal as follows:

> Yes, the lack of finance is a problem. But it is not just a matter of having enough money. The situation creates a kind of mental barrier, where the

families cannot understand why they have to spend this money for something that is a luxury. […] They are looking for value for money and don't see any guarantee that their son or daughter will get a better job as a result of making this sacrifice. But we do try to explain to the students that it is good for their CVs as well as a good experience to try living in a different culture.

This account suggests that there is a major challenge in justifying expenditure on the 'luxury' of Erasmus and, more tellingly, that the image of the programme as a 'CV-booster' (Weichbrodt 2014, p. 9) fails to convince many families. One reason may be that due to difficult economic conditions, the priority is upon securing employment as opposed to enhancing employability—not the same thing—suggesting that the programme needs to become more tightly focused on labour market entry. Arguably, this is already happening within the programme, with greater prominence awarded to work placements (e.g. Deakin 2014), although the reality may be one of moving towards recognition of the need to place people in work as opposed to expecting them to participate in what may be costly educational exchanges.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the institutional level of Erasmus, focusing on the management of undergraduate exchanges in Portuguese universities. Using first-hand accounts from men and women, most of whom work in International Relations departments, it has been possible to explain the nature of the work they undertake and find reasons for imbalanced levels of incoming and outgoing mobility. On the one hand, we have an attractive destination for incoming students in terms of cost, climate and academic environment, and on the other, the high cost of going abroad, made to feel even higher by the lingering effects of an economic crisis still affecting many Portuguese families. Other concerns relate to the quality of the undergraduate exchange programme in terms of contributing towards an improvement in labour market chances.

In regard to understanding its institutional level, we can however see that Erasmus plays a keystone function within universities, with its resources supporting other less well-resourced mobility platforms. For this reason, the programme can positively contribute towards internationalization beyond its own boundaries, albeit at the risk of generating a degree of dependency on European funding. At a more imaginative level, what institutions also receive in return for participating in Erasmus is a kind of internationalization dividend, measured not so much in financial terms but rather in a heightened global profile. This is a less tangible benefit for universities participating in the Erasmus programme but one that serves an important purpose: establishing a presence in the global circuits of tertiary education. Hosting Erasmus may therefore yield profit at a later date in the form of fee-paying students, who regard a cosmopolitan learning environment as a vital element of their learning experience.

Notes

1. For a more detailed discussion of the specific issue of how the Erasmus undergraduate exchange programme has coped with the challenge of austerity in Portugal, see Cairns (2017).
2. This project was conducted by David Cairns at ISCTE-University of Lisbon, funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), grant number SFRH/BPD/103320/2014.
3. Ironically the austerity measures designed to address the Portuguese fiscal crisis that are commonly blamed for this situation were imposed by the European Commission as part of a troika with the European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund between 2011 and 2013, a move that, however expedient for economists, risked undermining the social agenda of programmes like Erasmus (Busch et al. 2013; Cairns et al. 2016).
4. The final breakdown of institutions and interviewees included in the sample, most of whom worked in International Relations departments, was organised as follows: large public metropolitan university 1 (four interviewees); large public metropolitan university 2 (six interviewees); large private university (one interviewee); large university institute (two interviewees); medium size private metropolitan university (two inter-

viewees); small private metropolitan university (three interviewees); large regional university (one interviewee); small regional university (three interviewees).

5. Prominent examples include the Sandander programme, with mobility grants funded by this bank, which provides Ibero-American and Luso-Brazilian fellowships. Also worth mentioning is 'Almeida Garrett,' a Portuguese student mobility programme named after the nineteenth century author, established by the Council of Rectors of Portuguese Universities [Conselho de Reitores das Universidades Portuguesas] (CRUP) to support exchanges between universities in Portugal. And there is also the possibility for students to organise their own exchanges, as a form of free movement.

6. 'Erasmus Mundus' relates to learning agreements with institutions in non-EU countries, one of the most prominent joint programmes being Masters courses involving study in university consortia from the EU and elsewhere in the world.

7. Details of current levels of Erasmus grant funding can be found at: https:// www.erasmusplus.org.uk/higher-education-study-or-work-abroad-grant-rates-2016-17

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5

Erasmus Learning

This chapter, along with Chap. 6 which follows, looks at the lived experience of being an Erasmus student, with emphasis on undergraduates participating in exchanges between universities in different European countries. In engaging with this theme, we are acknowledging the importance of what has been the most prominent aspect of Erasmus in all its various iterations since the first programme in 1987. This explains why we refer to the undergraduate exchange programme as 'traditional Erasmus', as indeed did several of the interviewees encountered in the previous chapter. And while the Erasmus+ framework now engages with young people from non-academic backgrounds to a much greater extent than previously, the popular perception of Erasmus is still very much linked to the image of the undergraduate exchange student, with no sign of this changing.

The longevity of the undergraduate exchange programme may help account for the relatively high public profile of this form of movement, with sustained success also meeting with the approval of policymakers. In explaining why this is the case, we can point out that Erasmus is a major success in quantitative terms (as demonstrated in Chap. 1), making it a much needed good news story for the European Commission.

This explains why Erasmus is symbolically significant, in providing a working example of intra-European cooperation. Another important aspect of this success is the positive impression of the programme held by many of those who have participated in it, something we shall bring to light in this and the following chapter, with the image of extremely friendly, upbeat and optimistic undergraduates also emphasised in official policy discourse and in research supported the EU.

While policymakers may be enjoying the reflected glow of success from Erasmus students, researchers tend to more cynical about the achievements of the programme, or at least more likely to highlight 'negative' issues such as the alleged over-representation of young people from privileged backgrounds and the high financial cost of participating in exchanges (e.g. Kuhn 2012; Souto-Otero et al. 2013). However, other researchers have consistently noted the satisfaction that participating students seem to experience, coupled with a curious ability to withstand the 'culture shock' normally associated with moving to another country (Krzaklewska and Skórska 2013). Self-evaluations of stays abroad thus tend to involve descriptions of a rather euphoric experience—'It was the best time of my life!' or 'It is a must for every university student'—albeit counter-balanced by some reported difficulties in making the shift from the host institution and then back to place of origin. This tendency was in fact reported in the first major survey conducted on Erasmus mobility by the Erasmus Student Network (Krzaklewska and Krupnik 2005), and seems to have persisted.

In the most recently published ESN evaluation study, the rating of Erasmus remains very positive (Muñoz 2014), although we can also observe a more critical attitude towards studying abroad among those contemplating this possibility. This may be related to the fact that there now multiple opportunities for spending some time in another country or that students can participate in Erasmus more than once, modifying the expectations students have of their stays as well as their evaluations of the value of the experience. The 'wow' effect seems to somewhat dissipate for those who study abroad multiple times, with students also becoming more strategic in thinking about the experience, already having the background knowledge that enables them to plan their stays effectively. In

other words, they become instrumental and reflexive about mobility decision-making when stays abroad are imagined as part of a wider continuum that traverses education and training trajectories rather than being perceived as a one-off novelty event (see also Cairns 2014).

The Learning Dimension of Mobility

These opening remarks lead us to the main theme of this chapter: learning within Erasmus and what it is that happens, developmentally, to students during a stay abroad. In order to make this process clearer, we can isolate two critical dimensions to help us understand what it means to be an Erasmus student: the experience of *learning* and lived *relationships*. This deduction is based on the findings of our prior research on this topic and insights from related studies that have identified motivations for participating in Erasmus and areas in which the mobility experience provides students with most satisfaction (e.g. Krzaklewska and Krupnik 2005; Alfranseder et al. 2012).

While we will explore Erasmus students' conviviality and group socialization in the next chapter of this book, in this part of our discussion we examine the lived experience of international learning. This is an aspect of the programme absolutely fundamental to the success of exchange visits, with 'I have learnt so much' becoming a motto of alumni from across Europe (Krzaklewska 2010). This feeling from Erasmus alumni also matches a relatively new concept within the study of youth geographical circulation, 'learning mobility', which stresses the educational and training dimension of international activities. We will therefore look at Erasmus students learning processes during their stays abroad, discuss certain learning outcomes and their contexts, and reflect on the potential for strengthening learning during exchanges.[1]

Life Is Learning—A Multi-Space Exploration

'Study-party-travel' is a slogan used by ESN volunteers to describe what Erasmus students actually do during an exchange, with all three of

these attributes tightly linked to the concept of learning.[2] While still in the sending country, students generally associate learning with the university campus and activities linked to it: courses, internships, training, etc. However, students who have participated in Erasmus broaden substantially their concept of where learning takes place during the exchange: it becomes associated not only with the foreign university but also dimensions of life adjacent to studying at an institution. What now counts as learning is not only, or even principally, the experience of studying in the classroom or laboratory but rather living in a new place, encountering the host country and its culture, having encounters with other students and local inhabitants, travelling and enjoying intercultural events, as well as the experience of everyday life (Krzaklewska 2010). Using European education jargon, we could say that Erasmus connects formal, non-formal and informal learning, and it is the fact that students *recognise* learning in all these different dimensions that is critical to their evaluation of value in their stays abroad that is important. Even negative emotions, including hardship and troubles undergone during the stay, are interpreted as valuable if, on reflection, these experiences lead to important lessons being learnt.

The learning dimension is very much linked to the adventure of moving abroad: gathering *new* experiences, living in a *foreign* country, seeing *another* university, entering *different* education systems, trying things you has *never* done, being in *new* places and meeting *new* people. Opportunities open up for students, who dedicate their stays abroad to following what Wiers-Jenssen (2003) describes as 'new impulses'. This is a theme that emerges in narratives gathered from former Erasmus students, and confirmed by those who participated in our focus groups. Richness, multi-dimensionality, playfulness, spontaneity, pleasure and novelty are just some of the different adjectives used by Erasmus alumni to illustrate the uniqueness of their learning experience, and this exceptionality 'hits' strongest those who participate in Erasmus for the first time. If youth learning can be stereotypically linked to 'hardship' connected to the demands of homework and exams or the boredom resulting from sitting at a school desk for long hours every day, the accounts of Erasmus students are filled with positive emotions and connotations, for example:

Exchange is a real school of life. One learns everything with pleasure. I did not even notice when my English improved substantially. (Tomasz, Polish Erasmus student in Austria)

The geographical dimension of exchange is very important. The towns and cities which Erasmus students inhabit and the countries to which they move for several months at a time become important points on the map of Europe. Atmosphere of city and country where students had their exchange was one of the most important factors impacting on their evaluations of the stay (Alfranseder et al. 2012). Often these places become linked with future plans for further mobility, usually in the short-term but occasionally long-term, and some sentiment regarding the host location remains with Erasmus students after their visit.

In their narratives, Erasmus alumni pay a great deal of attention to describing their 'home' university location and travel destination. On analysing these descriptions, we were struck by the fact that most of these students spend a lot of time travelling, and the list of visited cities and countries is very long. Tourism in the eyes of Erasmus students appears not as an ephemeral activity but rather is an additional space of learning. This plays into the European discovery tale and getting to know not just the country but the continent. The truth is that travelling is part of the Erasmus narrative, embracing novelty, discovery, fun and play, as well as an internationalization of education and career paths.

All these aspects are embedded into the story of an Erasmus traveller. What is striking is the importance of *being on the move*: it seems that sometimes it is not important where you go, but the fact you are physically changing location that has significance. This plays into the specific identity shaped by the Erasmus experience, linked to a habitus of being mobile, indenting physical mobility into life. This may lead to consecutive exchanges or internships abroad taking place, participating in international projects and Erasmus alumni reunions, paired with an international mind-set and a network of friends from different cultures. A Polish female student has called this being 'addicted to travelling':

When asked what my memories from Erasmus are, I replied, 'From which one?' My exchange in France was not the first or even the second Erasmus

stay, and then counting a volunteer stay abroad, it was in fact the fourth long stay abroad. Anyone who had the experience of an exchange visit abroad as a student perfectly understands me. And a person who is deciding now to go on exchange will assure themselves after reading my post that it was a good decision. And soon, they will be joining the group of people who are addicted to travelling. (Anna, Polish Erasmus student in France)

What we have in these preceding paragraphs is a concise summation of everything that is potentially valuable and good about Erasmus exchanges, or even student mobility within Europe in general, emphasising the positive personal developmental impacts. We can also deduce that there is a strong endorsement of travelling, with physical movement between countries seen as inherently valuable in regard to making (positive) shifts in one's attitudes, something that might be extended to a closer identification with Europe itself. In this sense, we have an outline of the basic rationale behind undergraduate exchanges, albeit without considering the challenges of entering and sustaining a mobile learning habitus.

The Academic Dimension of Learning—Education with (a) Difference

While Erasmus is perceived as possessing a strong informal learning dimension, we should not forget that formal education, and the university, is still a core element of Erasmus life. In the previous chapter, we looked at how these exchanges are managed from the point of view of university staff. We should never forget that despite all the talk of fun and parties, Erasmus visitors have study obligations to fulfil. For these students, the university is the place where they take part in the obligatory courses needed to accumulate ECTS points. But at the same time, this is a place where they meet and mingle with other foreign and local students. Needless to say, studying is not an incidental part of the experience. It is in fact fundamental, embedded into the 'positive' narrative of learning during a mobility exercise and connected to the social dimension of Erasmus that will be explored in the next chapter.

We should always remember that the formal and non-formal learning dimensions of student mobility are strongly interconnected. In fact, according to Murphy-Lejeune (2002, p. 89), 'The verbs to live and to study are nearly interchangeable', and that students are learning in a new country gives the formal education dimension fresh value. Erasmus alumni stress the importance of exploring new curricula; the possibility of participating in courses that are different both thematically and also conducted in a different way, using a diverse range of pedagogical tools. This may explain why accounts of the Erasmus learning experience often compare education in the home country with the host university. For example, in many cases students needed to dedicate more time at the host university to preparing for classes, something that often resulted from the fact that courses are taught in a foreign language. Many also stressed that their experience was not a 'holiday' from studying since they needed to study harder than at home, and they underlined the value of this challenge in terms of the pleasure and the possibility of balancing their social life with studying. This process is explained by one Polish Erasmus student who visited France as follows:

I evaluate the institution as very good, and I will definitely remember it positively. The level of teaching was definitely meeting our expectations and I need to dismantle the myth that students from the exchange are treated differently from local students, which of course benefitted us. Even if we needed to face different projects, tests and presentations during the semester, we did not miss out on time for entertainment, so that meant visiting, partying and exploring Lyon, and also other more distant towns. (Maria, Polish Erasmus student in France)

Here we have a very good illustration of the 'study-party-travel' nexus, linked to geographical exploration of the host city, Lyon, and neighbouring towns. It is important to note that these excursions do not detract from studying. Rather, they are complementary and may make a contribution to other aspects of the learning experience such as strengthening foreign language fluency through being able to meet with a broader range of people when moving outside the host university.

Personal and Professional Development

Throughout this book, and in line with a core tenet of the philosophy of the Erasmus programme, we have stressed the important of personal *and* professional development. The former is certainly highly visible within the accounts of Erasmus alumni we have examined—moving abroad, getting to know new people, having fun, enjoying life in a different country, seeing the countryside and visiting towns and city *and* spending time in the classroom—supporting the idea that Erasmus is a convivial learning experience. Furthermore, if there are some people who don't state that they are going abroad because of the quality of a particular university or eminence of a specific professor this does not mean that professional concerns are absent, only that they are somewhat taken for granted. As one former Erasmus student remarked:

> To me, I have to say it was a mixture [of personal and professional concerns], as I already said, those different aspects from my motivation, and I had really good seminars at the university, where I learnt new things and also can just review some aspects from my Masters and Bachelor programmes which obviously are important, for a researcher, so this is something I want to underline or point out, that I learnt something for my professional development and it was not only the personal one. I think that's important to say because I think the Erasmus programme is also interested in having professional development of the students. (Hans, German Erasmus student in Hungary)

We can thus confirm that there *is* a link between the personal and the professional, at least in the case of Hans cited above, and that Erasmus learning does not neglect the latter. It may however be the case that the educational dimension of exchanges is less prominent in Erasmus discourse, which tends to place emphasis on the 'fun' aspects of the experience to a disproportionate extent, creating a slightly misleading impression in regard to what to expect from an exchange visit (see also Cairns 2014, pp. 117–118).

Looking closely at the accounts of former Erasmus students, we can see that professional development is quite prominent. In particular, stu-

dents stress the importance of choosing a university that fits in well with their existing curricula and academic interests. Another important aspect is the ability to accumulate professional development through successive Erasmus exchanges. We have discovered that some students undertake as many as five Erasmus visits. One Polish student stated that his motivation for doing so was due to the ability to take advantage of the different possibilities offered by different foreign universities. His decision-making processes involved taking detailed note of what was available in each institution and how this related to his on-going educational development, taking into account consistency in curricula between the host and the sending institutions. Moreover, he also stressed that he had been searching for alternative modes of spending time outside his studies via engaging with a regular association for foreign students. This one account shows that there is the possibility to explore the potential of an Erasmus exchange through modifying the scheme of motivations and expectations towards it, and that it is possible to have very specific aims and 'serious' expectations.

Another example is a Polish student, Ewa, who has been engaged for several years in ESN activities for incoming students. She describes her strategic planning towards Erasmus not in term of 'the entertainment side' but rather in relation to the quality of education on offer and possibilities for travelling.

> After four years of activities in ESN and constant contact with Erasmus students, I had an impression that I had already lived through my Erasmus exchange, at least when talking about its entertainment part. So I came to the conclusion, that if I go, I need to spend this time productively and actively. So I searched first for a good university, and second, a good location for travelling as much as possible. (Ewa, Polish Erasmus student in Belgium)

Having established the importance of educational value in Erasmus for dedicated students, what then of the more personal aspects of the mobility experience? This is an area where students' expectations appear to be generally fulfilled. They are, for example, able to confirm that skills, such as intercultural awareness, adaptability, flexibility, tolerance and problem-solving

develop substantially during exchanges (Alfranseder et al. 2012; see also Brandenburg et al. 2014). Looking back at earlier evidence, research supported by ESN in 2005 collated more than 5000 narratives, summarizing five areas of importance in learning: (1) acquiring cultural skills and knowledge, (2) maturity and self-development, (3) social networks, (4) academic enrichment and (5) value of discovery and exploring new possibilities (Krzaklewska and Krupnik 2005). These ideas are illustrated in Table 5.1.

Significantly, these are attributes in which the personal cannot necessarily be disentangled from the professional in regard to the development process taking place. Especially prominent is recognition of acquired skills linked to the intercultural elements of the stay, for example, foreign language fluency, international networking and learning how to live in other societies. On the one hand, this is linked to the fact that one is living in a foreign country and in theory gaining the knowledge and competences required to live in this other society, but on the other, we have the process of enhancing skills linked to being embedded

Table 5.1 Five areas of importance in learning through Erasmus

Acquiring cultural skills and knowledge	Maturity and self-development	Social networks	Academic enrichment	Value of discovery and exploring new possibilities
Communication and work in international groups Knowledge about the host country How to survive in the foreign country Open-mindedness Tolerance Foreign language fluency	Becoming independent Determination in solving problems Self confidence Flexibility Personal growth	Establishment of international friendships Integration Knowing how to live together Communication skills Outgoingness	Adaptation to different academic system Reflection on career paths	Openness to what is new Taking advantage of opportunities

Source: Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2005)

within a circle of international students. This internal universe, in which students work and socialize together, allows them to gain confidence about their ability to communicate and become more outgoing with people from a diverse range of national and cultural backgrounds, enabling the emergence of enhanced personal and professional capacities. Students are aware that personal development is also critical for professional careers, and that so-called 'soft skills' may be appreciated by their future employers as much as educational credentials, even if this was not an immediate motivation in their plan for going abroad:

> *Do you think this is going to be helpful in terms of job opportunities?*
> I hope so but I don't know.
> *You have the hope but it's not the reason why you went there?*
> It was not the reason at all, but I could imagine that people looked at my CV and thought like, oh, ok, she is ready to discover something new and to learn new languages, make new experiences. I could imagine that it helps, but it was not the reason why I went there. (Marine, Luxemburg Erasmus student in Poland)

Research showing that Erasmus students can gain multiple competences during a stay abroad is sometimes counter-acted, or even undermined, by the argument that they fail to learn anything new while abroad due to the fact that they are already 'superior' to those not choosing Erasmus as an option. For instance, the Erasmus Impact study (Brandenburg et al. 2014, p. 79) argues that Erasmus students score higher that non-mobile students when it comes to personal traits associated with employability measured *before* the exchange has actually taken place, with qualitative data indicating that they are more open towards change and the idea of immersing themselves in a new environment (see also Chap. 2). This position suggests that there is a re-enforcement rather than a replacement of values taking place among those who are already in possession of traits associated with employability. Nevertheless, the Erasmus Impact Study did still confirm that exchange students substantially improved their personal competences after their stays.

It should also be noted that our own investigations show that former Erasmus students tend to express a high degree of optimism about their

future prospects, something that might be regarded as an overestimation of their learning outcomes.

> After my Erasmus in Lille, I want to do an Erasmus internship in the Côte d'Azur, and later I will settle in France. Maybe I will stay here forever, or maybe move to a totally new place. I am open to new challenges. I think after this exchange, I am not afraid to go forwards. If you want to be a master of your destiny, and not just passively look around, choose Erasmus. (Magda, Polish student in France)

In this particular case, Magda demonstrates both a positive, extremely positive in fact, outlook on the future, and the possible limitations of being fuelled by passion. While her plans may come to pass, it might also be that a degree of over-confidence is on display. We therefore need to temper the enthusiasm of former Erasmus students with a degree of realism. For example, does this person know how difficult, and expensive, undertaking an internship can be or that opportunities in the Côte d'Azur may be highly prized and therefore fought over?

From a more constructive point of view, Erasmus presents many students, especially those who still live in the parental home, the opportunity to gain independence skills while living abroad (Krzaklewska 2013). Discussing this subject, ESN volunteers describe such Erasmus students as courageous in taking such a step but also acknowledged that a lack of confidence, and perhaps a lack of personal capabilities, can be a problem. It is easy to start feeling lost, particularly with insufficient preparation or an inability to deal with fairly routine matters in independent living, such as cooking, doing laundry and managing a household budget. Having to accompany visiting students to medical institutions was also mentioned as a very frequent task of ESN volunteers. It is therefore possible to see the additional challenge in managing the mobility of young people with limited independent living skills prior to Erasmus. Nevertheless, the stay abroad can be a huge life lesson, especially if this takes place before having the experience of living outside the family home. Some of these aspects are described by two ESN volunteers as follows:

They learn life skills, self-reliance, autonomy, organisation, how to do laundry—these small things, that normally you have no problem doing in your home country. At first they are a bit lost, but they get it all sorted.

They escape from the protection of their parents. They leave their city, family home, and for the first time they live on their own. They need to cook, learn to do basic shopping. So beyond culture and language, they learn autonomy, or even about life, and they come back as new people. (Focus group with Polish ESN volunteers)

Returning to the 'reflexivity' theme introduced in Chap. 2 (see also Cairns 2014), the Erasmus learning environment is a site within which a reflexive process can be triggered, leading to enhanced capabilities. While this can be related to professional competencies, and employability, there is also the opportunity to upgrade other skills either in the form of better communication and intercultural competency or opening up a previously undiscovered future direction in life. However, that there are strengths *and* weaknesses, and that not everyone will develop the same capabilities needs to be acknowledged, with prior experience of mobility and independent living two factors that might determine success. What we can argue more definitively is that Erasmus is a space in which to reflect: about the host society, other societies and even oneself. It can be a kind of moratorium period within an existing educational trajectory; a much needed breathing space particularly when people are unsure about their future direction. This is explained by one former Erasmus student as being caught somewhere in between two different cultures or realities:

Going on Erasmus is like throwing someone from one reality to another. In the first one, there are habits and everything has its own rhythm, in the other one, you need to create everything from the beginning and you need to find your way in a different world. (Aleksandra, Polish Erasmus student in France)

Such a situation allows a confrontation with 'otherness' to take place, which can trigger a process of self-reflection. This particular feeling is elaborated upon by another former Erasmus student:

If you just confront other cultures, with other people or people from other cultures, and how they study, how they live next to the university, this is something which brings you to the point that you totally ask yourself if you're doing [the] right [thing]. Many students of my Erasmus group were just hanging out in Budapest, enjoying the flavour of the city and the possibilities, and this was maybe the confrontation that led me to reflect on my own way of living, and this is to me the most important experience from my stay abroad, that you have to reflect on your way of living, because you're just confronted with another concept which is really different. (Hans, German student in Hungary)

The process referred to here seems to involve a mental journey, as well as a spatial one, undertaken during Erasmus. And it is engaging in this reflexive process that distinguishes an individual who is successful, in learning from others who are more interested in travel as a means of 'just hanging out', although ironically, it is the juxtaposition with the less learning orientated students that produces the epiphany. Being in another place, surrounded by people behaving in a manner obviously not conducive to learning hence has a value as something that can help move an Erasmus experience beyond purely touristic involvement in the host society.

Supporting New Spaces of Learning

In the previous chapter, we looked at the work of university staff members in managing incoming and outgoing mobility at their institutions. This provided an impression of the range of tasks undertaken and some of the challenges that arise in maintaining mobility platforms. The work of these individuals, while multi-faceted, does not generally extend into helping incoming students settle within the host society. Rather, their concern is with the academic dimension of exchanges, especially placing students in appropriate courses, rather than finding suitable accommodation and organizing social events.

The task of providing support to new spaces of learning tends to lie with other organisations, most notably the Erasmus Student Network

(ESN), making this agency a significant voice in the management of exchanges. It is also an institution that has increased in prominence in recent years, with the growth of ESN and other organisations that support incoming students mirroring the expansion of the Erasmus programme: in 2006, the ESN network consisted of 207 sections in 28 countries, while in 2017, ESN had expanded into 40 countries with 532 local sections. These figures demonstrate that ESN is now an integral element of the Erasmus experience for incoming students and a partner valued by universities. During the course of our research, we were frequently informed about the useful work undertaken by ESN volunteers. This can start during the first days of a student's visit when he or she is accompanied by a mentor or buddy, usually be a local student, who can guide a new arrival through the settlement process: picking them up from the airport, showing them the city, getting a mobile phone and a bank account, taking care of administrative matters, helping in arranging accommodation or just keeping them company so they do not feel alone.

> […] there are always people to help you out, because they know that you will come there and know nothing, […] every one of the Erasmus students had one Polish student to guide them, to help them, to get used to the system. (Herwig, German Erasmus student in Poland)

ESN is seen most of all as an organiser of social events; activities that can make a major contribution to fostering integration among a group of international students. The organisation provides multiple opportunities for international students and ESN volunteers to hang out together, and also introduces Erasmus students to the culture of the host country though organising cultural events. For example, during a visit to the local ESN office in Lisbon during the course of the research discussed in the previous chapter, volunteers were busy organising a beach party for the latest batch of incoming students.

The fact that ESN has gained so much visibility in the student mobility world can be measured from the fact that Erasmus students who have gone to a university without ESN feel its absence, knowing about its activities from fellow students who have gone elsewhere. When this important space of learning is missing, as explained by one student, there

are no equivalent events that support integration. The alternative is basically to manage by yourself. Another student stressed the importance of the activities that support integration between students:

> A huge disappointment was for me the lack of Erasmus Student Network— the organisation that is occupied with scheduling the Erasmus students' days. We did not have mentors, there was no orientation week or an integration camp. (Inga, Polish Erasmus student in Scotland)

Such a position illustrates the fact that ESN has established a standard model of practicing an Erasmus exchange for undergraduates. This extends beyond social activities into working in volunteer groups in local communities, an activity that while still exceptional, has been growing in popularity.[3]

Looking at recent developments it is worth noting the engagement of ESN with the civic dimension of stays, encouraging Erasmus students to contribute more actively to their new local community. Exemplifying this trend is *SocialErasmus*, an ESN project which aims to involve Erasmus students in volunteering during their mobility experiences. Through this project ESN hope that the international experience of young people abroad will be enriched with a better appreciation of other societies' problems, through being given an opportunity to work on the solutions.[4] Organized activities include picking up garbage, planting trees, walking dogs from a local shelter, visiting schools and kindergartens to give talks about their country, meeting with senior citizens, blood donations and participating in a diverse range of charity events. Preliminary analysis of outcomes from this project shows that certain students really value this new experience as it allows them to enter new zones in the local culture and do things they would never have been able to organize themselves:

> The local ESN organised a meeting with the elderly in the elderly home— this I would normally not do […]. I would not go to such institution and say 'Hello, I came to talk with you'. Different activities—walking dogs in the shelter, some charity collections. (Ewelina, Polish Erasmus student in Spain)

Focus groups conducted as part of the research for this book suggest that integrating volunteer work and civic initiative participation into

an Erasmus fellowship is not easy and turnout is often rather low. The ESN volunteers are clear that these events need to be 'promoted' among Erasmus students and advertised almost as a form of entertainment. This can be a difficult thing to do given the less than attractive nature of tasks such as collecting garbage, leading some ESN members to question the suitability of this new form of participation for Erasmus students. Some other events though, directed more towards promoting home cultures have a much stronger adherence: one volunteer described how Greek students spent an entire day cooking their country's specialities in order to share them during an event. Nevertheless, while it may appear challenging to engage Erasmus students as volunteers, the motivation of ESN volunteers at the host university does not pass unnoticed, and this acts as a source of encouragement to participate. In fact, one study has shown that 11 per cent of past Erasmus students became involved in ESN activities on return to their home university, and seven per cent volunteered in different organisations (Alfranseder et al. 2012), activities that also provided a means of dealing with return-culture shock, or 'after-Erasmus depression', after the end of a mobility episode.

Learning to Be Young in Europe

One self-evident aspect of Erasmus we have not mentioned so far in the course of this book is the fact that it is a programme designed for European young people. With a few exceptions, such as academic staff exchanges, the various elements of Erasmus+ are all youth oriented. In addition to developing employability and intercultural skills, exchanges are about learning about how to be a young person with particular emphasis, as we have seen above, on deeper involvement in the civic sphere of society of European societies.

The Erasmus undergraduate exchange programme is in many ways designed to be consistent with the needs of young people (Krzaklewska 2013). In practice, this involves recognition of the fact that at this stage in the life course, much energy is expected to be invested in the domain of free time and leisure. At the same time, there is concern at policy level that time spent during an Erasmus visit is constructive in terms of gathering competences and experiences that will help people

enter and progress within the labour market (see Chap. 2). The aim thus becomes one of seeking to integrate these two not always complementary dimensions, encouraging students to become autonomous and expressive yet strategic in their future life planning, loosely corresponding to the reflexive ideal outlined in our discussion of 'employability'. An Erasmus visit there by becomes a site for life construction and career orientation, with the additional demand of engaging with civil society.

In outlining this process, we may be inadvertently defining the present state of the youth condition in Europe, at least for those young people who wish to pursue tertiary education trajectories, with entry into a professional career the envisaged exit point from the youth phase. Erasmus explicates and underlines the qualities that must be refined during the youth phase, and anticipates certain aspects of adulthood. We therefore have an endorsement of qualities that exemplify being young but also acknowledge protean demands from the labour market directed towards young people. Young people are therefore put in a position where they can see what is expected of them, and what kind of transformations they need to undergo in their lives in order to be able to reach their personal and professional goals.

Given this status, we can anticipate the lifestyles of young people during exchanges conforming to the social expectations that characterize the threshold to adulthood; making an investment in free-time activities that are not only entertaining but also have an element of exploration so that they can try new things. This can be a source of aggravation to those outside the Erasmus universe, particularly where a feeling of 'not-being-invited-to-the-party' is generated, but the emphasis on leisure has a practical purpose, acting as a means of engendering optimism and a lack of worry about the future. This idea of youth helps explains why ESN volunteers use terms such as 'energetic', 'motivated', 'fascinated' and 'active' to describe the attributes Erasmus students should embody. Interestingly, these are also values that employers seeking enthusiastic new recruits are thought to value, closely corresponding to some of the ideas on 'employability' embedded in the Erasmus Impact Study we discussed in Chap. 2. These students therefore come to embody a kind of

idealized youth, centred on totemic attitudes and activities relating to employability and interculturality.

The liminal nature of this life stage can sometimes be described in terms of its non-reality, and looked at retrospectively it can be difficult to reconcile with subsequent life phases, which start to feel mundane in comparison. Such a position is illustrated by the following account of someone who participated in an Erasmus exchange ten years previously:

> Defending your Master thesis is a moment that you feel you finish your youth. […] the environment at work does not motivate you in any way as it did between young people—during your studies, during Erasmus or in student associations. There, there was more passion and support, or maybe […] how to say that […] love? […] At your work, you do not feel this energy, exuberant, young, youthful. (Agnieszka, Polish alumni of Erasmus programme from 2005, interviewed in 2011)

While completing tertiary education can be regarded as denoting the end of the youth phase, before this happens, an Erasmus exchange seems to be perceived as one means of having a last hurrah. It can be utilized strategically as a means to 'live your youth' for an interregnum period prior to entering the professional labour market, although this may not apply to the many undergraduate students who have already worked in jobs during their degree programmes, albeit not generally full-time or permanent. Erasmus can hence be used to provide a moratorium period to escape the imminent demands of the workplace. While for younger students it may be a break from an existing work-study routine, for those who participate in Erasmus during the final year of their university course, it can be more of a last chance to have some fun. As one Polish student describes it:

> Year 2016. Last, fourth term of MA course. Instead of writing my Master thesis, I decided to leave. I am departing to feel the student climate for the 'last' time. (Ola, Polish student in Italy)

We can see in this account that Erasmus may also mark a point of departure and a goodbye to youthfulness rather than its continuance,

providing one explanation as to why stays can be looked back upon with fondness and nostalgia. It may therefore be that the end of the exchange visit marks the closure of the youth phase and the arrival at the next point in the life course.

A Comfortable Place of Learning

Prior research on the adaptation of Erasmus students to their new environment has suggested that a comfortable situation for learning incorporates a degree of challenge, but remaining a space that is perceived as safe and free from high levels of stress (Krzaklewska and Skórska 2013). Erasmus is in fact designed to be such an environment for the young traveller, tailored to meet the needs of this age group and allowing them to experiment as youth while exploring learning possibilities and considering professional pathways. In regard to the element of challenge, the act of leaving the sending country in itself is viewed as an act of bravery, with such students viewed as courageous by ESN due to taking the chance to move abroad. Such bravery can however be questioned by students themselves. This may be due to the European educational system having become somewhat homogenized, with travel between different institutions now routine. For this reason, while students stress there are different habits and ways of doing things in each institution, an exchange visit does not necessarily bring about a dramatic shift in academic culture.

Another reason for a lack of dislocation relates to prior experience of mobility. While it may be that an Erasmus exchange is the first time a student has spent an extended period in another country or travelled abroad for reasons other than holidays or meeting with relatives, it may also be the case that a significant amount of mobility capital is possessed prior to departure. This may be inherited from family members with prior experience of living in other countries, something gained from insights offered by friends who have travelled abroad or personal experience. International travel for many starts at a young age, even prior to

going to university, and has become a regular feature of life by the time a first Erasmus exchange comes along. The magnitude of the dislocation may also be relatively small in terms of distance. Many Erasmus visits are made to relatively close at hand destinations; for example, movement between Spain and Portugal (Cairns 2017). That most Erasmus movement among undergraduates takes place within Europe provides an additional layer of comfort. Life may be different abroad, but it is not necessarily unfamiliar.

Another important source of familiarity made reference to in the previous chapter, and a theme that will be expanded in the next chapter, is the ability to move abroad with friends or other students from similar backgrounds. While exchanges are generally thought of as being individual experiences, this is not always the case. Moving abroad with existing friends can help lower the cost of stay abroad through having shared accommodation and provide more practical reassurance.

> *Do you think it was brave, if you think about it now?*
> I think it would have been braver if we didn't do it like the two of us together. […] It was not brave […]. I mean, it's still Europe, but at any moment we could back home. If it was a complete disaster, we could back home. Of course, we would have to give the money back, but, so what? […] I think I never felt terrified because at any moment I could have gone home, it's ok. (Hannah, German student in Poland)

This position of seeking a challenge does not mean that students do not want to be supported by their host institutions or an organisation such as ESN. On the contrary, when hardship and difficulties are encountered, they wish to have these matters resolved, particularly when they get sick and are in need of medical assistance. What this implies is that the host institution provides a basic safety net function but with a considerable degree of leeway in regard to letting people solve their own problems, in some way taking the place of parents who may fulfil such a role in the home country.

Conclusion

Learning for Erasmus students is a multi-spatial experience that incorporates formal education at the host university and, ideally, informal intercultural encounters within the host country, predominantly with other foreign exchange students, and a supportive role played by academic staff and agencies such as ESN. The learning process is also linked to wider developments taking place during the youth phase of the life course, stressing not only interculturality but also preparation for the graduate labour market. The learning that takes place during Erasmus is also appreciated by students as a break from their normal routines within tertiary education, offering a brief moratorium period prior to the onset of full adulthood as well as opportunities to make a positive contribution to society via civic engagement. That this experience is voluntary also means that we can expect Erasmus exchange students to be open to new experiences and highly motivated to make their stays abroad a success. The non-mandatory nature of Erasmus participation is therefore one of its hidden strengths and this status needs to be maintained (see Alfranseder et al. 2012).

We might still want to ask how the learning experience of students might be improved. Some students have suggested to us that they should have made more preparation before actually leaving. It is therefore important that prospective exchangees learn from the experience of former Erasmus students, both in regard to the educational aspect of the exchange and extracurricular activities.

> It's a good thing to think about Erasmus, the adventure and to be able to relax, but before going, make some plans. Try to make use of that time the best you can. Because for me I cannot go to any other Erasmus, I mean, I finished my Masters, I don't think I will go to PhD, at least not yet, so try to make a plan that will help you make the best out of your experience. (Mira, Serbian Erasmus student in Germany)

While this is one way to utilize the exchange in order to achieve diverse aims, this philosophy is not one most students necessarily agree with. There is in fact a strong emphasis on spontaneity in a stay abroad: being

open towards new opportunities, exploring, catching up with new people and realising emerging ideas. While the first perspective plays strongly into the agenda of seeing youth as a time for preparation for adulthood, with emphasis on professional life, the second is more attuned with the 'youthfulness' agenda of Erasmus. As we have shown in this chapter, both these dimensions co-exist in the Erasmus programme and it seems that balancing these twin aims is the critical task facing exchange students today.

Notes

1. The term 'learning mobility' is typically used among European youth policymakers and stakeholders to describe non-formal learning experiences abroad (Devlin et al. 2018). Nevertheless, it was designed to describe both formal and non-formal experiences, as defined by the European Platform for Learning Mobility (see Chap. 8).
2. The data for this chapter includes two focus groups conducted with ESN volunteers that take pastoral care of Erasmus students (1 international group of 10 members, and a second Polish group of 16 members), alongside content analysis of 45 narrative accounts from Polish students who participated in exchanges on Erasmusblog.pl, and nine interviews with Erasmus alumni conducted in Germany and in Poland, with data collected in 2017.
3. In the 2005 evaluation study (Krzaklewska and Krupnik 2005), it was found that only seven per cent of Erasmus students did volunteer work abroad, with this low level of involvement in civic initiatives characteristic of an Erasmus stay at this time. It has also been suggested in subsequent research that Erasmus students are traditionally even less active during their Erasmus stays than in their home countries (Wood 2013).
4. For more information on SocialErasmus, see: https://socialerasmus.esn. org

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6

Erasmus Conviviality

The memories of an Erasmus visit can include thoughts of the amazing company provided by other Erasmus students and foreign friends. The sheer intensity of the experience, with frequent contact between exchange visit participants, is often mentioned by Erasmus alumni as a defining feature of the social dimension of the programme. That these students move abroad for a sustained period and concurrently with other students from a range of different countries seems to magnify the impact exchanges have on their lives, and a shared sense of adventure helps forge bonds between people. However, there is also individual level change, with stays abroad having a lasting emotional impact, extending to a rethinking of one's identity (Tsoukalas 2008). These are just some of the most prominent aspects of Erasmus as a social experience, a theme that we will explore in this chapter focusing on the value of international conviviality.

The strength of intra-Erasmus student bonding explains why participants often make reference to the idea of there being an 'Erasmus family', a means of putting into words an extraordinary level of mutual

trust, making them close to other members of the group and distinct from local students in the host institution. However, in contrast, some Erasmus students prefer to aim towards making contacts with the host community, purposefully avoiding what we will refer to as the 'Erasmus bubble.' This desire can be motivated by the fact that they would like to learn more about the local culture, practice their foreign language skills, or simply gain a better appreciation of how other people live. In the course of our discussion, we will look at both approaches, exposing a kind of tension within Erasmus conviviality, particularly among undergraduate exchange students who move abroad for a semester or more.

Many prior studies have looked at this issue in an attempt to appreciate the identity ramifications of the intensive buddy relationships formed between Erasmus students, with identification with other Europeans one possible consequence of an exchange visit, to the extent of seeing the programme as a means of making a specific kind of new European citizen. The creation of an international network is an important factor in this process, with transnational networks identified as a means of strengthening identification with Europe (Mitchell 2013). Analysis of international encounters also brings to light the significance of intercultural encounters within these networks (de Federico de la Rúa 2008). Therefore rather than meetings between students from different backgrounds being seen as constituting a kind of culture shock, a high degree of homogenization within the student exchange experience effectively softens the blow of the country shift, something perhaps unique to student mobility in the European Union, enabled by the common ground created by shared membership of the same geopolitical community. Recognition shared by European citizens of different nationalities explains why a 'bubble' atmosphere surrounds the student visitor when he or she moves to a new country, a place within which intercultural encounters take place, usually in the English language, between people of a similar age, more or less equal socio-economic status and similar feelings towards Europe and the EU.

Making Erasmus Friends

In explaining how the 'Erasmus bubble' is formed, we must first define the basic context within which exchanges take place. Focusing on the most 'traditional' aspect of the programme, undergraduate exchange visits to foreign universities, we can see that there are many common features beyond a shared interest in Europe and similar socio-demographic characteristics. One of these aspects concerns the journey itself. While instances were reported in Chap. 4 of friends travelling together, the more common scenario is moving abroad by oneself. That students generally travel alone rather than with a partner or family members encourages them to seek out new friends and acquaintances in their immediate environment, which means other Erasmus students.

Meeting new friends thus becomes an integral part of the Erasmus exchange experience, and these peers will come to have instrumental value during the course of a visit as a source of support and a point of reference in the internationalized learning experience (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, p. 87; see also Boomans et al. 2008).[1] These networks are likely to be small but, as we intimated earlier, intensive and somewhat insular. Studies tend to confirm the fact that exchange students generally interact with other international students, as indeed does our own research on this topic, making it difficult for them to make contacts of equivalent intensity outside this circle or even with people from nationalities other than one's own, whether be this a group of Italians in Spain sticking together or Polish students in Germany (Van Mol and Michielsen 2014).

Erasmus friends constitute in themselves sources of entertainment, identification, support and learning (Krzaklewska 2008). These points of reference were identified out of semantic analysis of material that described the nature of an Erasmus stay gathered on the occasion of the 20 year anniversary of the Erasmus Programme. Even if this analysis is now over ten years old, judging by observation of how Erasmus is functioning among incoming students in our universities the meaning of such internal student networks does not seem to have changed significantly. Conviviality still matters. And other studies using qualitative

data confirm the idea of there being Erasmus communities across Europe comprised of optimistic and emotionally-charged students who inhabit a learning habitus defined by intercultural contact (de Federico de la Rúa 2008).

Looking now at our own evidence, this includes not only assessment of material published online and accounts gathered from Erasmus Student Network volunteers during 2017, some of which we discussed in Chap. 5, but also interviews with undergraduate students who have recently participated in exchanges. Specifically, we are able to draw on qualitative material gathered for the purposes of informing this book in Poland and Germany, also in 2017, from which we can identify some of the key features of Erasmus conviviality.

A Diverse and Joyful Community

An initial reflection concerns the idea of 'community' itself, characterized in the case of Erasmus by diversity and being full of energy and happiness. One of our female Polish interviewees, who studied in Austria, was able to describe this positivity aspect of Erasmus, stressing that it is impossible to be bored in such an energetic and stimulating peer group:

> There was no place for boredom—the companionship of other Erasmus students does not allow for it. People who come for the exchange are incredible, curious about everything, full of life, joy and energy. The energy that stems from it is not comparable to anything! (Alicja, female Polish Erasmus student)

This 'energy' is also observed by some of those who are outside the student group, such as certain ESN volunteers, who were able to underline what they had learn from incoming Erasmus students, including the importance of taking a very optimistic approach towards life:

> I learn from them how to enjoy life. And even if I have a lot of things to do, at university, work and ESN, I try to schedule this in such a way that I still have time to go out and relax […]. It is important to go out, play,

smile, and not work as robots. Thanks to Erasmus, they charge me with positive energy. (Focus group participant, Polish ESN volunteers)

The central notion here seems to be one of somehow adopting what might be termed a 'light-hearted' approach to life, directed at taking pleasure from living. It is also useful to observe the fact that this ESN volunteer admired how easily Erasmus students made contacts with new people, a process that he later compared to children in the playground. His intention, we think, was not to infantilize Erasmus students but rather to emphasize their positive and open attitudes, and lack of world-weary cynicism.

All in the Same Boat

For Erasmus students, the word 'friends' is not just used to describe intimate, affection-loaded relationships but also people who happened to be in the same Erasmus cohort. As one person describes it, they are 'all in the same boat' in regard to their social situation. By this he means that they are all foreigners and often have similar motivations for participating: to enjoy their stays abroad, travel around in the host country, meet new people and practice a foreign language. In looking at the passengers in this 'boat' it seems that there is a great deal of common ground. This can extend to having similar social or cultural interests, including a desire to travel and have a good time. Such commonalities help explain why Erasmus students make friends most easily with one other. But the difference between the Erasmus students' social situation and that of local students, who may be from a wider range of social backgrounds, conversely hinders the getting-to-know-you process outside the group. Such a division has implications for the programme in limiting the chances of integration with the local culture and its representatives, and can be further reinforced by the institutional set-up of the programme; for example, where there are separate classes for Erasmus students, special accommodation (including university dormitories) and Erasmus-only events to encourage inter-group intercultural contact.[2]

Similarity of social situation is nevertheless the factor that helps differences between Erasmus students disappear. Quite simply, these people know that they can basically trust one another, and some evidence goes so far as to assert that after the establishment of trust and solidarity within the group, the differences of nationality begin to disappear (de Federico de la Rúa 2008). This feeling is often expressed in students' narratives quite unconsciously. They are able to state that they are spending quite extensive amounts of time together doing what are usually very enjoyable activities—partying, meeting-up and travelling (see also Tsoukalas 2008)—but are less explicit about a change of national identity process. It is rather the feeling of Erasmus group solidary that comes to the fore, something that while no doubt appreciated by those inside, can be perceived by outsiders as cultish and exclusive.

Solidarity and Support

The issue of solidarity between students is a key element of Erasmus conviviality, one reason being the absence of other sources of mutual support during a stay abroad, such as family members or familiar friends back home. Other Erasmus students, despite being people who have only just met each other, come to fulfil this 'family' function, supporting each other in new social situations and helping to stop the emergence of feelings of isolation or loneliness (see also Bauwens et al. 2008). The Erasmus social group thereby comes to substitute other home-based networks, such as the family and friends, giving the incoming student an immediate point of reference and a pop-up emotional safety net.

Analysis of interviews with Polish Erasmus students has stressed the importance of knowledge and practical knowhow in this process (Krzaklewska and Skórska 2013). Quite often, stress associated with being in a new country is related to a lack of crucial information, especially in cases of medical assistance, transportation and general administrative matters. Students can therefore share what they have learnt within the group, whether this relates to the name of a good dentist, a reliable bank or the best internet service provider in the area. This latter point, relating to the internet, brings to mind another important issue in

managing Erasmus conviviality: access to digital technology. Studies are beginning to indicate that support can be received through the virtual presence of those left behind; for example, Kapela (2014) indicates that students use internet technologies (such as Skype) to overcome their longing for family or friends at home. And useful information about the host country can also be obtained from the internet before going abroad.

Although this can be useful, as implied from the previous discussion, it is local knowledge that is often what is most required; parents and old friends will not have the necessary knowhow. Human contact also matters. Erasmus students are looking for people with whom they can enjoy themselves *now*, for going out and sharing meals, as well as practical issues relating to studying, not to mention talking about personal matters with people of a similar age and social milieu (de Federico de la Rúa 2008, p. 4). And as mentioned in the previous chapter, the presence of ESN local sections also constitutes a source of near immediate institutional support.

Learning Within Erasmus Networks (Without Integration)

The descriptions of the stay illustrate, vividly, the international face of an Erasmus community. Significantly, this 'community' is not constituted in the manner of a social network or organisational ties grounded in the previous locality. Rather, it is defined by mobility, more specifically, the bringing together of a diverse range of individuals via mobility. What they share is this experience of spatial dislocation as well as the fact that they are co-residing within the same learning environment. This is now a site within which intercultural learning can take place, with each person being valued because of their possession of a set of national or regional cultural traits that the other group members do not have.

> For me Erasmus is most of all people. People who come from different corners of the world that have their own traditions or customs. Spending time with them, I learnt to see the world differently. It may sound banal, but it was like this. We were a big team, we spent time together, ate meals

together, jogged, in short, lived, as friends. During Erasmus there is no me, there is always 'us'. Erasmus develops your soft skills and teaches you collaboration. (Anna, Polish student in Italy)

Erasmus students such as Anna, cited above, therefore attribute the potential for formal and informal learning experiences to living in international circles. The students that they meet from other countries, even if in many ways 'similar', constitute to them a series of manageable challenges in the 'getting to know you' process and little learning experiences within everyday life events. In doing so, they can become more open towards one another on an incremental basis during the course of the exchange.

The most important aspect of my Erasmus was the people, Spanish people enjoying life no matter what age or circumstances, as well as all incoming students […] Italians, Germans, French and of course Poles […] and even Americans or Mexicans. Each of these nations have a different culture and those differences sometimes caused conflicts, because how are you to understand the Italian or Spanish person who arrives without feeling at all guilty to the meeting at 11 pm, even though we scheduled it at nine? We need to change our attitude, and it reveals to us that we need to take pleasure from life without looking all the time at the watch. (Kasia, Polish student in Spain)

Intercultural learning among Erasmus students in their own circles has also been reported in other studies (e.g. Krzaklewska and Skórska 2013). This work confirms that for intercultural learning to take place, there is no actual need to reach out to the community of local students. Learning can take place within Erasmus networks that are secure and do not generate too much stress for those inside. Including 'outsiders' would only disrupt the continuity.[3]

Moving abroad without integrating into the local community provides another justification for using the 'bubble' metaphor, implying that as well as being supported by internal cohesion, outside influences are effectively shut-out. Lest we sound too harsh, this does not mean that Erasmus students cannot or do not want to meet with locals, only that their use-

fulness is lesser compared to those within the international student habitus. This situation is effectively summarized by one of our German Erasmus students as follows:

> You live in a bubble abroad, in an international bubble, so you just have a few contacts with the domestic students […]. Erasmus students are not systematically integrated in the university abroad, let's say like this. And this was for sure the same situation in Budapest, they had the buddy programme, which was organised by the domestic students […] most of the guys just wanted to have drinking events […] and they try to do something cultural, which was also like visiting other cities in Hungary […]. So there were not so many Hungarian students taking part in those events [but] those [non-Erasmus international] students [who are at the university] were very interested in the exchange with the Erasmus students. (Hans, German student in Hungary)

Here we have some very obvious reasons for not including local students in one's plans. Presumably they do not have a high level of interest in 'visiting other cities in Hungary' and it may also be that they are not so keen on international student 'drinking events'.[4] We do however have an interesting admission that non-Erasmus international students might be more convivial than locals.

This is a theme expanded upon by other interviewees, from whom we have a number of examples of successful social integration between Erasmus students and international student peers from other global regions.

> When it comes to the company, in my case I happened to go to the course with 45 per cent of French and 50 per cent of Indians, three Chinese and me, one Polish girl, so it was really international. It did not hinder beautiful friendships. It is important not to close yourself to those people you would think are distant culturally, because different does not mean worse. The students from far away countries can become very close to you and you will remember them in Erasmus. Thanks to them, you will learn many interesting things. (Aga, Polish female student in France)

This is a very welcome reminder that while the prospects for integrating locally may be limited, there is potential for other lines of international conviviality to emerge. While we were not able to cover the

Erasmus Mundus programme in this book, that this part of Erasmus integrates global students creates more scope for this kind of outreach activity. We can therefore conclude this section of our discussion with a relatively upbeat assessment of the value of international student conviviality.

The Erasmus Bubble

In the second half of this chapter, we will take a closer look at what has been termed the 'Erasmus bubble', referring to the learning habitus within which exchange students reside. While there are negative connotations associated with the term, implying a degree of insularity and artificiality, it is not our intention to use 'Erasmus bubble' in a pejorative sense. This is not in fact a term of our own choosing but is rather a reflection of the language used by Erasmus students to describe how being in an international learning environment feels to them. We will however consider some of the negative aspects of this arrangement, or at least certain limitations, later in this discussion. Before doing so, we will take a closer look at how the bubble is created, emphasizing once again the importance of international student conviviality.

Creating an Erasmus Bubble

In identifying the conditions that are conducive to the creation of an Erasmus bubble, some factors should be self-evident. Living in shared or common accommodation is an important consideration, as are the existence of courses tailored to meet the specific needs of Erasmus students, typically in the medium of the English language. Shared time also matters. Being in close proximity can lead to bonding, something that ESN volunteers are able to confirm.

> We get dormitories for international students, and they are people from different cultures, and then you really need to respect other people, but you are living together. […] they have classes together. They are forced to be together. (ESN international focus group)

The accommodation issue, we should add, can be one of the biggest challenges for exchange students should universities not provide enough space in dormitories. In some countries, recourse must be made to private dwellings that may be of a different standard compared to what students are accustomed to or are quite expensive, especially when travelling alone, and perhaps in areas with poor public transport infrastructure. University residences therefore provide a means of avoiding such complications while creating the opportunity for more intense intra-student socialization, particularly if the international visitors are housed together. As one student explained:

> The only option one has is to be accommodated in a dormitory next to the university. All the Erasmus students live on the ground floor and the regular students above us. […] each of us share a kitchen and bathroom with other foreign students. This was actually quite a good thing, otherwise I would never have had a chance to teach a mate from Korea how to make Pierogi, or I would never experience the smell of burnt sesame oil in the October afternoon. So we all live together and we do not even need cell phones. (Jakub, Polish student in Austria)

The fact of living together makes it easier for students to make contact with one another, but also places a physical boundary between foreign and local students. This helps explain why the Erasmus bubble can become denuded of local influence:

> On my floor, there were mostly foreigners, from Indonesia, South Korea or Turkey. We spent much time together—cooking together, playing cards in the evening or doing a barbecue on the roof. (Wojtek, Polish student in Germany)

Another familiar situation is an Erasmus experience in a small town, with a regional university and perhaps only a handful of exchange students. The unique atmosphere of such settings is stressed by those who chose to undertake such an experience as having a bearing upon the construction of a peer group. Particular emphasis is placed upon the benefits of being in a place where they have the impression that they know every-

one within the locality, making it easier to feel at home, and to be regularly able to connect with new acquaintances around the university or town:

> In Rijeka, on exchange we are around 50 persons now. So for some, you can seem really strange and maybe negative. But because we are not so many, we all know each other. […] this is the huge advantage of small universities or towns. Thanks to this you can know each other better, spend more time together and organize something more easily. (Natalia, Polish student in Croatia)

The Erasmus presence also impacts on a place's geography: there are particular settings, especially bars, which come to be associated with Erasmus, even called 'the Erasmus pub' among local residents. These places constitute hospitable points on the map for exchange students that ease the process of socializing. For example, two students mentioned the Erasmus corner in Lisbon:

> The most famous place is Bairro Alto, in which there is Erasmus Corner! This is a place which every students knows. (Julia and Justyna, two Polish female students in Portugal)

Last but not least, we need to stress the role of ESN in the creation of international student networks. As we discussed in Chap. 5, the organisation helps maintain a space for informal learning while socializing, and is particularly important at the start of a stay abroad, playing an important role in the orientation process. In practice, this involves providing students with necessary information about the university and place, an introduction to the ESN organisation and providing spaces in which incoming students can meet each other:

> During the orientation day, our 30-person student group from abroad had a chance to meet each other and the local ESN section of Dortmund, which many times later organized diverse activities for students. The first day the mentors organised a visit to the football stadium of Borussia Dortmund, the pride of the city. This group also organised events and parties, we did not have time to get bored. (Piotr, Polish student in Germany)

As the quote above underlines, many students when arriving in a foreign country are provided with support from a local buddy or mentor, a student or volunteer who provides them with information on arrival (or even before arrival through the internet). These mentors, as many Erasmus participants stress, play a very significant role during these early stages. They basically mediate between the members of the international circle and a local community, as well as the host university to whom they may be affiliated.

Outside the Bubble?

Even if the popular image of the stay abroad is one of the Erasmus group living within a bubble-like learning environment, not all students enjoy or desire such an immediate and tight feeling of community. Some in fact purposefully avoid being part of the Erasmus mainstream while others miss out on the experience due to a lack of significant others or suitable facilities at the host institution; for example, those who do not live in shared accommodation or with courses tailored to their needs. While the latter scenario relates largely to the limited popularity of certain destinations, one of the main reasons for what might be termed 'self-exclusion' is having a strong orientation towards academic life rather than being focused on the social dimension of Erasmus. Such a situation is described by a Serbian exchange student in Germany, Mira, who was particularly concerned with the fact that she was the first person to go on an Erasmus exchange from her university and felt she needed to set a good precedent:

> For me it was more like the emancipation […] but for the rest of the guys there, classic Erasmus students, it was very much about parties, going out, meeting new people, and travelling. […] Another difference between me and other Serbian people is the fact that we were very good students before […] the top from our faculty, and so we were very much into the academic part, and also we tried to behave as much as we could, because we felt like we were representing our country, representing the faculty.

Nevertheless, she ended up creating another kind of 'bubble', not comprised of international students from unfamiliar countries but rather with regional contacts; in this case, people from the ex-Yugoslavian countries.

> Well, unfortunately, usually when you say 'the Erasmus bubble' you mean, Italian or Spanish students who are always together; they are only befriending the Erasmus students who are coming from their own country. There are multiple reasons for this. The biggest one is because of the language barrier, and it's easier then to talk to people who speak their language. Then there are some cultural differences, and then I think it just starts, you know, it's natural to just stick to people from your own country, and then it just goes on like that for the whole duration of your Erasmus, which was the case with our 'ex-Yu' bubble. We spoke the same language, very similar cultures and then, you know, it was easier to just be friends with them.

This kind of arrangement is obviously a concern and can be considered a threat to the emergence of interculturality, since there is no prospect of this emerging through forming bonds with people from culturally similar backgrounds. However due to the large numbers of students from certain countries within Erasmus (see Chap. 1), this is perhaps inevitable. For this reason, it is imperative that the programme become more inclusive in respect to national and regional background, and those from the core countries be distributed more widely between countries and institutions.

Another reason for distancing oneself from the Erasmus community is the fact of doing an exchange for a second time (or more). Such students have already passed through the experience of intensive socializing in living in an international learning community, and it seems that this experience can only happen once. As a German student, Hannah, told us in the course of an interview, the euphoria of participating in an Erasmus community is specific to students who are abroad for the first time. She distanced herself from this on subsequent exchange visits, but admits that she went through the process during her first Erasmus:

> […] because a lot of them [other Erasmus students] apparently hadn't been abroad before, for them it was all like, 'oh, we are now an international family and we're going to be friends forever'. And I already had that in Berlin, my friend already had that in Iceland, and we already knew how it

would turn-out. […] at the end you lose contact with most of those people and we just really didn't feel like getting involved all that much […] we didn't want to plunge into this, 'oh, we are an international family' thing […]. We did some things with some other Erasmus students of course, but we didn't participate in the whole big Erasmus parties.

Such an observation is interesting, coming as it does from someone who has had a long history of Erasmus participation, and raises the question as to the efficacy of allowing students to participate in multiple Erasmus visits, or indeed, the wisdom of including anyone who has a substantial personal history of mobility. Might it not be better to focus only on those who lack such experience? This is obviously a matter for policymakers to decide.

Looking now at another related issue, that of forming bonds with people outside the Erasmus group, some students demonstrated that they had actual intentions to reach to the local community but it was not as easy as it seemed, lacking the more spontaneous or easier contacts that could be made with other exchange students. In the story below, a German former Erasmus student describes how her efforts to avoid the Erasmus community in Estonia failed.

I decided to not live in the student house from uni and to go to find an apartment for myself […]. Because I knew there would only be Erasmus students and I didn't want to live only with Erasmus students, but in the end I ended up in an apartment in the old town [with other foreigners]. So I was surrounded with a lot of Erasmus students in the end. […]

Ok. How do you locate yourself within this community of Erasmus?

Well, at the beginning I would have said that I didn't want any contact with any Erasmus students and I would also say that I tried in Tallinn not to go around with Erasmus students, but then at the same time, I felt that it was really random and not fair to not talk to people that I actually like and actually I can connect to in a way. I tried with Estonian people to connect and didn't […]. I think also because it was random people I met somehow and met to have a coffee, it just didn't click. And I was like: why would I now try so hard to be friends with someone when I don't have any connections.

Just because they are Estonian and not Erasmus?

> Yes, exactly, so I was like, it's really stupid and also a way of using nationality in a weird way, and I didn't like to be that strong about 'now I need to talk to Estonian people'.

As other studies have indicated (e.g. Van Mol and Michielsen 2014), local students are often not willing to extend their social networks to Erasmus students due to the temporary nature of their stays at the host university and their different lifestyle. From this point of view, we can see that there might be a reluctance on the part of local students to accept Erasmus visitors within their social circles, constituting another reason why incoming students might find themselves reliant upon one another.

Conclusion: Towards an Imagined Community of Erasmus?

The preceding discussion raises many important question in regard to the value of conviviality within the Erasmus programme, concentrating on the social dimension of undergraduate exchanges. From a positive point of view, we can see that incoming students are able to help and support one another, and are able to avoid a culture shock situation through bonding with other people from similar backgrounds and in the same educational situation. Less encouraging is the apparent insularity of the group and its limited connection with the host society and its citizens, one reason being the degree of distinction being part of Erasmus bestows upon a student. In consequence, what may emerge is a quite limited and fragile form of interculturality, with arguably a lack of a real appreciation of life in other EU countries.

Regardless, we do have some indications that lasting bonds between people from different societies can be made. The accounts we have examined provide a few indications that at least some friendship ties survive post-exchange; for example:

> The best part of Erasmus is the people, without whom this would not be the same. Even if already seven months have passed since my return, I still keep in contact with many of them, I already participated in one reunion and the next one is in March. (Stanisław, Polish student in Germany)

Creating durable ties from Erasmus is an important consideration in regard to the European integration dimension of the programme. What this involves is a transformation of once strong ties into weaker links. These links may be mediated by virtual communication and occasional reunions, leading to the making of a sort of imagined community of Erasmus alumni. It is not just the 'Erasmus people I studied with' who are important but also the Erasmus community, perhaps extending to international students in general. Former friends take on a kind of symbolic function, as an aide memoire in regard to the feeling of being in an internationalized learning habitus.

We can also speculate about the identity ramifications of Erasmus. These short stays abroad and the establishment of international networks can be important in the whole process of identification with Europe (Ambrosi 2013; Krupnik and Krzaklewska 2013). Research on this issue however tends to be inconclusive, one problem being that those who participate in student mobility programmes may already feel somewhat European before going abroad (Sigalas 2010). This re-emphasizes the need to consider who is participating, and to make sure that students who lack intercultural competencies are included in the programme so that they might gain a strong alignment with Europe. Clearly, having large numbers of students pre-loaded with 'Europeanism' renders the European identity ambitions of the programme inert, and this should not be allowed to happen.

Notes

1. One study found that in regard to fellow Erasmus friends, around half of a group of student respondents had a network of between six and 20 people, with around a quarter between 21 and 50 fellow students while they may only get to know between one and five local students or other host nation inhabitants (Bauwens et al. 2008).
2. This fact has also been explored in some psychological theories, which state that people who are in closer contact with one another and can acquire information about each other in a less costly manner interact more easily (Schutte and Light 1987).

3. This practical arrangement also helps take Erasmus mobility out of the broader framework of intra-European migration, which would require a deeper involvement with local communities and customs. Therefore, there is less risk of later life migration to the host society taking place when one's integration within the country is limited.

4. That not all students are interested in 'drinking events' is another issue, although it is noticeably that Erasmus support organisations such as ESN receive patronage from drinks companies: for example, the Pernod Ricard conglomerate recently confirmed a partnership to raise awareness of binge drinking. See https://esn.org/news/esn-and-pernod-ricard-partnership-renewal

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7

Erasmus and Citizenship

In this chapter, we focus on exploring topics related to the question of what it means to be a citizen of the European Union and have an awareness of what the European Commission terms the 'European project' and 'European values', with specific emphasis on the role of intra-European youth mobility in supporting both these aspects of European society. This will involve specific recognition of the importance of 'citizenship' in the processes of European state-building and fostering social cohesion within nation states. While engaging with 'citizenship' is not a new development in European Youth Policy, Erasmus provides a novel means of linking EU citizens with the civil sphere of different societies, continuing an existing trend within the policy fields of education, training and youth in general, extending to intra-European and, increasingly, extra-European cooperation (European Commission 2017). The Erasmus+ framework can in particular be viewed as more than a student mobility platform, becoming a means of teaching young people from a broad range of social backgrounds about what it means to be a citizen of Europe, and indeed the world.

While there are various examples of this international enhancement of citizenship process in Erasmus+, including the Erasmus Mundus Programme which fosters co-operation between higher education institutions from inside and outside the EU through hosting joint Masters degrees, our main focus in this chapter relates to the experiences of young people who have participated in mobility projects that previously formed part of the *Youth in Action* programme, which ran from 2007 to 2013, but are now nested inside the Erasmus fold. This focus provides us with the opportunity to acknowledge the fact that 'Erasmus+' signifies more than increased numbers of young people undertaking mobility but also an extension of the Erasmus 'brand' to fields previously outside the scope of the programme. This has been achieved through a literal annexation of parallel EU-supported initiatives, enabling Erasmus to potentially engage with a broader range of young people through short-duration mobility projects centred on issues that emphasize civic engagement.[1]

Youth in Action (hereafter YiA) aimed to inspire active citizenship, solidarity and tolerance, and involve young people in shaping the future of the EU, and presumably the European institutions hope this work can continue within the new Erasmus format. The target group for these actions is mostly young people aged between 13 and 30 years old, also involving youth workers and civil society organisations, who are supported through training, networking and intercultural dialogue. We can therefore see the attraction of mobility projects engaging with these themes for Erasmus+, providing a means through which EU policymakers can conjoin Erasmus mobility with social consciousness and, by extension, address problems such as youth unemployment, politically apathy and the integration of migrants into European society (European Commission 2017).

Theorising Citizenship

The remainder of this chapter acknowledges the significance of having an expanded form of Erasmus that has an integral social agenda, with specific emphasis on the role of Erasmus+ in encouraging active citizenship. In doing so, we look at how this is happening in the Eastern

European member states, and the value of learning mobility actions. But before doing so, we need to explain exactly what is meant by 'active citizenship' in youth policy for the benefit of readers not familiar with this term.

Within the EU, there has been strong emphasis on active citizenship, with the term appearing in EU policy discourse as long ago as the Lisbon strategy of 2000 (European Parliament 2000), although interest in this issue among social scientists pre-dates even the existence of the EU (e.g. Marshall 1950). Despite this longevity of usage, no singular way of defining 'active citizenship' has emerged. It is in fact an amorphous term, used in numerous ways and in different contexts, but with a key element being the idea of participation in society. This in itself relates to various forms of participation: for example, being active in the civil sphere and within communities and/or political life, thus acting in the interests of democracy, with this involvement encompassing both formal institutional actions and involvement with more informal political activities and less well-established organisations (Mascherini et al. 2009).

In terms of its value, active citizenship is widely recognized in European youth policy as representing a common good as well as being an imaginative way of enabling young citizens to meaningfully participate in societies. Youth sociologists also stress its importance within processes such as the transition to adulthood; in effect, helping young people grow-up into conscientious citizens. In doing so, active citizenship can be a less self-conscious manner of being politically active that reflects a move away from 'state-based politics or state-oriented activism' (Harris et al. 2010, p. 11). It is therefore a diversified mode of participation, extending beyond the confines of membership of political parties, electoral participation or traditional campaigning. In practice, this may entail young people practicing politics through what appear to be relatively unconventional means, especially via the internet, becoming involved in decision-making at municipal, national and European levels through online platforms or involvement in formal and informal structures such as youth parliaments or community development projects.

At a theoretical level, the rise in prominence of the idea of active citizenship at European policy level can be linked to broader processes of change in post-industrial societies: a move away, in democracies, from

the idea of the dutiful citizen and towards an actualizing citizen model, favouring loosely connected forms of activism addressing issues that reflect personal as well as political values. The dutiful citizen model also emphasizes obligations to participate in civic society organisations alongside the expression of interests through involvement in political parties, implying a certain amount of passivity towards authority, an arrangement that may not necessarily appeal to younger citizens who want to express their own views. There is hence a certain tension within an actualizing citizenship model that underlines a diminished sense of obligation to formal structures of governance and a higher sense of individual purpose in enacting citizenship. We can also observe a degree of detachment from formal political structures due to a favouring of informal networks and community-based action that may extend to mistrust towards establishment media and politicians (Bennett 2008, pp. 13–14).

We can also interpret active citizenship as a manifestation of what has been termed the self-actualizing citizen. This interpretation is linked to the work of Amnå and Ekman (2013) who offer the concept of 'standby citizens', relating to seemingly passive youth who stay alert and get informed about politics by importing political issues into everyday life contexts, being willing and able to participate if needed. Amnå (2013, p. 19) further specifies that standby citizens might become overtly active, and when they do, this can stem from a sense of duty, the importance of the issues at stake, being asked to join in, the feeling of being able to make a difference, perceptions of efficacy or the assumption the activity will work and be meaningful. In general, we can say that there should be a feeling that the activity adds to life-satisfaction and self-realization, but with a certain amount of discernment evident in making decisions about involvement. Standby citizens are therefore not necessarily hostile towards (formal) politics, nor politically inactive in the rest of their lives, but rather, they are reflexive about how and when to engage.

The extent to which this theoretical idea is actually being realized within youth populations is a matter of some debate, meaning that we should not allow the popularity of the idea of active citizenship among EU policymakers, and certain researchers, to lead us to conclude that civic engagement, extending to informal or new forms of political participation, is widespread within European youth populations. For example,

the results of a series of expert interviews conducted with policymakers in eight EU countries as part of a recent EU funded study found that while repeated references to young people's normative and dutiful participation were made by these interviewees, unconventional forms of political participation were not referred to at all (Amnå and Ivarsson 2016).[2]

Active Citizenship in Estonia

Contemplation of the theoretical context of this theme takes us to a position where we are ready to learn more about the realization of active citizenship, looking at opportunities to participate created by the existence of the Erasmus programme and, previously, the YiA initiative. In order to do so, we will use interview material conducted within the framework of *Research-Based Analysis of Erasmus+: Youth in Action* (RAY), which focused on assessing the impact of participating in mobility projects on young people's lives, with specific regard to growing perceptions of civic-mindedness and active citizenship. Examples of YiA projects include some initiatives mentioned elsewhere in the course of this book, especially youth exchanges centred on a particular social issue and involving brief stays abroad for groups of young people from a range of foreign countries. This extends to other areas such as youth democracy projects, training courses and the European Voluntary Service (EVS), the latter of which may involve individual actions. All these activities involve some form of mobility between EU member states, and occasionally neighbouring regions, with the criteria for funding eligibility provided in the YiA programme guide (European Commission 2012).[3]

Estonian *Youth in Action*

For the purposes of this chapter, we will use interview material gathered from young people in Estonia, although these accounts can be interpreted as representing the broader scenario of post-socialist Eastern Europe. At the outset, it is important to state that this regional context is rooted in the citizenship traditions and practices of former socialist

countries; a somewhat different scenario compared to other European nations. Behaviour and attitudes inherited from an authoritarian citizenship system, amplified by the negative effects of a major political and economic transition, demands additional attention (Allaste and Cairns 2016; see also Vukelic and Stanojevic 2012). Socialist citizenship patterns have been, by various agents, transmitted to younger generations who have no direct experience of living under a socialist regime and were not witness to its demise as a result of a civic awakening. Estonia, specifically, chose a path of radical neo-liberal economic and political reforms after regaining its independence, which led to the popularization of a success-oriented, materialistic and individualistic public discourse. Although recent years have seen something of a rise in civic engagement, the prevailing mentality is still very much success-oriented, with young people focused on individualistic and materialistic goals rather than caring about social issues or becoming activists in local communities.

The discussion that follows in the remainder of this chapter draws upon interviews with ten Erasmus/YiA mobility project participants. These interviews were conducted in two separate waves: before the core activities of a project had started and (at least) seven months after participation in the projects had ended. In regard to timeframe, the 'before project' interviews were conducted at the end of 2015 and in the first half of 2016, and 'after participation' interviews in November and December 2016. It should also be noted that unlike many participants in the undergraduate exchange programme (see Chaps. 5 and 6), the majority of these participants had no significant prior mobility experience and all except one were secondary school students, meaning that they are younger than the 'traditional Erasmus' cohort. As we shall see, these interviews provide insight into these young people's worldviews, the extent of their civic participation before their mobility experience and what happened afterwards. Using qualitative evidence, we can focus on what are regarded as some of the core European values, such as increased tolerance, as well as enhanced social skills, topics that are difficult to grasp via statistical soundbites published by the EU in its annual reports on Erasmus (see Chap. 1).

Becoming an Active Citizen

In Estonia, the dutiful citizen model we referred to previously has never actually reflected the typical 'political' behaviour of young people. So in contrast to many other EU countries, rather than looking at the replacement of one model of participation with another in Bennett's previously cited terms, we can discuss the emergence of a relatively original form of micro-level participation, something that might (or might not) replace a culture of passivity. We do however need to concede that the results of a recently completed EU funded study on youth participation did reveal that a group of multi-active young people does seem to exist in Estonia, at least in the two municipalities that formed the research sites for this research (Allaste et al. 2014). Neither, for that matter, are YiA project participants necessarily people who could ever be described as 'passive'. In fact, the interviewed young people who were civically active prior to their mobility project experience emphasized that it was more a case of new experiences encouraging them to participate more, or more intensely, and to take-on different or a wider range of responsibilities. Several interviewees also pointed out how they felt more encouragement to take a stand or speak-up for their beliefs than they had previously. This position is illustrated by the following extract from an 'after project' interview:

> Well, the project really did give me a lot of inspiration to go on because I met a lot of new people, who mostly had the same goals […]. Now I've been the president of the youth council for three months already […] and through that I can contribute more. I've gotten braver now […] and I say what I really think about things. (Kristi)[4]

Kristi is a good example of a young person who became more active and more focused about activism as a result of participating in a mobility project, although it needs to be said that she was not exactly passive beforehand. For this reason, it is difficult to evaluate the direct impact of a mobility project on civic engagement: it might be that the experience raised Kristi's self-esteem to such an extent that she felt able to run for the presidency of a youth council, but ultimately an interest in participation

was already there. In this sense, it may be that participating in mobility projects strengthens or channels an existing interest rather than creating an entirely new disposition.

It is however a general trend in Estonia that young people tend to distance themselves from formal politics as well as grassroots activism, and this rhetoric was also present in the 'before and after' interviews. Neither did involvement in a mobility project necessarily make everyone who participated more self-consciously active. For example, another interviewee, Kristina, admitted that in reality her level of participation stayed pretty much the same after the project she joined had finished, although she did point out that she now felt as if she had acquired a higher level of interest in social issues. For this reason, she now follows the media more diligently in regard to current affairs in Estonia and Europe. Therefore we can say that there are young people who start to think more intensely about the topics of democracy and active citizenship as a result of participating in a mobility project.

Citizenship Knowledge

One of the most important issues in learning active citizenship relates to the question of knowledge, extending to having an awareness of current events, an understanding of democracy and concern with civic, human and democratic rights. The topic of 'citizenship knowledge' is also strongly integrated into European policy discourse. For example, it was stated in the recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning that such knowledge is a pre-requisite for becoming an active citizen, something that starts with the:

> […] concepts of democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, and civil rights […]. It includes knowledge of contemporary events, as well as the main events and trends in national, European and world history. (European Parliament 2006 p. 17; annex, paragraph 6b)

This statement can be viewed as reflecting the assumption that active citizenship requires a degree of political literacy and basic knowledge of

the meaning of diversity and cultural heritage, as well as an understanding of the community a person lives in, knowledge of the political institutions that govern them, and the way they work, and thinking about how people might influence society (Hoskins and Crick 2008). On the basis of the interviews, we can identify signs of young people having been influenced by their mobility project experience in this respect, with the new knowledge gained often connected to the topic of the project. For example, if the main theme related to the environment issues, then increased knowledge about issues like sustainability was specifically mentioned.

> So that's what it is, like the experience, that I found out through that […] through the games and the role play I, like […] found out about the environment and the problems with it. I found out about what the different problems are called—what the terms are and all that. Maybe that was the most important thing. (Kersti)

In cases where democracy was one of the main topics of the project, informants spoke about acquiring new knowledge about different European communities and the workings of democracy. More prominently, they tended to arrive at a better understanding of cultural differences. This involved learning about other religions, cultures and diversity, knowledge that helped them to become more tolerant and in some cases, as exemplified in quotation below, a multiplier of this knowledge through sharing their insights with other people, for example, parents.

> My parents can be a bit crude when referring to people of other faiths, such as Muslims. Sure, it's not racism, but it's not polite. And now, after the project, it sounds wrong to me, because I have Muslim friends—from Turkey and England. Because the English ones actually visited us. They were Pakistanis living in England. And now, I try to avoid using crude words, and try to re-educate my parents. (Stanislav)

This is an obvious case of 'knowledge' generated within a mobility project being put to good use. We can also observe the value of mobility and a shift in spatial location during the knowledge acquisition process.

The Eastern European context matters in this respect, as the interviewee asserts that there is less understanding of different cultures or religions in Estonia compared to other European countries. In relatively homogeneous societies, encountering people from different background is still a new phenomenon and some people are not accustomed to living with this form of diversity.

One further related note arising from these interviews concerns the issue of 'territory'. In these narratives, the EU is not always the main point of reference. In fact, understandings of 'Europe' and the 'EU' were often blurred, with young people not always distinguishing between these two over-lapping entities. Others pointed out that Europe should not be defined through its borders but rather via a network of 'connections' and 'flows'. For example, Stanislav perceived 'Europe' through a prism of personal contacts, who included friends/volunteers from Germany and France who had visited him in Estonia. He also stated that even though he was technically at home in Estonia, he feels Russian, but after the Erasmus exchange he felt European when he travelled abroad and spoke English.

In regard to more specific knowledge fields, these young people were mostly unfamiliar with youth policy before their involvement with a project, and their understanding of over-arching aims and objectives remained vague even after the project experience. Rather than ideas and values, the interviewees tended to connect youth policy with networks and participation. As Katrin explained, 'I think that young people from different countries get together and then discuss different things'. Others were more hesitant when answering ('I don't know', 'I haven't thought about that'), although they had generally learnt more about the opportunities and advantages of the EU, mostly related to what is available within the framework of Erasmus+.

Citizenship Skills

The skills required for active citizenship relate to the ability to engage with others in the public domain, and to display solidarity and interest in solving social problems. These are prerequisites for constructive participation

in community activities and decision-making at all political levels: local, national and European (Hoskins and Crick 2008). One vital element is the fact that a person needs to be able to communicate effectively: to have the capacity to debate and actively listen. It is also important to have the ability to work with others in local and intercultural environments. On the basis of the interviews, participation in mobility projects provided experience for the development of such skills. For instance, practicing English helped overcome the language barrier in regard to contributing to debate at European level.

> I used to be afraid of communicating in a foreign language. If someone told me that they wanted me to speak in English, I wouldn't agree to do it. Now, thanks to regular language usage, my English has improved considerably. (Stanislav)

It should be emphasized that young people did not learn a language from scratch (including English) through their involvement in what was after all a relatively short-term project, the mobility phase of which may have lasted for little more than a week. It was more about the ability to practice and recognize existing, if under-utilized, skills. This is explained by Krisi as follows:

> What surprised me the most myself was that I worked up the courage to speak English […] the first time I talked about how I'm really scared of English […] of speaking English, but this encouraged me and I even applied to go to the US for next year. (Kristi)

Similar patterns also emerged concerning other communication skills and the ability to participate effectively in the project. Although these young people might have learned new skills through having an opportunity to practice these abilities in a 'safe' environment, becoming aware of and using strengths they already possessed was still noteworthy. As exemplified by Katrin's account, the ability to communicate effectively increased as a result of participating in a mobility project, during which she also learnt more about her own latent abilities and competences.

Well, definitely a lot of it was the courage to speak with foreigners in English, and I got up the courage to participate in different projects. And now I have this great experience and I can also direct others towards participating in projects. […] afterwards, I understood that I'm much better at some things than I thought before.

OK, what kind of things were these?

For example, communication and my writing skills. (Katrin)

As a relevant point for engaging effectively with others, interviewees also stressed that they had developed their teamwork and management skills. For example, Karin was often involved in her project's administrative activities and in organising games, and felt that her decision-making skills had grown, encouraging her to initiate other projects. She reported that after the mobility project experience she felt that preparing an activity plan and managing a project was not so hard to accomplish:

I think so, because like before I wasn't ready at all to deal with any projects, because it just seemed like so much work and responsibility. […] But like after this project, it just seems like less work […] and much easier—understanding it and doing it. (Karin)

As already mentioned, after participating in the project those who were already civically engaged were able to become even more active. And after they overcame their fears and improved language skills, their aims became even higher, with the perceived increased importance of participation becoming a source of motivation.

Umm, in some sense I'm definitely more active. […] It was so much fun that I'm going to participate more in things, because I just want to experience it again. […] I'm definitely ready to go vote […] if […] the terms are suitable for me and if the person has a good reputation, then I'll definitely vote for them, so that they would win. (Kersti)

Developing this theme, we can also observe that 'activated' people become involved in a range of community activities and different organisations, at the same time, and they often initiate actions themselves.

> I went to this organisation called *In the Name of Animals*, and now I'm a volunteer there and I've organised two […] protests in Tapa and Tartu against using animals in circuses, for example, thanks to […] that […] organisation […] now I also joined the youth section of the socialists, but I haven't had time to deal with that, because there's so much more to do and I recently also joined the *Estonian Union of Student Representations*, their public policy area. (Kristi)

We can hence observe a multiplication effect that embraces both volunteer activities and becoming involved with organisations concerned with political and civic engagement, although one limitation may be that there is insufficient time to participate in everything. It can also be argued that intercultural communication skills develop through increased tolerance and more open-mindedness towards people from other cultures, and that intercultural competence, referring to the ability to meaningfully interact with individuals from different backgrounds, facilitates communication at an international level.

> Now, basically, I'm not afraid of communicating with other people. I don't know, in the past, I wouldn't call it racism, but […] let's say […] if it was an Afro-American, I was afraid, because it was somebody different, or something like that. It's not like that anymore. Basically, they're people just like us. (Maria)

As exemplified in the above quotation from Maria, communication with people from different backgrounds became easier once there was a chance to have more experience of honing one's intercultural skills. Simply meeting people from different background and talking with them raised the potential for young people to overcome their fears, or to realize that any fears were unfounded, a situation partly related to the lack of opportunities for such encounters in a relatively homogenous Eastern European society like Estonia.

All in all, increased self-confidence as well as possessing a degree of curiosity helped spark the interviewees' interest in participation, volunteering, travelling and becoming acquainted with other cultures. In some cases, for example, with Maria, it was connected to a decision to get out

of the 'comfort zone' of her hometown and move to a place where she had more of a chance to achieve her goals. Also notable is the value of practicing skills such as foreign language fluency, something we might regard as a literal manifestation of intercultural competence. Also valued is voluntary work. Although already regarded as important before participating in a project, improved skills encouraged the interviewees to consider further placements, meaning that they are now planning to apply for different forms of voluntary work in other parts of the world.

Citizenship Attitudes

Citizenship attitudes can be interpreted as connoting a commitment to political trust, an interest in one's community and a wish to be a positive influence on society. Such attitudes also include respect for other cultures and an openness towards accepting differences of opinion (Hoskins and Crick 2008). For the interviewees, such attitudes came to be regarded as more important after the mobility project experience. They also confirmed that their interest in social issues, for example, in relation to the environment and the school system, had grown and that they noticed these topics more prominently when they popped up in public discussion.

> And I, like, notice it more on the news that there are environmental problems […] ozone holes and such—it's like I can watch and understand it better. Like what could be done so that there wouldn't be as much of it. (Kersti)

These young people were also more willing to participate in discussions on these topics, and these discussions sometimes gave them ideas for action. The quotation below could be interpreted in a broad sense as an example of how practical ideas come to be influenced by more active attitudes.

> We did talk a lot more about the environment, but we talked about organisations that bring people together […] and how anything could be solved

in the first place. […] I also got a few ideas about what I could do at my own school. […] over the next year I will try to initiate a project myself, so that the schools in our county would have rubbish bins that have three separate compartments, so that waste would be separated. (Kristi)

Participation was considered more important than it had been before the exchange visit took place. Interviewees also noticed the readiness of other young people and their enthusiasm for youth participation at a societal level.

I have started noticing more that young people want to participate too. […] I became a member of the Youth Council. And I've been participating more actively in all kinds of events. And the school student representation. And I started taking part in the newspaper. (Katrin)

After their positive experience in mobility projects, informants also started to make an impression on other young people, following the multiplier dynamic principle, thus spreading the impact of an Erasmus exchange beyond its original starting point. Some also shared their experiences with peers while attending joint events. It could be said that these young people had an increased feeling of responsibility towards others, exemplified by Kristi's experience:

I have actually managed to get quite a lot of young people to become more active and that is great. […] I felt that I was given some sort of responsibility for other young people too, to do something for them and organise something. (Kristi)

These young people also tended to feel more like European citizens after their participation in a project. This impression was influenced, for example, by knowing about the opportunities that the EU offers to youth from across its member states. They also believe that simply communicating with others and overcoming cultural differences helps establish a form of European identity, even if it is not connected to political attitudes. As Katrin puts it, 'Like, culturally I am more European, like I also consider other cultures and take an interest in them. But politically not so much'.

When it comes to attitudes towards the European institutions, young people's opinions were more polarized, although there was a clear pattern of increased trust.

> When things are good in Europe, for example, then the chances are greater that they'll be better in your country too. […] Maybe that European politics is the most important one. […] Europe, in my opinion, can do the most. So that like […] it has the most impact, so to say. So maybe I would be a candidate at the European level. (Kersti)

As a result of taking part in the project and an increased level of political participation, young people might therefore start to consider 'Europe' as more important and politically attractive.

> Since we are a part of the European Union, we get a lot of support from the European Union. […] I really like the European Parliament, since I've gotten more into politics myself then […] that has become more important for me too. (Kristi)

On the other hand, it can also be that learning more about European institutions makes young people more critical, for example, when they become aware of problems and limitations in its governance structures.

> So like that European Parliament, like they could make their decisions right away, not let the problems get too big. And then start blaming one another.
>   *What do you think, how does the European Union consider the interests of different states?*
>   Well, to me it seems that some states are not being taken into account. (Katrin)

One further, and more extreme position, is the belief that the EU, and democracy in general, is doomed, and the EU as one person put it 'will probably collapse' due to both internal and external issues. It is not exactly clear why such negative views emerged among a small number of the interviewees, but from these accounts as a whole we can deduce that there is no consensus of opinion in regard to the value of the European institu-

tions or their effectiveness in governing the EU. Therefore, while we can generally say that there is a positive attitude towards being a European citizen, and indeed towards participating in EU supported mobility projects within the Erasmus+ framework, this is not always matched by believing that there is a future for democracy at European level.

Citizenship Values

The forms of knowledge, skills and attitudes discussed above imply the existence of certain value orientations, nurtured by undertaking exchange visits. In regard to their constituency, as specified by Hoskins and Crick (2008), citizenship values include human rights, democracy, gender equality and sustainability, as well as valuing involvement as an active citizen. In most cases, democracy was already valued by the interviewees before the mobility project experience, and this position didn't change markedly afterwards. For example, for Maria, democracy is still about 'freedom of choice', 'no limitations', and 'the people'. She believes that people should be involved in political decision-making and attracted to active citizenship as their lives, and not just somebody else's, depend on it:

> I used to think that, about elections, when a person wants to vote, they vote, if not, they don't. I don't know, it's kind of stuck in my head, that you're the one who needs it, not somebody else, it's important for you. One way or another, your life also depends on it. (Maria)

After mobility, some young people started to value involvement as active citizens more than before. For example, for Karin the importance of participation increased, although she specified that participation is of most importance when the topic is of personal interest. Although politics was not discussed in her project, she confessed that there had been a slight growth of interest in civic engagement. She emphasizes equal rights in participation, considering democratic principles, the responsibility of protecting the environment for future generations and participating in public discussions.

> Umm […] I think that an active citizen should just like, raise their voice more and participate in discussions—about things that have to do with the

environment around you; and I have like participated in discussions that have to do with the environment that surrounds me, hah. (Karin)

The importance of being an active citizen, especially as a driver for possible social change, was more clearly acknowledged than before by another interviewee, Kadi, who also stressed the importance of working together to find solutions.

Has being an active citizen now become more important for you than it was before the project?
    It most definitely is more important! […] When I heard about the problems, about what's really going on in our lives, things that a lot of people don't even know about, then I understood that actually we should all do at least something, so that things would be good. Because you can't do everything alone. If every citizen started helping out with at least something, things would already be much better. (Kadi)

On the subject of elections, the interviewees tended to feel that every vote counts, a position that can be at least partly attributed to their mobility project experience. For example, Kristina had less positive attitudes towards political decision-making during the first interview before her involvement in a project, when she stated that people don't have a voice and important decisions are made independently at Parliament. However, she became more positive after the project experience.

One exceptional case demonstrated that it was also possible to stay cynical. For example, Sergei believed that many people don't fight for their rights because they are afraid to lose what they have, and those who are personally capable of changing things don't necessarily have the power to do so:

It seems to me that our society is similar to the one in *The Matrix*, and while there are reasonable people who understand what's happening now, how the world works, and consider it wrong, they lack the possibilities to change it. Well, because their rivals, these companies, are a lot more powerful. (Sergei)

But more generally the willingness to act as a result of considering something to be important increased, suggesting that a positive role had been played by participating in a mobility project, at least judging from the before and after interviews we have explored in this discussion. At the

very least, we can say that their activity level increased and an attempt was made to make a positive contribution to society: as Katrin puts it, 'I just can't sit around at home, I want to go out and get something done'.

Conclusions

In reaching conclusions about active citizenship and Erasmus, we are able to point out connections between defined competences, necessary for an individual to become viewed as an active citizen by European policymakers, and the experience of participating in a mobility project. What we have are illustrations of what can happen, rather than a confirmation of a process that will happen, since to make such a claim would require a level of evidence far beyond what is currently available. We are therefore confirming the possibility that active citizenship can be enhanced rather than stating that mobility projects are an effective means of making this happen.

Looking at other aspects of the accounts we have gathered, it may also be that a contribution is made to social inclusion, with a degree of personal agency being exercised in the process of becoming more determinedly active within the civic sphere. This is an important finding considering that, as we shall discover later in this book, stakeholder organisations who host mobility projects are not necessarily focused on documenting the personal development dimension of stays abroad, preferring to concentrate on the regulation of the quality of exchanges from an institutional perspective and introducing a 'business' mentality into mobility management (see Chap. 8). We can also point out a contrast with the experiences of undergraduate students explored in the preceding chapters, which were oriented around the enhancement of personal and professional competencies rather than just the former, although there are signs that undergraduates are now being encouraged to develop civic aptitudes through the work of agencies such as the Erasmus Student Network.

Another issue in need of deeper exploration concerns how the knowledge, skills and attitudes discussed during the course of the interviews is contributing to building 'cohesive and inclusive societies' and 'shaping the future of the European Union' (European Commission 2017). Considering the heterogeneous nature of the EU, how this might happen is likely to differ across countries. What makes Eastern European youth

experiences potentially different from their Western counterparts is their socio-historical context, including what may be more passive attitudes towards political participation and lower levels of civic engagement, a situation viewed as a legacy of the Soviet past and a more recent immersion in neoliberalism. However, judging by our accounts, young people who participate in mobility projects are already more active than young people in Estonia on average, meaning that we cannot really assess the impact of passivity since young people exhibiting such predispositions are unlikely to join a mobility project. How to appeal to politically passive and civically disinterested individuals therefore remains a challenge for the European institutions.

Perhaps because of their pre-existing conscientious backgrounds the interviewees, young people who did participate, expressed the opinion that a mobility project had been a worthwhile personal development experience; they had learned new things, gained an insight into different political practices, and in most cases, became motivated to be more active citizens in society. Significantly this was not a case of Erasmus being the inceptor of active citizenship, which was already present to a certain degree, but rather the incubator for strengthening existing predispositions, although it may be that there is a multiplication effect initiated post-Erasmus directed at peers or family members. In this sense, the potential for spreading social inclusivity via Erasmus+ may be quite limited but not entirely negligible. It might also be that due to the Eastern European context, young people need more encouragement to engage in *any* form of participation. Nevertheless, we have shown how a mobility project can be occasionally inspirational, providing a site in which young people might become more interested in important social issues. And involvement in such projects can help to consolidate existing knowledge and lead to an understanding of what it means to participate in European society and one's own regional context.

Notes

1. The social agenda of Erasmus+ can also be regarded as an inheritance of another antecedent programme, the *Lifelong Learning Programme,* which ran between 2007 and 2013 (although officially established on 15

November 2006), during which time it provided an integrative context for Erasmus. The relevance of this programme to this chapter is explained in the *European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (European Council 2006), which cites social and civic competence among eight key aptitudes, defined as the 'knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to enable individuals to become active citizens' (Hoskins et al. 2008, p. 11).

2. Dedicated research on active citizenship among youth in the EU is rather limited in scope, but one interesting development concerns the Horizon 2020 project, *CATCH-EyoU*, on the theme of constructing active citizenship with European Youth, in which these expert interviews were conducted. For more details, see: http://www.catcheyou.eu/

3. According to Taru (2013, p. 10), in 2011, the average duration of a YIA project was 8 days.

4. All names used in this chapter have been changed to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

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8

The Quality of Mobility

The attempt to institutionalize and regulate the practice of intra-European mobility among students, graduates, volunteers, trainees and academic members of staff has been a major undertaking by the European political institutions, involving a massive investment of time and financial resources. If the success of this policy effort can be judged by the amount of traffic within programmes such as Erasmus, then we have to conclude that there has been a significant amount of progress made in mobilizing Europe's young people.

As we observed in Chap. 1, millions of young Europeans have been supported in their travels, with Erasmus+ incorporating the additional aim of addressing prominent social challenges including youth unemployment and a social inclusion deficit. That Europe has been mobilized to a certain extent is a major achievement but in order to be regarded as a real accomplishment, programmes such as Erasmus need to demonstrate value, particularly in regard to the quality of the mobility experience. Young people from a diverse range of backgrounds ought to be able to practice mobility without the fear of incurring unwanted hardship in the form of onerous costs or a lack of social integration within host soci-

eties, and the experience of working, studying and training abroad should contribute to personal and professional development. Additionally, we might want to consider the extent to which youth unemployment and social inclusion are actually being addressed, particularly among those facing different levels of disadvantage. This explains why this chapter will have as its main focus the exploration of 'quality' within various aspects of Erasmus+, in effect studying how certain modes of intra-European mobility are regulated.

In engaging with this issue, the need to provide mobility experiences for students, trainees, volunteers, et al. that are personally and professionally meaningful for participants is self-evident. Without these 'qualities' Erasmus exchanges can indeed be dismissed as little more than holidays. Collectively, it is also hoped that the enhanced capabilities of the 'Erasmus generation' (Feyen and Krzaklewska 2013) will make Europe more economically productive, and more socially and politically aware. 'Quality' in Erasmus thus comes to be inextricably linked with the twin talismans of employability and intercultural awareness. But while stating the need for quality is relatively straightforward, finding and assessing it is much more complicated. This is due to the fact that quantifying quality is a fundamentally oxymoronic process, being an attempt to count something that is amorphous and elusive. We are therefore left with the challenge of studying an intangible and changeable, yet fundamental, aspect of intra-European mobility.

It is also apparent that there are no objective criteria by which to measure it. 'Quality' varies according to hosting institution and individual experience, with the additional complication of outcomes such as enhanced employability depending upon context, especially the health of local labour markets. Its acquisition will only become evident at a point in the life course *after* the completion of a mobility stage; typically, on entering and attempting to make progress within the labour market. We therefore cannot comprehensively measure this aspect of quality within Erasmus unless prepared to embark upon evaluation exercises vast in scope and integrating a longitudinal dimension. Since such approaches are not viable, as the expense of such evaluations would probably outweigh the cost of the actual programme, the next best thing is to look at certain measurable aspects of quality that can be assessed before and after

a specific mobility episode. This constitutes a more subjective and limited form of quality assessment, but is obviously much more manageable and cost-effective, particularly when carried out using standardized and repeated measures.

We are still left with the challenge of how to create and maintain quality within this limited framework. As enhanced employability is hard to assess, we can anticipate there being a much greater emphasis on intercultural understanding and improvements to areas such as foreign language proficiency, something that also contributes to the 'Europeanization' dimension of exchanges. Language assessments are already part of the Erasmus undergraduate exchange programme, and we have discussed the procedure through which improvement in foreign language proficiency is assessed in previous publications (Cairns 2017; Cairns et al. 2017, pp. 76–77), including the use of online tools. Therefore, to avoid repetition and to continue a theme introduced in previous chapters, our main emphasis will be on the regulation of mobility exchanges in non-formal educational settings, in institutions that host mobility projects, including the creation of regulatory frameworks by policymakers and stakeholders.[1]

Benchmarking Erasmus

To begin this chapter in earnest, we will examine criteria used to assess programmatic success in Erasmus+ and look at some of the actors who are defining quality in mobility within non-formal learning contexts. A particular concern relates to benchmarking quality and the setting of institutional guidelines for exchanges. Benchmarking is fairly standard practice within the youth sector and the broader field of European Social Policy, and can loosely be defined as an attempt to create and manage quality via the setting of aspirational targets. This enables an organisation's performance to be evaluated by external criteria. Doing so may include the setting of actual targets, such as numbers of people expected to be undertaking various forms of mobility, as well as anticipated outcomes relating to what has been learnt during stays.[2]

Such benchmarking work is relatively straightforward, involving monitoring of statistics, assuming that accurate records are being maintained. However, quantitative measures do not necessarily tell us a great deal about the developmental aspects of the mobility experience. In other words, there is a lot of work to do beyond collecting facts and figures in order to assess quality. This often involves interventions not only with programme participants but also the people who work within the host institutions. In the case of Erasmus+, this involves stakeholders directly affiliated with or funded by the European Commission including non-formal education and training providers from a wide range of national and regional contexts. Benchmarks can therefore be aimed at such stakeholders in an attempt to standardize their management of Erasmus actions.

This leads us to ask who might be responsible for benchmarking quality, in Erasmus and other mobility platforms, and the development of quality indicators. One framework is provided by the European Platform for Learning Mobility (EPLM). This is a European-wide network of stakeholders from across the youth sector that since its emergence from an initial conference in 2011 has aimed to support people who work in mobility programmes, especially trainers and youth workers, following in the traditions established by several decades of intra-European co-operation facilitated by the European Commission and Council of Europe (European Platform for Learning Mobility 2013; see also Friesenhahn et al. 2013).[3] The work of the EPLM includes the hosting of regular meetings and conferences for the discussion and exchange of ideas among stakeholders, especially representatives of youth work organisations. While some of the platform's work is relevant to formal education (i.e. schools, colleges and universities), the main focus is very much on learning in non-formal educational settings; that is, learning outside the classroom, lecture theatre or laboratory, typically involving mobility projects with participants from different countries for relatively short durations. In the past, this has included voluntary work and work placements undertaken under the auspices of the *Youth in Action* programme, now part of the Erasmus+ framework as discussed in the previous chapter.

Such a position means that the benchmarking activities of the EPLM are focused on a large number and a diverse range of mobility projects taking place in countries across Europe but with a relatively narrow range of young people; that is, those who fulfil the 'social remit' of the mobility projects in question. In some respects, this approach fits the broad concern at European level with integrating a social agenda into Erasmus actions, but the multiplicity of projects and organisations creates a challenge in regard to 'quality' due to the diversified needs of programme participants.

Mobility Quality in Europe

Creating quality within intra-European exchanges involves ensuring that mobility programmes and projects address issues such as civic participation, active citizenship, intercultural learning, developing personal and professional competencies and enhancing employability. This is not just a list of policy buzzwords but rather a set of attributes that provide clues for stakeholders in regard to directions to follow in their work, constituting a foundation for quality in a European context. But moving away from the question of values, we also need to consider the approach to be taken in respect to engaging youth; deciding which young people are to be included in mobility programmes and projects.

Making *all* European young people mobile is an interesting proposition but obviously not a realistic one. Civil society institutions in particular do not have the operational capacity to engage with large sections of the youth population, preferring to focus on particular socio-demographic niche groups or a specific issue, and not all young people want to go abroad on an Erasmus exchange or other form of mobility exercise. In redirecting Erasmus towards civil society agencies within the youth sector, what we can expect to find is a greater emphasis on the kind of groups typically engaged by youth workers: young people who are experiencing various forms of severe disadvantage due to adverse societal circumstances or personal misfortune that has contributed to their exclusion from society.

At first glance, this approach does not make a great deal of sense considering that the 'problem' of making the European youth population

mobile appears to be avoided rather than addressed through focusing on what may be a very narrow range of young people, although it should be noted that not all aspects of Erasmus-supported mobility outside the undergraduate exchange programme cater only for those with a high needs threshold. For example, organisations such as the European Voluntary Service (EVS) integrate young people from a wide variety of backgrounds into its programmes, supporting in the region of 100,000 volunteers in the last 20 years. Furthermore, volunteering activities, which last between a minimum of two weeks and a maximum of 12 months, cover various aspects of youth work, cultural activities, social care and environmental protection in Erasmus+ participating nations and neighbouring partner countries, thus extending geographical scope (European Commission 2017a, p. 14).[4] There is however an assumption at European policy level, albeit a controversial one, that most European students are essentially able to fend for themselves when it comes to (paying for) mobility, and can cope with a relatively minimal level of support through receiving money from their families or getting into personal debt. From such a point a view, it becomes logical to privatize the cost of mobility for the majority and support those with visibly less opportunities and/or fewer resources since they cannot make any such recourse.

At a more practical level, we also need to consider the fundamental question of what the European institutions are actually capable of delivering. Despite the appearance of affluence created by its impressive edifices in Brussels and various other European capitals, budgets are in fact limited and often spread thin between and within funded programmes. Neither is 'youth' necessarily a high priority field, attracting only a fraction of the resources allocated to transport, the environment, business and agriculture.[5] A principle of subsidiarity to national governments at European level also means limited room to manoeuvre in policymaking (European Commission 2017b). When intervening in the management of mobility, it is necessary to balance the Commission's own goals, such as the desire to promote intra-European free circulation, and the concerns of member states. It certainly cannot be seen to be doing anything that would be interpreted as politically unpopular, such as inadvertently encouraging brain drain phenomena. Limiting access to mobility to those who meet a high threshold of disadvantage or promoting unpaid programmes via EVS thus acts as an effective deterrent against this happening.

On further consideration, we can see that having a more concentrated remit in Erasmus+ is fiscally responsible and politically expedient. This approach is also consistent with how youth policy generally operates, making it possible to manage mobility though existing 'youth work' structures. Emphasis is hence placed on the role of stakeholders delegated with the responsibility for improving the lives of prioritized groups of young people; that is, intermediate parties such as youth workers. Even when young people are involved, via approaches such as 'structured dialogue', this takes place within frameworks created by policymakers and stakeholders and managed to meet their interests.[6] Policy interventions are therefore directed not at what might be termed the macro level of society, with responsibility for regulating labour markets and education systems left up to national governments, or directly at the micro level of young people themselves but rather situated at a 'youth work' mezzanine level somewhere between these two parties.

Quality Frameworks

Moving towards the issue of managing quality in institutionally-mediated forms of mobility, especially Erasmus, the challenge becomes one of creating an institutional framework for stakeholders, the individuals and organisations that host and manage exchanges, which ensures quality of mobility experience. The EPLM has attempted to establish such a quality framework for the youth sector with a *Charter on Learning Mobility* (European Platform on Learning Mobility 2017). However, before discussing this development, we need to look at antecedents, especially the *Green Paper on Learning Mobility* (European Commission 2009), as this provides an essential point of reference for subsequent benchmarking of mobility and an illustration of the dominant approach to regulating intra-European circulation at European policy level.

Green Paper on Learning Mobility

A 'Green Paper' in EU policy parlance is a preliminary report on policy proposals, published with a view to provoking discussion among stake-

holders and interested individuals. Such documents reflect policy aspirations, suggesting a future direction rather than proscribing it, and need to be read as such. But it may be that such reports lead to the preparation of a 'White Paper', which contains more concrete policy proposals that may be adopted by the European Council, a prominent example being the White Paper, *A New Impetus for Youth* (European Commission 2001).

As its title suggests, the *Green Paper on Learning Mobility* was concerned with promoting learning mobility among young people, '[…] for the purpose of acquiring new skills [that] can strengthen their future employability as well as their personal development' (European Commission 2009, p. 2). This position is therefore consistent with what could be termed the 'Erasmus philosophy' on learning mobility as discussed throughout this book; that is, conjoined personal and professional development.[7] In pointing a way forward, it is stated in the document that mobility should be 'organised' and 'linked to specific learning outcomes and lead to the attainment of qualifications, credits and/or professional experience', with additional reference to voluntary work and non-formal learning, both of which are regarded as 'very effective ways of reaching young people who would otherwise risk falling outside learning mobility programmes' (European Commission 2009, p. 4). This movement is also to be specifically intra-European in character, extending to cross-sectoral circulation; for instance, between educational institutions and the business community. However, rather than 'students' being the priority, who are assumed to be already well-represented within mobility programmes, participation in institutional programmes is to be encouraged from under-represented groups, with the examples of vocational trainees and apprentices cited (European Commission 2009, p. 5).

This approach can be viewed as an attempt to move away from just supporting the traditional Erasmus clientele of undergraduate students and towards addressing the mobility needs of other groups of learners. The justification for this shift seems to be related to the ever-increasing level of traffic within traditional Erasmus (see Chap. 2). As noted previously, it may be that policymakers, despite the risk of complacency, believe student mobility platforms are functioning sufficiently well to the extent that the majority of participants need less support. Such a position would certainly explain the relatively low level of Erasmus grants, dis-

cussed in Chap. 4, since such people are presumably thought able to pay their own way.

In regard to the more specific issue of setting standards, the emphasis in the Green Paper is on practical issues, including information about opportunities for young people, making clear the potential benefits of mobility, foreign language learning and overcoming bureaucratic barriers, including visa issues. These are all essential prerequisites for movement and it is hard to dispute their inclusion. The quality of the mobility experience itself is to be benchmarked according to the pre-existing *European Quality Charter for Mobility* (2006), with a list of ten general principles to be taken into account.[8] Adapted from the Charter for clarity, these ten principles can be described as follows:

1. Information and guidance—access to clear and reliable sources of information and guidance on mobility and the conditions in which it can be taken up, including details of the roles of sending and hosting organisations;
2. A learning plan is to be drawn-up and signed by the sending and hosting organisations, and participants, describing objectives and expected outcomes, means of achieving them, and evaluation, taking into account reintegration issues;
3. Personalization—mobility must be consistent with the personal learning pathways, skills and motivation of participants, and should develop or supplement them;
4. Before departure, participants should receive general preparation tailored to their specific needs, covering linguistic, pedagogical, legal, cultural and financial aspects;
5. Arrangements should be made for a pre-departure assessment of language skills, the possibility of attending courses in the language of the host country and/or language learning and linguistic support and advice in the host country;
6. Availability of logistical support, including providing participants with information and assistance concerning travel arrangements, insurance, the portability of government grants and loans, residence or work permits and social security;
7. The hosting organisation should provide mentoring to advise and help participants throughout their stay, and ensure their integration;

8. If periods of study or training abroad are an integral part of a formal study or training programme, the learning plan must mention this and participants should be provided with assistance regarding recognition and certification;

9. On returning to country of origin, participants should receive guidance on how to make use of the competences acquired during their stay and any necessary help with reintegration. Evaluation of the experience acquired should make it possible to assess whether the aims of the learning plan have been achieved;

10. Responsibilities arising from these quality criteria must be agreed and confirmed in writing by all sides (sending and hosting organisations and participants).

These are the basic aspirational benchmarks for mobility programmes, providing a concise summation of what is required of mobility project hosts. The suggestions made are frankly excellent and reflect both the needs of the individuals involved in the mobility exercise and the role to be taken by institutions, and how they should work together, for example, on language skills (point 5) and labour market readiness (point 9). It is no surprise that these guidelines were referenced in the Green Paper. Furthermore, all of these items are important and all should be taking into account when creating and managing mobility platforms and projects.

A further issue worth remarking on in relation to the Green Paper is its emphasis on what it terms economically and socially 'disadvantaged groups,' citing the examples of 'people with special needs, and underprivileged migrant populations' (European Commission 2009, p. 13). It is interesting that this text pre-dates by some years the 2015 refugee crisis, an event which has provided a major focus for youth policy at European level in the mobility field and elsewhere since this time, indicating that interventions with 'migrants' is a long-standing commitment rather than just a reaction to topical events.[9]

Charter on Quality in Learning Mobility

Having looked at the aspirations of the Green Paper, we now want to consider some of outcomes that have emerged from recent debate on learning mobility among stakeholders and other interested parties. The

Green Paper closed with a call for a new partnership for mobility, involving public sector actors and various civil society agencies, effectively moving responsibility for managing institutionalised mobility towards the third sector and cross-sectoral partnerships. In this respect, the EPLM's very constitution can be viewed as a manifestation of this aim. Its steering group includes young people's representatives and youth non-governmental organisations (including the European Youth Forum), policymakers from various European institutions and youth ministries, researchers, trainers and representatives from Erasmus+ National Agencies, Youth Work, Social Work, youth information services and vocational education.

The work of the EPLM has included the preparation of a *Charter on Quality in Learning Mobility* (2017), a document that can be viewed as an updated and expanded version of the previous cited guidelines. It provides 22 indicators for people who work in international youth mobility projects, especially 'project organisers', with a strong focus on non-formal education activities. Its scope therefore extends across and beyond Erasmus+ projects, into the areas of volunteering, school exchanges, youth worker mobility and vocational apprenticeships. The 22 points can be summarised as follows:

1. The project has clear learning objectives known to all actors, including participants;
2. The mobility project fits the needs of the partners' organisations, including management and staff, in order to provide an opportunity for professional and strategic development, and added value for the organisations;
3. The type of learning mobility is adapted by organisers to the profile of the participants and the learning objectives, with specific reference to the needs of the target group and their available resources. Organisations should also manage participants' expectations;
4. The organisers formulate indicators for assessing outcomes collaboratively with participants. Monitoring success from indicators leads to current and future project improvements;
5. Organisers will inform candidates and participants well in advance about the project, with information communicated through channels appropriate to the nature and needs of the specific target groups, with participation voluntary;

 6. If there is a selection process, the criteria and procedures are to be objective and transparent;
 7. Organisers create an inclusive environment wherein participants have an opportunity to express their needs, especially where there are additional needs;
 8. There is a realistic match between human, physical and financial resources, timeframe, activities, the needs of participants and objectives, and organisers must manage these resources responsibly;
 9. Learning environments are to be chosen and tailored to enable participants to acquire competences as set out in the learning objectives of the mobility project;
10. The programme of the activity fits what the host institution can offer. All actors share expectations and agree in advance how they will implement the project with roles and responsibilities made clear;
11. The programme provides enough opportunity for authentic encounters with the cultures involved in the project and of the host communities. The project stimulates intercultural learning and allows participants to challenge stereotypes and prejudices;
12. Actors in the project co-operate in a positive partnership, with both the sending and the hosting partners committed to a collaborative approach to ensure participants' learning;
13. The organisers take care of practicalities such as travel, accommodation, social security and insurance;
14. Before departure, organisers prepare participants appropriately. Project staff should also go through a preparation process;
15. Activities for participants are tailored to their capacities and skills, with organisers putting in place a process for participants to share feedback;
16. Organisers provide adequate guidance throughout the learning process and qualified support to defuse problems. Participants are made aware of these available support structures and how to access them;
17. Space and support is provided for structured reflection about the experience, both individually and collectively, and this takes place before, during and after the activity using recognition tools and processes to support the reflection. Organisers help participants put their experiences and interpretations into perspective enabling them

to form and challenge their own views in order to develop critical thinking;

18. Learning outcomes are evaluated both for the project as a whole and individual participants, comparing the participant's starting point and the impact of the project on the individual. The evaluation also encompasses a longer-term perspective;

19. In the evaluation, organisers cover both explicit objectives and other outcomes, positive or negative, that result from the project;

20. Participants receive proof of participation. Organisers assist participants to document learning outcomes and achievements from the project;

21. Organisers guide participants to capitalize on the outcomes of the experience. After the activity, organisers support participants to transfer their learning to other contexts and exploit the outcomes in their personal and professional future development;

22. During the implementation, organisers and participants take measures to increase the visibility of the project. Organisers and participants consciously capture results that can be exploited. Good practice is documented and shared. The organisers reflect on how the mobility project fits into the wider strategic development of the organisation.

As with the previous set of indicators, these guidelines are not designed to be prescriptive, but rather offer guidance and are open to being adapted to different mobility contexts by organisers. And we can observe a significant amount of common ground with the prior suggestions in regard to areas like learning objectives (points 1 and 3) and information provision (point 5), confirming the lasting importance of these aspects of quality in managing mobility. In looking at what is new, there is more explicit recognition of 'intercultural learning' (point 11) and the idea of opening up space for reflection (points 7 and 17), pointing towards a method of encouraging dialogue between stakeholders and participants, as well as 'authentic encounters' with the host community (point 11).

The most prominent change is however that the onus is very much upon organisational development. There is also a noticeable 'business' mentality on show, with the suggestion that the mobility project staff

should be better supported and that the mobility of project participants is something to be explicitly capitalized upon, with a view to contributing to 'strategic development' (point 22). Point two refers to the professional development of staff within mobility programmes, as well as fulfilling the strategic aims of host organisations. Point three iterates that organisations should manage participants' expectations, so as to presumably not expect too much from the experience. This may be due to the level of investment in and/or expense of maintaining organisations, which necessitates having limited aims, with a degree of realism in regard to resources implied in points eight and ten. Monitoring and evaluation is also emphasized (points 4, 18 and 19), recognizing both positive and negative outcomes, while points 18 and 21 make reference to long-term impacts from the learning experience, which might include enhancing labour market prospects.

Conclusions

Reaching definitive conclusions about the quality of mobility in Erasmus is difficult given the somewhat limited nature of the evidence and the need to make deductions from policy discourse, designed to fulfil an advisory function for stakeholders and other interested individuals, rather than having hard facts. Little, if any, serious independent research exists on the subject of 'quality' within various aspects of the expanded Erasmus+ programme. Further complicating this situation is the diversified nature of the Erasmus+ initiative, which integrates literally thousands of institutions, within which an upholding of common standards is hard to envisage. We therefore need to have realistic expectations in regard to the capacity of Erasmus to deliver a high quality of mobility experience across the board.

Despite the limitations, we can nevertheless observe a number of significant developments such as the shift towards recognising the importance of non-student mobility in Erasmus, the rise in prominence of intermediary parties in managing mobility quality (especially stakeholders in civil society organisations and youth workers) and these stakeholders' views on how they wish to regulate quality in the mobility projects they host. The idea seems to be that establishing quality in organisations

will lead to quality experiences for individuals, including the enhancement of employability and intercultural competences. Whether or not this approach can be deemed a success is not possible to assess. We are very much looking at a work-in-progress, without robust and independent sources of evidence that would permit evaluation.

Looking at recent developments, especially the Green Paper and Charter on learning mobility, there are some very good ideas present in regard to ensuring that at least some of the risk and unpredictability is removed from participation in mobility projects. However, we might also view some of the guidelines proposed by the EPLM as somewhat paternalistic and overly concerned with own organisation development. Making reference to the 'exploitation' of positive outcomes from participants also makes for somewhat uncomfortable reading, although this perhaps reflects a movement towards a market-led ethos already prevalent within tertiary education systems (e.g. Bok 2009). In this sense, such Erasmus stakeholders are only catching-up with their university counterparts.

Legitimate concerns might also be raised regarding the downplaying of the 'employability' dimension of assessing quality. While there is some recognition of the need to capitalise on skills learnt while abroad, the connection between Erasmus and the labour market still appears to be somewhat tenuous. As a future direction for assessing quality in all aspects of Erasmus, we would therefore argue for a thorough mapping of paths to the labour market facilitated by Erasmus, even if this involves expensive longitudinal research. Such a procedure, if yielding positive results, would provide a ringing endorsement of European mobility policy, particularly if able to take into account maintaining social inclusion and overcoming social exclusion.

Notes

1. 'Non-formal learning' is defined within the context of European Youth Work, somewhat descriptively, as 'purposive but voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity.' See: http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/non-formal-learning. This definition implies that non-formal learning is reified

according to context rather than the actions of learners, placing the emphasis upon institutions rather than individuals.

2. The issue of targets in Erasmus is a controversial one and in the past it has been noted that the programme has tended to miss its targets for students' participation (Feyen and Krzaklewska 2013, p. 13).

3. Besides the main European institutions, examples of what might be termed mobility stakeholder organisations include the European Youth Forum, European Voluntary Service, SALTO (Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Youth) and various national level youth agencies and civil society organisations.

4. The EVS impact study provides some information on the socio-demographic backgrounds of its volunteers. For example, most (63%) are female and the parents of the majority of EVS volunteers and alumni are educated to a tertiary degree level. Most volunteers are also graduates or in the process of studying for tertiary education level qualifications. Equally interesting is the fact that significantly more volunteers regarded as having fewer opportunities state that they engaged in EVS in order to improve and widen their career prospects or because they wished to enhance their future employability: 45 per cent compared to 35 per cent among young people with fewer opportunities (European Commission 2017a, pp. 15–16).

5. For example, in 2015, 1.6 billion euros was allocated to Erasmus+ while the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme attracted 10 billion euros (see also European Commission 2014a).

6. Themes for discussion are decided at European level by EU Youth Ministers then coordinated by the current trio of EU Presidency countries, the EC and the European Youth Forum, who also decide on the questions to be asked to young people from across Europe (European Commission 2014b).

7. The case for learning mobility contributing to employability is supported through drawing on evidence from evaluations of the Erasmus programme, including work undertaken by the Erasmus Student Network.

8. Recommendation (EC) No 2006/961 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility [Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006].

9. European level policy discourse tends to follow the convention of defining movement to and from the EU and other global regions as 'migration,' with internal circulation between member states discussed under the rubric of 'mobility.'

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9

Conclusions: A Changing Erasmus

In this closing discussion, we bring together insights and ideas from across the preceding chapters of this book that relate to various aspects of Erasmus. Our intention is to consider the present state of the programme, learning from our own evidence and experience, and the implications of the transformation into Erasmus+. This change is marked not only by increasing numbers participating but also expansion outside the traditional bounds of student exchanges, with an invitation issued to young people from different backgrounds to share in the benefits of mobility. In doing so, the hope is, presumably, that young people facing various forms of social disadvantage can overcome their personal difficulties through taking part in mobility projects, explaining the integration of a large number of civil society organisations into the Erasmus fold.

At the same time, we have to consider that the social, economic and political context within which Erasmus is operating is changing. There are serious internal and external challenges that complicate the practice of mobility and cast doubts on the efficacy of intra-European circulation for work, study and training purposes, not to mention more long-standing problems relating to financially supporting an inclusive range of students. Opportunity thereby becomes linked with uncertainty in regard to the

success of exchange visits and mobility projects, not so much due to the objective or subjective quality of this mobility but rather the very idea of Europe as a free space for circulation being called into question.

While we are not suggesting that a point has been reached where the European Union and neighbouring countries are systematically shutting their internal and external border gates to young people, this may be the moment in EU history when the tide is turning away from outward expansion and freer circulation and towards a more insular focus on national and regional level issues. It is, if nothing else, an interesting moment in European history to be engaging with the topic of mobility, although on behalf of the many young people who are seeking to engage in various forms of spatial circulation, we obviously have some concerns.[1]

A Changing Erasmus?

A key theme throughout this book relates to the diversified modes of mobility now present within the Erasmus framework. We have interpreted this shift as an attempt to realise a more explicit social agenda within the programme. From a positive point of view, this potentially broadens the appeal of Erasmus, moving it outside academia, through engaging with young people in informal learning contexts. If we are being more circumspect we might want to ask if what are, in general, quite short duration mobility projects have the same impact on participants as the more traditional stays abroad of up to a year in length. We might also wish to learn more about the impact *Youth in Action* type mobility projects (see Chap. 7) are having on encouraging civic mindedness and intercultural understanding at national and regional levels, and across different European societies. Is mobility now being used to enhance the youth condition in specific localities rather than in the service of internationalization? We do not necessarily have the answers, but we can anticipate these shorter duration forms of exchange becoming increasingly popular during the lifespan of Erasmus+ and perhaps beyond.

Such forms of mobility seem to matter a great deal to the European Commission. One way of confirming this supposition is to look at where money is being spent. When announced, it was stated that the Erasmus+

budget was to be 14.7 billion euros, reported as a 40 per cent budget increase for the programme (European Commission 2014, p. 2), although during the period during which Erasmus formed part of the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007–2013), almost seven billion euros was allocated, which makes this increase appear more like a doubling of expenditure. However, taking into account the broader scope of Erasmus+, we should not forget that the *Youth in Action* budget for this same time period was 885 million euros (European Commission 2013). From what we have observed in the preceding chapters, there are no signs that this extra money is being directed towards traditional Erasmus exchanges involving undergraduates. We know this since while there have been modest increases in participation since the start of Erasmus+; this does not constitute a doubling of numbers. Grant levels for undergraduates have also remained at a precariously low level. The implication is that the increased spending relates to non-academic mobility projects of the type explored in Chap. 7.

Figure 9.1 illustrates what this means in practice: in 2015, 2.1 billion euros was spent on the programme. This included 19,600 mobility projects and 69,000 organisations, involving 678,000 students, trainees and volunteers.
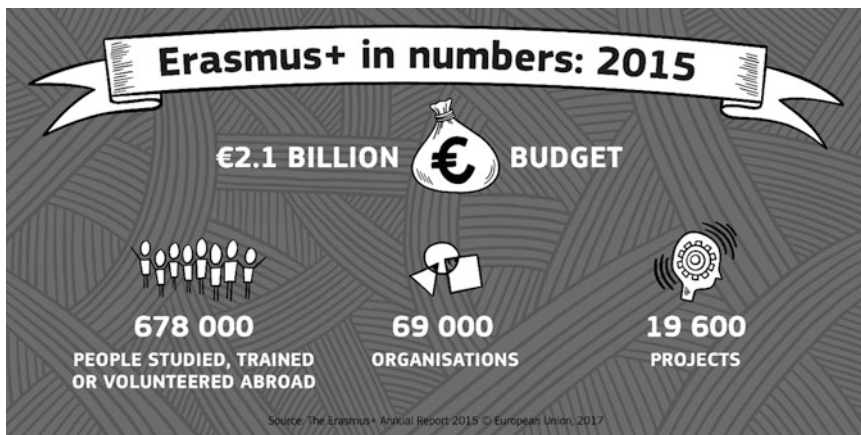
Fig. 9.1 Erasmus+ in numbers: 2015

The sheer weight of numbers in respect to individuals, organisations and projects suggests that the EU is aiming for breadth in regard to the reach of Erasmus+, something that would also explain the prominence of stakeholder organisations in the definition of mobility quality (see Chap. 8). What such a situation implies is that the increase in Erasmus funding is being used to re-orient the programme, and that we as mobility researchers need to re-think our priorities: we may need to move away from the traditional focus on undergraduate mobility and towards identifying the meaning of more informal and diversified forms of exchange.

Mobility in the Life Course

While the freedom to move between EU member states is taken for granted by many European citizens, credit should still be awarded to the European institutions for recognising the instrumental importance of movement between societies and that different forms of circulation can enhance lives and societies. This is particularly true in regard to young people, both in the sense of teaching them how to become mobile via participation in exchange visits and projects, and learning about the EU and their own place within it through the practice of mobility. The instrumental power of mobility at this point in the life course does however need to be put into perspective. Horizontal movement between European countries complements rather than replaces circulation within nations, and is not a substitute for vertical (or social) mobility. Supporting different mobility modalities has a value in the sense of creating aspirations but this is only one element of educational and occupational development. Geographical mobility in isolation is certainly not a social mobility panacea.

What Erasmus can do is play a role in supporting young people who are already undergoing processes of personal and professional development. An obvious example is the transition from education-to-work, but we also observed other processes taking place in Chap. 7 related to political participation and civic engagement. Significantly, what we found was that joining a mobility project provided a means of focusing existing energies on a specific issue, strengthening the efficacy of these capacities.

Extending this idea, it might be the case that an accumulation of Erasmus experiences coalesces into more than the sum of its parts. Mobility opportunities may be pursued singularly, as a one-off experience, or sequentially when one exchange visit is followed by involvement in another. It is in fact possible to envisage an Erasmus trajectory that lasts for decades. A volunteer in a mobility project focused on civic engagement might later become an undergraduate exchangee, perhaps several times, subsequently participate in an Erasmus Mundus postgraduate degree programme, followed by an academic staff exchange. That large numbers of people will run the full gamut of Erasmus mobility opportunities is unlikely, but we can see that there are different times at which learning mobility can begin and it does not necessarily have to end when one specific mobility stage is completed. This perspective, for all its charms, might be considered somewhat fanciful as we need to take into account the many difficulties people experience in becoming and remaining mobile during each phase. For example, mobility exercises are expensive, for funding institutions and participants, placing limitations on the number of actions which can be realistically undertaken. But it may be that *enough* experience is gained in order to create to a tangible change in circumstances.

Quite how durable this position will prove to be is another matter. We also need to accept that the last few years have been something of a high water mark for institutionally mediated mobility within the EU due to the success of Erasmus and other exchange platforms. The current levels of investment will not necessarily be sustained in the future, particularly if other priorities emerge. This would make it much harder to maintain a continuum of mobility experiences and place greater emphasis on developing a capacity to practice free movement. Taking mobility for granted is hence a form of complacency as is the assumption that participation in mobility exchanges and projects will always be expanding in scope. We should also bear in mind that not everyone wants to take part and we cannot force people to do something they are unwilling or unable to do, or that they simply do not value. While the gross participation figures discussed in Chap. 1 imply that there has been incremental growth in recent years, mobility may start to lose its appeal among students and trainees if it comes to be viewed as arduous, inconvenient or just too

expensive to contemplate. It might also be the case that exchange visits fail to live up to expectations, ruling out further foreign sojourns.

Such subjective factors are important to take into account in looking towards the future but there are also changes in external social, political and economic circumstances to consider. One issue is the rise of antipathy towards mobility itself in many European countries, linked to factors such as the large influx of people from outside the EU following the 2015 refugee crisis. This is a situation that can be converted into justifications for erecting new barriers to mobility within the EU that might, however inadvertently, curtail circulation.

New Threats to Mobility?

Another source of uncertainty relates to well-publicised 'threats' to intra-European circulation associated with the proposed departure of the United Kingdom from the EU in 2019. Brexit potentially removes a significant destination from the student mobility map and while this does not necessarily signal an exit from the Erasmus programme in its entirety, incoming and outgoing mobility to and from the UK may become more complicated and less appealing for many people. There may also be disruption for British candidates seeking outward mobility should the status of the UK as an Erasmus participating country shift from being a core nation to a peripheral one. Brexit also threatens to introduce a new border across the island of Ireland, providing another obstacle to the free movement of people and goods. At the time of writing this book, we do not yet know the final outcomes of the divorce settlement between the UK government and the EU, or even if there will be one, but the event inevitably generates uncertainty and puts the UK on a defensive footing towards its European guests, students or otherwise, who may start to feel unwelcome.

The existence of new borders and heightened securitization following real or imagined fears, whether this relates to an influx of unwanted people from outside the EU or internal geo-political factionalism, thus raises new barriers to entry and exit. At the same time, a basic lack of funds continues to keep many young people outside the Erasmus fold or

restricts them to less movement than they would wish for. Financial constraints also have a bearing on decision-making. Lest people forget, Europe, or at least large parts of the EU, have never really recovered from the 2008 economic crisis and the imposition of debt relief austerity programmes on stricken economies, including Greece, Portugal and the Republic of Ireland (see Cairns et al. 2016). Employment levels, particularly for young people, remain a concern as does the continual suppression of increases in household earnings. As we learnt in Chap. 4, this situation has had a lasting impact on Erasmus participation in Portugal due to a lack of financial support available within many families and the perception that undergraduate mobility in particular is something of a luxury.

Social Inclusion and Social Exclusion

In exploring mobility at an institutional level, we also need to consider the ability of agencies such as the European Commission to connect with young people from a broad range of social, cultural, regional and national backgrounds, especially in regard to ensuring they all have access to opportunities. To be regarded as a popular as opposed to a political success, Erasmus must be seen to be appealing to large numbers of young people in varied circumstances, explaining the addressing of social inclusion through mobility. At the same time, and as we have often discussed in this book, there is a clear desire to engage with young people from highly disadvantaged backgrounds using Erasmus actions, implying that the programme is also to be concerned with overcoming specific forms of social exclusion. However, it is not always entirely clear if the ramifications of having these dual aspirations within the same policy framework are fully understood, and that there are significant incompatibilities between the two concepts, with this lack of understanding having the potential to confound the efficacy of mobility programmes and projects.

While often linked by sociologists, social inclusion and social exclusion are not in fact equivalent concepts. As the name implies, policies that aim to support social inclusion must relate to practical everyone within a population (i.e. excluding no-one) while addressing social exclu-

sion involves targeting interventions at groups that have been politically designated as constituting a societal concern. Both foci are extremely important in all societies but given the greater scope, it is likely that addressing social inclusion will be a more challenging mission than tackling social exclusion since the latter involves engagement with relatively small numbers of people. Therefore, while social exclusion may have a deeper qualitative impact on society, social inclusion will always be of greater quantitative importance.

Such a position creates a policy decision-making dilemma in regard to engaging with the youth field. Addressing social inclusion is necessary in order to involve large numbers of young people in society, thus maintaining social cohesion, but policymakers will come under significant pressure to address issues that are presented as urgent priorities by the media and lobbyists, involving the exclusion of small numbers of individuals in potentially perilous situations. They cannot therefore simply follow a simple utilitarian logic, addressing the needs of the greatest number of people at the expense of the more needy few, since there may be a genuine risk that those who are social excluded are in situations that place them at risk of actual harm.

This raises the question of what is possible and the related issue of how priorities are to be decided upon when budgets are fixed and human resources finite, as is invariably the case. The risk becomes one of addressing one set of issues at the expense of another, or picking the 'wrong' issues. This is a very real danger and the temptation will always exist to become distracted by what feels like a pressing concern, particularly where there is the prospect of generating political capital for the European institutions and the opportunity of being seen to do good in the eyes of the European public. Although this may suit the immediate needs of policymakers, it is an approach that is less clever in the mid-to-long term. Topical issues tend to have a limited political shelf life, losing their urgency by the time policies are agreed and enacted, creating the impression that resources are being wasted rather than intelligently targeted. Reactive as opposed to proactive policymaking thus becomes counterproductive. Addressing social exclusion needs to take into account nuances in policy decision-making, requiring evidence and intelligent decisions rather than emotions as a rationale for action.

Erasmus Within Institutions

Looking at the more concrete aspects of the programme, uncovering some of the internal mechanisms of Erasmus illustrates how various mobility actions actually work, taking into account everyday situations. We are able to recognise the roles played by a range of stakeholders in supporting exchanges, including universities and civil society institutions. This has been a quite deliberate approach, since most prior studies of Erasmus tend to focus on studying micro level trends in mobility or detailing different aspects of Erasmus participation from students' perspectives (see Cairns 2017).

To add to this work, we have elaborated on what might be termed a meso level of student mobility (Chap. 4), integrated alongside first-hand accounts of the Erasmus experience from students (Chaps. 5 and 6). While by no means a comprehensive overview, we have been able to illustrate why young people first become motivated to participate in Erasmus (Chap. 3), how quality is maintained during exchanges (Chap. 8), and some of the ways in which mobility connects with the social agenda of the programme (Chap. 7). We also discussed two of the main conceptual talismans of Erasmus mobility, employability (Chap. 2) and interculturality (Chap. 6), around which ideas of programmatic quality coalesce for policymakers and stakeholders. These two specific considerations—employability and interculturality—provide an indication of how the Erasmus experience is to be managed within institutions. What we have is a quite deliberate attempt to give a specific meaning to mobility for participants and provide it with value for societies.

What these chapters further illustrate is the institutionally-focused nature of European mobility policymaking, with the pivotal relationship being the one between policymakers and stakeholders, the latter comprised of various organisations that host projects. Young people themselves seem to have little direct input, discounting avenues such as regular events held by the European Youth Forum, and academic researchers are also notably absent beyond work commissioned by the European institutions (e.g. Brandenburg et al. 2014).

We have also been able to reveal that the youth population has become a resource for stakeholder organisations. This was explicitly acknowledge in Chap. 8, when we looked at the issue of benchmarking quality in

mobility projects and indicators being developed to monitor quality within non-formal mobility projects. This raises a basic question in regard to what young people actually mean for these institutions: are they expected to contribute to organisational development as well as, or instead of, their own advancement? This issue is not necessarily a problem, although what young people themselves think about such an arrangement needs to be taken into account, extending beyond a basic duty of care and into areas such as the use of a youthful image as a marketing tool within European-funded programmes.

The Internal Erasmus Universe

These preceding remarks lead us to emphasise the fact that Erasmus is not, or should not, be just a programme designed for the benefit of stakeholder institutions. Neither can it be an initiative designed solely for purposes of generating political capital for the European political institutions. It is an opportunity platform, or rather a platform with many opportunities, for young people to learn more about Europe, and arguably about themselves, through practicing different form of mobility.

While an actual shift in spatial location can be important, the programme is as much about opening-up mental space for learning as it is about learning to navigate through physical spaces, with these two dimensions inter-related. One of the obvious, but rarely stated benefits of Erasmus and other forms of exchange is the opportunity to expand internal horizons, and while we know that this is supposed to happen in regard to fostering intercultural understanding and enhancing employability, it may also be that there are other incidental but not insignificant outcomes emerging from international conviviality. It might simply be a case of making new friends but this can extend to an entire change of direction in life due to the exposure to new possibilities. In this sense, there is an opportunity to find personal meaning in Erasmus, something that cannot always be said of European policy initiatives.

Motivations for wanting to participate, as we learnt in Chap. 3, can be imaginative and vary considerably. While many of these ideas appear mundane or predictable to readers, there is still value in looking at the justifications students make to themselves for partaking. We can, for

instance, observe the extent to which personal rationalizations match-up with the expected or anticipated reasons for wanting to participate, as well as gaining insight into how students respond to the challenge of having to provide a coherent statement about their mobility decision-making. Motivations vary even more so when we look beyond the undergraduate exchange programme and into other forms of exchange related to short duration mobility projects (see Chap. 7), with a personal political and civic engagement rationale. This underlines the fact that even a relatively short exposure to an international learning habitus can have value, with the potential for values to be transmitted to others on return, such as friends and family members.

What we have also been able to establish is the importance of personal and professional development to young people in Erasmus; they want to learn and enjoy themselves, doing both at more or less the same time. While the integration of leisure and learning is not always successful, and creates a dilemma in regard to balancing pleasure and levity in learning, it is obviously not a problem if programme participants enjoy themselves if and when positive feelings enhance the quality of the learning experience. It is only when enjoyment is the only outcome that the value of mobility comes to be questioned. This suggests that even non-formal learning programmes require a degree of regulation, helping to explain the pre-occupation with capitalizing on skills and capacities strengthened before and after a mobility project. From examining benchmarking processes in Chap. 8, we can see that this aspect of quality management involves a great deal of effort and co-ordination on the part of organisations, encompassing the making of learning goals and determining future uses for accumulated mobility capital.

The Erasmus Hothouse

This consideration takes us back to our discussion of interculturality in Chap. 6. As we illustrated, generating interculturality is a multifaceted and somewhat counter-intuitive process. We can point out that groups of exchange students inhabit something of a 'bubble' habitus. A particular form of insularity can be ascribed to groups of Erasmus students or participants in mobility projects, with a kind of hothouse atmosphere exist-

ing within learning environments. This may be deliberate, as such an ambience may accelerate the growth of interculturality given the intensified exposure to people from a diverse range of national backgrounds. Nor is it necessarily problematic, since when enabled, a kind of reflexive learning process can be operationalized, facilitated by the reference point provided by fellow students or project participants with shared learning goals.

For Erasmus participants, their main point of reference becomes a peer group consisting of other exchange students, volunteers or trainees. This does not mean that individuals cannot, or will not, connect with local communities or people within the host institution, only that they cannot do so in the same manner as non-Erasmus guests since being part of Erasmus creates a distinct identity. This may help explain why non-institutional exchangees may find it easier to integrate into a new society. That there may be a degree of homogenization to the Erasmus learning experience further adds to the feeling of distinction and distance from non-Erasmus peers and neighbours.

The bubble-like structure is therefore conducive to the emergence of attributes such as interculturality, and perhaps also a form of internationalized employability. While it is possible to be intercultural with members of the host community, within the Erasmus sphere the potential for interculturality is heightened due to the wider range of cultures that are intermingling. Furthermore, that there may be a shared educational universe creates further synergy should inter-disciplinary bonds be forged leading to useful network connections at a later point in a career. That this is a cohort experience may be one reason why some authors have argued that there has been, to some extent, an 'Erasmus generation' (Feyen and Krzaklewska 2013) emerging from the practice of institutionalized mobility.

From Erasmus to Free Movement

As a final question, we wish to return to considering the place of Erasmus within the broader framework of free movement within the EU. More pointedly, does the programme have a contribution to make to this practice? It is certainly encouraging certain forms of circulation, albeit with-

out stimulating migration due to short durations and guaranteed returns to sending societies; exchanges among undergraduates take place during an on-going degree course and participating in a mobility project that lasts for one or two weeks is unlikely to initiate a brain drain. We might hence deduce that a side benefit of Erasmus is in providing alternatives to migration in the form of more liminal forms of mobility that stop significantly short of settlement in a foreign country.

Confounding a conventional 'migration' logic, in creating mobility without migration, is one fringe benefit for policymakers. Establishing an institutional system that sustains circulation is another, although as we have observed throughout this book, a substantial effort is required to sustain this edifice. If we are going to state that Erasmus is making a contribution towards supporting the free movement of people within the EU, one of the cornerstones of EU citizenship as established by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 (European Parliament 2017), we need to add that this is in some respects due to a re-definition of the meaning of mobility away from being a migratory experience. While we may be getting more free movement, it is not necessarily free movement in a form we might have once expected.

The 'Erasmus as migration' debate hence becomes neutralized. We can however still see that certain kinds of Erasmus exchange have a proto-migratory appearance, involving moving to a foreign country and staying there for a meaningful length of time. This provides a useful introduction to the idea of migrating and the way in which migration functions, relating to becoming aware of the mental and physical effort required in living in different society. Another consideration concerns the social networking dimension of exchange. While much discussion of migration focuses on the economic aspects of moving abroad (i.e. classical migration and 'push and pull' monetary factors), taking advantage of strong and weak ties with friends, family members and looser acquaintances also matters. This is another classic theme in the study of migration and, again, Erasmus provides an introduction to one of the principles, taking advantage of these relationships to make a stay abroad successful.[2]

A final dimension is less obvious but no less significant, concerning an idea discussed in Chap. 3, and developing a theme introduced in a previous publication (Cairns et al. 2017). Previously, we have argued that

much mobility is organised along competitive lines, with peers essentially competing with one another for the same 'prizes'. Erasmus participants are entering a European level competition, for what may be the first time, becoming candidates for places on a much sought after programme, and the institutions themselves are in competition with one another for funding from National Agencies (see Chap. 4). This is a valuable experience as the competition motif, not to be mistaken for *competitiveness* which is quite another matter, will recur throughout subsequent careers as this is a key aspect of how opportunities are allocated. Erasmus participants can gain an awareness of the fact that their peers are not only their friends but also their challengers. This will become particularly evident should they be seeking opportunities at European level at a later date, when they will become just one more person competing with thousands of other candidates for jobs and project funding.

We can therefore identify a familiarization with crucial aspects of migration but without a direct connection with migration itself as understood from an economic perspective, and an introduction to competition-based resource allocation. In keeping with a theoretical trope introduced earlier in this book, what is also introduced are aspects of a reflexive imagining of mobility. The requirement is as much for a means of thinking (differently) about movement as it is about action, with progress made incrementally in different stages. Such thought and action is mediated by the presence of significant others, especially fellow programme and project participants, and guided by trainers and educators. This returns us to reflect on the model of employability introduced in Chap. 2, in the sense that we can add the mobility dimension to this equation.

Notes

1. Strongly related to free movement in the EU is the establishment of the Schengen zone, which includes 22 EU countries plus Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein (European Parliament 2017). The UK and the Republic of Ireland are not part of Schengen, having their own Common Travel Agreement.
2. This is similar to what social capital theorists sometimes refer to as the strength of 'strong' or 'weak' ties (e.g. Granovetter 1973).

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