

HOW LONG IS TOO LONG



Project Reference Number: 2019-1-FR01-KA203-062506

International Student Mobility at a Glance

Promising Potential and Limiting Barriers of Non-traditional Mobility

Desk Research Report

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KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
KA203 - Strategic Partnerships for higher education



International Student Mobility at a Glance – Promising Potential and Limiting Barriers of Non-traditional Mobility. Desk Research Report.

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ISBN: 978-963-489-263-2

Publisher:

ELTE Eötvös Loránd University Department of Erasmus+ and International Programmes

2020

Recommended citation: Erdei, L. A. & Káplár-Kodácsy, K. (2020). International Student Mobility at a Glance – Promising Potential and Limiting Barriers of Non-traditional Mobility. Desk Research Report. Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Loránd University Department of Erasmus+ and International Programmes.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Table of contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Research aims	5
3. Methodology	5
4. Internationalisation of higher education and international student mobility in a nutshell 7	
4.1. Internationalisation of higher education	7
4.2. International student mobility	10
4.2.1. Definitions, forms and trends of international student mobility	10
4.2.2. Barriers and challenges of international student mobility	13
4.2.3. Benefits of international student mobility	14
5. Benefits and barriers of international student mobility in terms of competence and skills development	20
5.1. The case of traditional semester-long, physical student mobility	21
5.1.1. Semester-long, physical mobility	21
5.2. The case of student mobility with non-traditional length	34
5.2.1. Short-term mobility	34
5.2.2. Long-term mobility	50
5.3. The case of student mobility with non-traditional modality	52
5.3.1. Virtual exchange programmes	52
5.3.2. Blended mobility	77
6. References	83
7. List of figures	98

1. Introduction

The notion of Erasmus+ programmes is an unavoidable, complex practice for those who have ever related to the world of higher education institutions. A main goal of Erasmus+ is to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, which includes making lifelong mobility a reality and improving the quality and efficiency of education and training (European Commission, 2020a). Institutions are striving to develop towards internationalisation and broaden mobility opportunities for students. There are many reasons why students do not or cannot go on mobility, often due to working capacity issues, not knowing the benefits, or simply being intimidated by going to another country. Physical inability to go on mobility is an obvious obstacle. There are also many cases where students are unable to go on mobility because of employment obligations or strict university programmes. With the implementation of the new Erasmus programme, to be started in 2021, there is the possibility to adapt programmes and practices of higher education institutions (HEI), including a variety of lengths and mobility types.

Thus, the aim of the project *How long is too long?* (HLiTL) is to enable higher education leaders and internationalisation managers to adapt and improve their mobility strategies, foster mobility schemes with the greatest impact on competences of students, including mobility schemes mixing distant learning and physical mobility (blended learning) and broaden mobility options for all types of students. Traditional schemes such as one-semester and two-semester mobilities predominate the HEIs (Teichler, 2017). This is mainly the result of the structure of the education programmes and the conditions of grant schemes, which define the minimum and maximum length of the mobility phase. It is generally assumed that the longer the stay, the more positive it has for the generation of mobility-related core competences. However, there is very little known about the competence and skills development with respect to different lengths of study and/or different modalities of mobility. The picture grows even more complex with the increasing use of digital tools for training activities, making it easier to bring an international dimension to the classroom without or complementary to physical presence.

The project is implemented by a consortium of 4 universities, with diverse existing links in-between, and two European stakeholder institutions. The University of Versailles Saint Quentin-en-Yvelines (UVSQ) is the coordinator of the project and is cooperating with Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), University of Porto (UPorto), University of Lodz (UoL), University of Marburg (UM), the European University Foundation (EUF) and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN).



2. Research aims

Over the years, HEIs have designed their student mobility strategies navigating multiple constraints, ranging from availability of grants, growth and performance milestones and trends shaping the international dimension of higher education. Notably absent from their toolkit have been the findings of research carried out on the impact of student mobility and key factors that shape and affect it. It is obvious that in existing studies on learning schemes including digital tools (e-learning, different types of distant learning and teaching) the use of the terms (for example ‘virtual mobility’ or ‘virtual exchange’, ‘blended learning’ and ‘blended mobility’) can cover very different rationales and practices. Hence, the benefits in terms of competence and skills development of these non-traditional mobility types have neither been explored systematically nor discussed in detail. Besides the aforementioned theme, another research gap has emerged, namely, the relevance of the general assumption that the longer the stay, the more positive it will be for the generation of mobility competences such as foreign language competence and digital competence as well as intercultural awareness.

The present document therefore delivers a thorough literature analysis concerning the benefits and impacts of international student mobility according to (1) the length of mobility and (2) the modality of mobility. In the first section, the review systematically analyses each type of mobility, as far as duration is concerned, aligned with the classification of the Erasmus+ Impact Study 2019 (European Commission, 2019a): short-term mobility (1 week to 3 months), semester mobility (from 3 to 6 months) and long-term mobility (from 6 to 12 months). The results will allow us to better understand the effective length to acquire key competences associated with international student mobility programmes. Also, the report gives an overview of different student mobility activities in the EHEA as well as in the context of non-European higher education institutions with respect to non-traditional modality, such as blended mobility and virtual exchange programmes.

3. Methodology

The report applies the systematic literature review methodology, thus, studies selected for inclusion are analysed by applying the PRISMA-P 2015 protocol (Moher et al., 2015; Shamseer et al., 2015 adapted for our use). This allowed a narrative synthesis of emergent themes, oriented by the following concepts: “internationalisation of higher education”, “study abroad / international student mobility / credit mobility / student exchange”, “length and/or modality of student mobility” with a special emphasis on “short-term mobility” and “virtual

mobility”, as well as on “benefits of and competence and skill development in student mobility”.

There were four information sources (Scopus; EBSCO; Google Scholar and Google) in scope for the period 2000-2020. This research work yielded 232 studies in total (academic and grey literature equally) and 198 studies after duplicates removed in the first round with double parallel review of two independent researchers. Abstracts were searched for the following keywords:

- *first search criteria*: internationalisation of higher education, international student mobility, credit mobility, mobility higher education, learning mobility, ERASMUS, cross border education, internationalisation at home, joint degree;
- *second search criteria*: length, type, forms, modality, competence, skills, impact, effects, efficacy, benefits, barriers;
- *third search criteria*: short term, long term, virtual mobility, blended mobility.

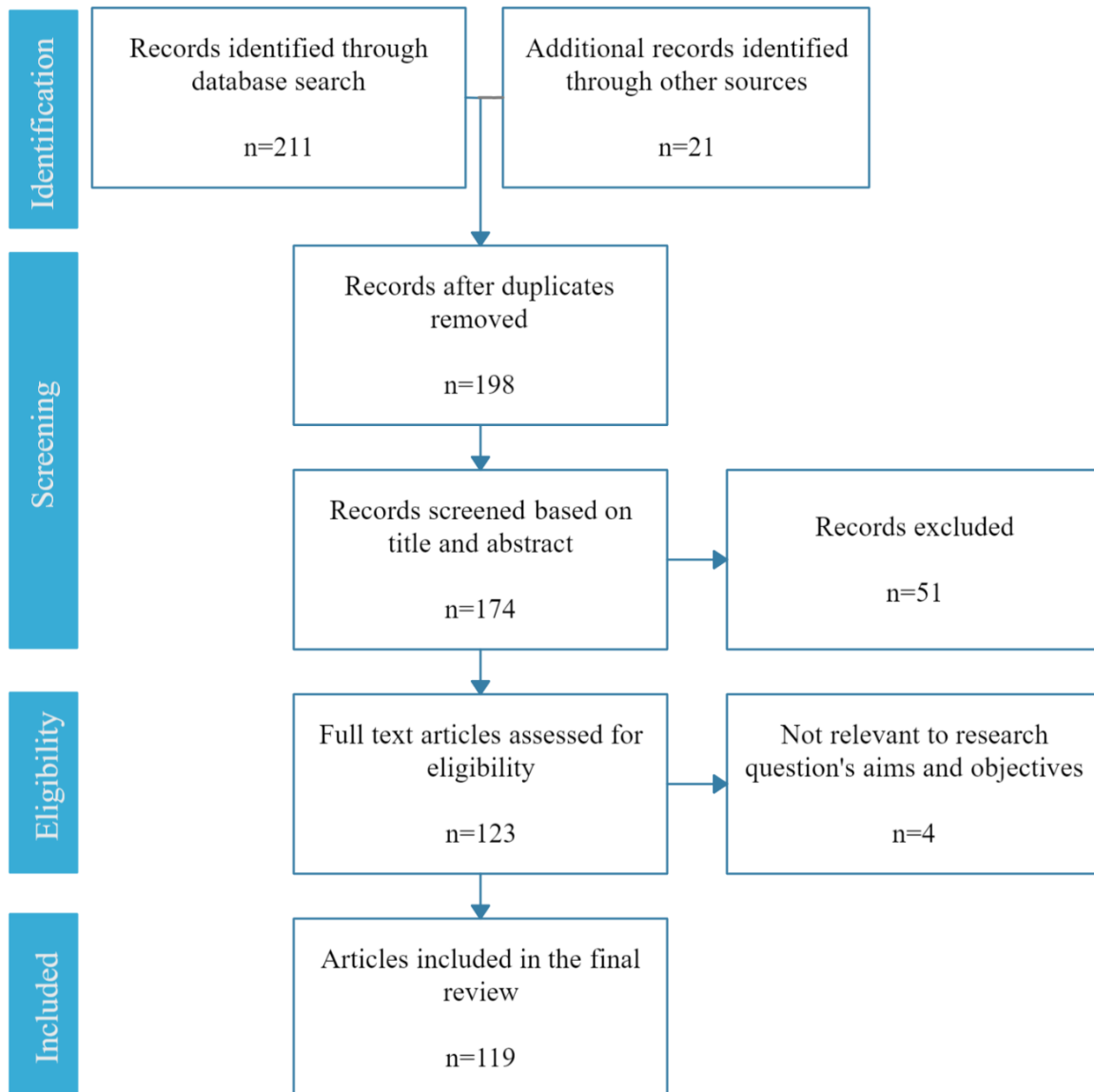
These sets of search words were then refined by the following terms: study abroad, student exchange, virtual exchange, skills development and impact of study abroad / international student mobility / credit mobility / student exchange.

In the second stage of selection, based on the skim-read of the papers, 174 studies were included, and 24 studies were excluded in the parallel review for irrelevance, mismatch or study not found in full length online. In the refinement phase, final number of papers to be included were defined by going through the “to be negotiated” category again. The refinement resulted in 123 papers for complete review.

In the final phase of the selection, 119 items were studied in full length for filtering the most relevant papers within the research scope in a parallel single review.

Papers included in the final phase were read, coded and analysed by two independent reviewers and results were cross-checked via moderated sample, differences were resolved through direct discussion between the reviewers.

For the visualisation of the complete procedure of the PRISMA-P protocol see Figure 1.



1. Figure - Prisma-P protocol (Moher et al., 2015; Shamseer et al., 2015 adapted for our use)

4. Internationalisation of higher education and international student mobility in a nutshell

4.1. Internationalisation of higher education

Internationalisation of higher education and its corresponding phenomena, including international student mobility and its outcomes, have drawn an increasing interest of

researchers from multiple disciplines. In parallel, the emergence of different mobility programmes promoted either by supranational bodies, such as the European Commission or inter-institutional collaborations through strategic partnerships or university alliances, has been significant, thus enabling a growing number of students, academic and non-academic staff to benefit from internal experiences.

Internationalisation of higher education is a key concept that regularly emerges in both professional discourses and everyday practice, however, it is not greatly investigated in the latter case. According to Wächter (2008) internationalisation is a multifaceted phenomenon which can be described in several ways; therefore, it also can be used as an umbrella term for strategies and actions that are to support the understanding of other cultures (Bovill et al., 2015). Knight (2003) defines internationalisation as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 2).

The activities related to internationalisation can be interpreted and clustered in several ways. Two main ways of interpretation can be referred to as ‘cross-border education’ and ‘internationalisation at home’. The first approach promotes “the movement of people, knowledge, programs, providers and curriculum across national or regional jurisdictional borders” OECD (2004, p. 19), therefore includes outward student mobility on the level of higher education institutions. Meanwhile, the latter approach refers to “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students, within domestic learning environments” (Curaj et al., 2015, p. 69).

The ‘internationalisation at home’ approach highlights the importance of both inward student mobility and the purposeful integration of internationalisation into the curriculum of the home institution, allowing the active participation in international activities of the physically non-mobile students as well (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). As Standley (2015) states, ‘internationalisation at home’ occurs through the interactions of non-mobile students “with incoming students and with students and staff who have returned to their home institutions after a period abroad” (p. 2) that serves as an important trigger for non-mobile students for future participation in student mobility. Although international student mobility under the scope of cross-border education is still a prominent phenomenon in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the emerging concept of ‘internationalisation at home’ puts an emphasis on “teaching, learning and student services in a culturally diverse setting; is strongly linked to intercultural education and to the development of international, intercultural and global perspectives in all students; and concerns all staff (general and academic staff), all students (domestic and international) and all processes (administrative processes as well as teaching, learning and research processes). It has implications for the curriculum, for general

staff development, professional development for academic staff, services, systems administration and campus culture, but is it possible to completely separate internationalisation at home ('here') from internationalisation somewhere else ('there')?" (Leask, 2004, p. 5).

The above question will arise again in the later phase of this report, as student mobility activities such as virtual exchange and blended type of mobilities are very difficult to fit in to the narrow concept of cross-border education. Thus, this new perspective calls for an integrated approach that might be described with the concept of comprehensive internationalisation (Hudzik, 2015).

Reinterpreting internationalization along the concepts mentioned above can be supported by interpreting the processes that are currently taking place as part of the internationalization agenda. In Choudaha's (2017) approach, global trends shaping the internationalization of higher education mark three distinct waves of internationalization, of which the third period of the third wave is currently underway. As the author summarises, "Wave III indicates a trend towards increasing competition among new and traditional destinations to attract international students and increasing expectation of career and employability outcomes among international students. The institutional driver in this wave will be to innovate and offer new modes of programmes through partnerships, and transnational and online education to attract global students. A recent report by Richardson (2015) asserts that it is critical to find ways to expand the reach of cross-border mobility to as many higher education students as possible in all Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation economies and '[f]or cost reasons, the only feasible way of doing so is to tap into the opportunities provided by online modes of learning'" (Richardson, 2015 as cited by Choudaha, 2017, p. 830). These models of internationalisation orient the conceptualization of this report and compile a structure for the discussion of virtual and blended mobility programmes together with the integration of short-term physical mobilities into the curriculum.

As mentioned above, internationalisation of higher education institutions is implemented through a number of modes and forms: "from offering foreign language courses to international research projects and international student, staff and faculty exchange programs (...), it can even mean the development of joint degree programs by universities located in different regions of the world" (Schwald, 2012, p. 44). Hence, the internationalisation shall not be an isolated agenda within the institutional strategies and implemented practices, but it should be supported across the higher education institutions through several means "to foster an internationally oriented learning environment: an international dimension to the curricula, inclusivity of procedures and support services to international and home learners alike, staff who are interculturally aware and, ideally, have

personal experience of working abroad and an institutional management that is supportive of staff availing themselves of international teaching mobility opportunities” (Standley, 2015, p. 3).

The importance of discussing the conceptual frameworks, trends and diverse forms of internationalisation within HEI is unquestionable, however, it is important to realise that the approach implicitly pervades the discussion focuses exclusively on the institutional aspects and benefits of internationalisation. The institutional perspective is usually “perceived to enhance quality, offer an economic benefit or elevate perceptions of the institution and its reputation, such as league table positioning, global research ranking or high-level partnerships” (Jones, 2013, p. 95), eliminating the importance of benefits for the main stakeholder group, the students. In the next section, our report focuses on the phenomenon of international student mobility and the benefits it produces on individual level.

4.2. International student mobility

4.2.1. Definitions, forms and trends of international student mobility

As discussed earlier, international student mobility is a key means of internationalising higher education institutions and produces several benefits for both the institution and the identified beneficiaries, including students, academic and non-academic staff as well. As Buchem et al. (2018) indicates, “mobility of students and staff has been one of the central objectives and main policy areas of the EHEA (...) with the Erasmus program, superseded by Erasmus+, that has been one of the most well-known programs promoting mobility of students and staff” (p. 352). The aforementioned central role is well recognisable through the Communiqué of European Ministers for Higher Education in Europe from 2009 that indicates the importance of student mobility by stating that “in 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad” (European Commission, 2009, p. 4).

As Henderikx & Ubachs note (2019), three perspectives that are important in organising mobility: “1) From a university perspective, mobility takes place when two or more universities organize and recognize the study periods followed by their students in an exchange program or in a networked/joint program. Institutional policies and strategies entail such collaborations and mobility. Collaboration and mobility agreements create the organizational framework. 2) From a student perspective, students follow a learning activity, a course or part of a curriculum in another university in the framework of a bilateral or a network/consortium agreement between universities. Individual study plans (ISPs) summarize successive mobility periods within the curriculum or course. Students benefit from



a rich international academic experience. 3) From a teaching staff perspective, staff is organising a learning activity or a course in the framework of a bilateral or a network/consortium agreement between universities. By doing so, new educational and mobility formats are created, based on international course and curriculum design. Teaching combine international collaboration in education, research and innovation and live their ambitions” (p. 12).

Through these three perspectives, the main concept of the current report is referring to the terms used widely in the EHEA, namely, (*international*) *student mobility*, *credit mobility* or *student exchange* as well as *study abroad* according to the US literature (Streitwieser et al., 2012). This study prefers the use of international student mobility (ISM) as it is contextualised in the European higher education system and refers to the different forms of cross-border education activities, including diploma or credit mobility and placements as well. However, it is important to note that the term study abroad may appear in the report through quotes, thus implicitly referring to the US context of the article.

Although ISM is a wide-known and used term, definitions are seldom applied in academic or grey literature. International student mobility activities are defined for the current report as certain study periods of an educational programme that are integrated into the curriculum of any post-secondary education that take place outside the geographical boundaries of the country of origin, and may provide a short- or long-term learning experiences abroad before returning home (Smith & Mitry, 2008; Clarke et al., 2009; Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016; Kumpikaite & Duoba, 2011). Rodrigues (2012) also highlights the importance of the border crossing element but emphasises that “even though it may seem straightforward, the definition of student mobility depends on the type of mobility and on the criterion used to identify mobile students” (p. 6). This statement is especially important when considering mobility actions that are implemented through online collaborations and supported by digital tools that is the case in relation to virtually assisted mobility activities. On the level of the individual beneficiaries, student mobility can be seen as “the ability to act autonomously and to adapt to a different socio-economic environment and culture” (Kumpikaite & Duoba, 2011, p. 42).

As stated above, international student mobility can take different forms and be realised through various types of activities. According to Ackers (2010) “mobility can be international, trans-national, cross-border or within national borders, cross-sectoral and increasingly virtual. It can be motivated by employers and by individuals” (p. 85). Kumpikaite and Duoba (2011, cites Promoting Mobility, 2007) discusses three different types of student mobility based on the purpose of the mobility, such as:

- Horizontal Mobility: a process in which students spend a period of their studies in another country;
- Vertical Mobility: a process in which students take a full degree abroad;
- Brain Mobility: a process whereby a country loses its most talented and educated people to other countries because there is a lack of opportunities in their own.

However, Kumpikaite and Duoba (2011) underlines that “horizontal mobility has been the major means of mobility for a large number of students all around Europe. This type of mobility is currently in focus of the European Union, which recognizes the importance of education and becomes more involved in the stimulation of student mobility” (p. 42).

Weibl (2015, cites King, 2003) discusses another thematization that also shows similarities to the previous concept. It presents “1) diploma, degree or programme mobility with a whole programme of study abroad; 2) credit mobility, where part of a study programme is conducted outside of the home country and 3) voluntary or spontaneous mobility, also known as international free movers, who undertake study abroad for a variety of personal reasons and are organised by students themselves” (p. 33). Kehl and Morris (2007) suggest another model of student mobility activities that are prominent in the US On the one hand, this model involves “direct enrolment [...] that entails direct placement of US students into the host country’s post-secondary educational system. This type of study abroad program may include either one-way or a more traditional two-way exchange of students and/or faculty. Faculty from the host institution teach the courses and students are housed independently or with students from the host institution” (p. 68). On the other hand, the model defines hybrid programs as “type of study abroad program [that] includes opportunities for students to be enrolled directly in courses of the host institution, as well as in courses taught by faculty from the home university. Housing options may include home stays, hostels, or housing leased or owned by either the home or host countries (Kehl & Morris, 2007, p. 68). The model also discusses island programs that “is often thought of as a self-contained academic program. Students take courses alongside other students from the US institution. Faculty may be employed by and travel from the home institution or be hired locally. Typically, classrooms are outside any local host university, with English as the language of instruction - with the exception of foreign language courses” (Kehl & Morris, 2007, p. 68).

As a conclusion, international student mobility can take various forms, but regardless of that, it poses several barriers and challenges, as well as numerous benefits, for both the institutions and the main stakeholder group – the students. In the next section, we will shortly discuss

these barriers and benefits from the students' perspective. The barriers and challenges of ISM are discussed in detail in the IO1 desk research report of the *NORM Erasmus+ KA2 project*¹.

4.2.2. Barriers and challenges of international student mobility

Concerning the barriers of participation in international student mobility activities, it might be obvious that the lack of financial resources, additional costs and other affordability limitations results a great proportion of barriers (Ackers, 2010; Bryła, 2015; European Commission, 2014, 2019a; Rodrigues, 2012; Smith & Mitry, 2008). Students mention other types of barriers as well, such as 1) problems with integrating the study period abroad with the study programme and a possible delay in the progress of studies (Bryła, 2015; González et al., 2011; Smith & Mitry, 2008), 2) language barriers (European Commission, 2019a; Rodrigues, 2012), 3) difficulty to get recognition (Rodrigues, 2012), 4) lack of information (Rodrigues, 2012), 5) insufficient support in the home country (Rodrigues, 2012), as well as 6) lack of individual motivation (Rodrigues, 2012). These can have a huge impact on the general quality of the participants' everyday life.

The above-mentioned barriers are strongly related to further limitations, such as 7) the difficulties of maintaining personal relationships with family and friends for a longer period of time (Bryła, 2015; European Commission, 2014; Greenfield et al., 2012; Rodrigues, 2012; Stronkhorst, 2005), while it is even more of a concern for atypical students who are dealing with 8) family responsibilities, including parenting and child care. Concerning the same target group, 9) difficulties regarding the employment of both the main beneficiary as well as of partners as spouses emerge (Ackers, 2010; Greenfield et al., 2012). These barriers result in the increased limitation of the inclusivity aspects in case of racial, ethnic minority groups or other historically marginalised groups (Greenfield et al., 2012; Stebleton et al., 2012). These limitations are mainly derived from "social-psychological factors, e.g., students from racial or ethnic minority groups are less likely to have family members with international travel experience (Fusch, 2011 as cited by Greenfield et al., 2012). Therefore Greenfield et al. (2012) highlights that the active involvement in student mobility programs "is also prone to racial or ethnic disparities" (p. 754).

Evidence-based studies emphasize barriers and other challenges regarding student mobility that might not be obvious from the general discussions. However, it is not a wide-spread phenomenon, 10) the lack of acknowledgement of the professional value of mobility activities by employers was present in some cases, even calling ISM an 'academic tourism' as such (Messelink et al., 2015; Rodrigues, 2012; Stronkhorst, 2005; Teichler & Janson, 2007). As

¹ A detailed description of the NORM Project is here: <https://uni-foundation.eu/project/norm/>



Teichler and Janson (2007) note, the “professional value of the ERASMUS experience turns out to be more modest for recent generations than for those having studied in another European country some time ago. We have reasons to believe that ERASMUS offers to a lesser extent an exclusive experience now than some years ago and that visibly international work assignments grow to a lesser extent than does the proportion of internationally experienced graduates” (p. 493).

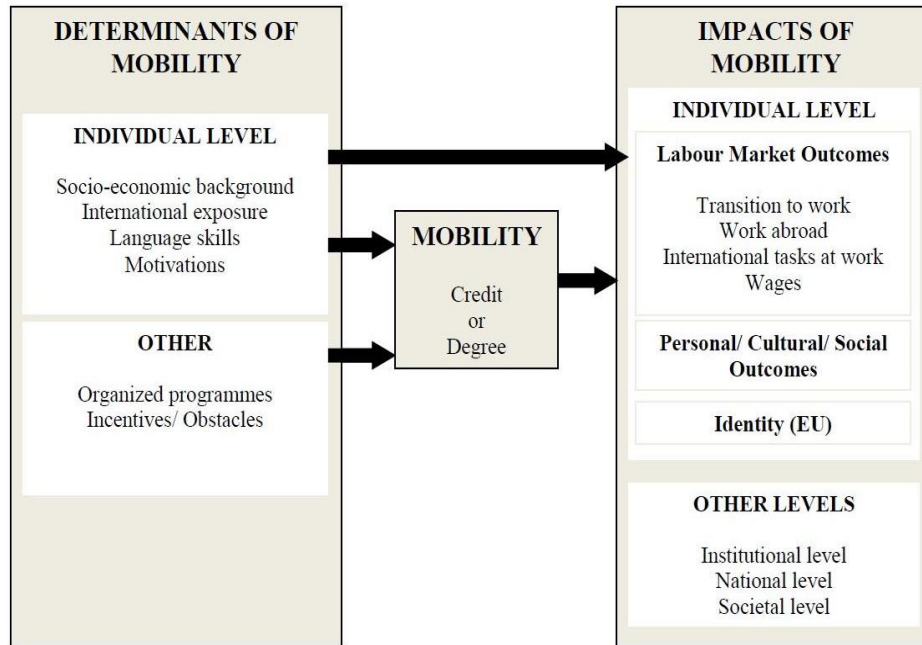
The summary (above) shows that international student mobility is a continuously emerging concept and practice within the internationalisation agenda of the European HEIs but also poses several challenges and barriers for the participating individuals and implementing institutions as well. Nevertheless, student mobility is manifested in a great amount of benefits for all actors involved, especially through contributing to the career advancement and competence development of the participating students. The next section is discussing the main benefits in detail.

4.2.3. Benefits of international student mobility

The exploration of the various ISM benefits is of a constant interest among practitioners and researchers in the field. However, considering the possible benefits of ISM, the policy objectives concerning the broader field shall not be missed. The Leuven Communiqué (European Commission, 2009) states that “mobility of students, early stage researchers and staff enhances the quality of programmes and excellence in research; it strengthens the academic and cultural internationalisation of European higher education. Mobility is important for personal development and employability; it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures. It encourages linguistic pluralism, thus underpinning the multilingual tradition of the European Higher Education Area and it increases cooperation and competition between higher education institutions. Therefore, mobility shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area. We call upon each country to increase mobility, to ensure its high quality and to diversify its types and scope (p. 4). Nevertheless, Rodrigues (2012) has the assumption that “the value of studying abroad may decline as more students acquire international competences. This interpretation is aligned with the finding that in countries experiencing student mobility more recently (Central and East European countries) the value reported is higher than in Western countries” (Bracht et al., 2006 as cited by Rodrigues, 2012, p. 20).

When aiming at evaluating, assessing and analysing the multitude of ISM benefits, it is necessary to consider the variety of challenges that may emerge for all parties involved in the ISM programme. In order to support this evaluation and assessment process, Rodrigues

(2012) provides a conceptual framework that highlights the possible determinants and areas of impact of mobility (*Figure 2*).



2. Figure - Student mobility conceptual framework (adapted from Rodrigues, 2012, p. 7)

“The framework emphasises that, in order to understand the phenomenon of student mobility, one should analyse its determinants, i.e. the factors affecting the choice to become mobile. The focus is on determinants at the individual level. Other aspects may also affect the decision to become mobile, such as obstacles, incentives and the existence of organized programmes. It is assumed that the mobility experience has impacts at the individual level, namely on labour market outcomes, personal/ cultural and social outcomes and international identity. This is inspired in the above-mentioned EU rationales to support student mobility.

The framework highlights that the individual characteristics that eventually lead to the decision of being mobile affect directly the outcomes mentioned above, apart from the effect on mobility. This has implications in the interpretation of the impacts of student mobility (...). Finally, the framework acknowledges that other levels may also be affected by student mobility, namely higher education institutions, as well as the society and the nation in general” (Rodrigues, 2012, p. 7).

As student mobility programmes are means to connect people around the world (Schwald, 2012), the programmes provide students with a life-changing experience in several respects (Weibl, 2015), hence the possibility to be prepared for living and working in a globalized world

(Greenfield et al., 2012), as well as functioning in an international and inter-cultural context (Bryła, 2015). ISM programmes furthermore contribute to the creation of a European identity of the participating students within the EHEA (Messelink et al., 2015). ISM programmes support the development of students through building new social networks, socialising with the citizens of another country (Bótas & Huisman, 2013; Bracht et al., 2006; Rodrigues, 2012), thus, supporting better academic achievement, as well as brighter individual labour market outcomes and career prospects (Bótas & Huisman, 2013; Carley et al., 2006; European Commission, 2014; Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016; Smith & Mitry, 2008). Compared to non-mobile students, former Erasmus+ students experience higher chances of finding their first job after graduation, especially through being offered a job by the former employer in case of an internship experience (European Commission, 2019a; Rodrigues, 2012), while work more often in higher level positions with more responsibility (Bótas & Huisman, 2013). Other benefits of ISM regarding the employability of students are the higher chances of working internationally, experience job mobility at one point in the professional career or being employed in positions with international assignments compared to non-mobile students (European Commission, 2019a; Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016; Teichler & Janson, 2007).

Important to note, however, “that the effect of student mobility is stronger for the future career in horizontal dimensions (work abroad and international tasks) than in vertical dimensions (employment/unemployment and wages). In other words, it seems that being mobile does not have a significant effect on the success of the career but on the nature of the career, namely by making it more international or by increasing the probability to work abroad. This suggests that studying abroad is used by students as a signalling tool to indicate a preference for international subjects and tasks” (Rodrigues, 2012, p. 19). The above statement is endorsed by Nilsson and Ripmeester (2016) who concluded that “former Erasmus students could not expect higher income and status than their immobile peers but were more often internationally employed” (p. 615). These results are quite contrary to the findings of the 2014 Erasmus+ Impact Study that indicates significantly lower rates of unemployment among former Erasmus+ students than for those who never had a mobility experience (European Commission, 2014). International student mobility programmes, including the Erasmus+ mobility actions therefore produce several positive outcomes in terms of employability through supporting the development of competences, hence employability skills, relevant knowledge and attitudes that are highly valued by employers (Bótas & Huisman, 2013; European Commission, 2019a). Summarising, student mobility has an impact on the human, cultural and social capital of the participating students (Bótas & Huisman, 2013; Bracht et al., 2006; Rodrigues, 2012) that results in the so-called *mobility capital* (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Rodrigues (2012) label the concept as “to describe that people with mobility experiences develop a taste for living abroad, being therefore expected to present a

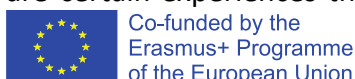


higher proportion of mobile students working/living abroad after the mobility experience” (p. 17).

Before moving to the detailed discussion of competence development aspects of ISMs, it is important to look at the means and processes by which student mobility produces positive outcomes. According to our understanding, this inquiry completely fits the ISM conceptual framework presented above (*Figure 2*), as it focuses not just on the outcomes as such, but on the possible processes of producing the analysed outcomes. Even though the benefits of ISM programmes are well-researched, according to Clapp-Smith and Wernsing (2014) “less is understood about the process by which people gain these relevant skills and competences from international experiences” (p. 663). As mobility was defined as a life-changing experience, it can be also understood “as ‘becoming’ [that] reflects the reshaping of international students through their aspirations for engaging in geographical, educational, cultural and ‘life’ border-crossing. This re-conceptualisation appears to imagine more for mobility than simply the movement across national borders for educational purposes” (Tran, 2016).

The concept, in line with other studies, suggests that student mobility is a transformative process that is supporting the development of the students’ competences in several respects. Hallows et al. (2011) reassures the concept when examining the outcomes of short-term mobility programmes among global business students in the US context. Both studies rely on the transformational learning theory of Mezirow (1991) that describes the processes by which the students experience a “significant knowledge transformation and paradigm shift. This is also known as perspective transformation” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167). As Hallows et al. (2011) highlights, “the theory purports that real learning goes beyond just acquiring content knowledge or learning facts, figures and data. It is how adults learn to think for themselves. It is founded on the belief that when an experience results in deep, structural shifts in students’ thoughts and feelings, it will profoundly affect their actions. Moreover, they are more likely to reframe their world view by incorporating this new knowledge or information into their belief systems” (p. 93). As a result of this learning process, students might question and reflect critically on their own perspectives or interpret their surroundings in another way that consequently affects their thinking as well as how they act in different types of social contexts (Hallows et al., 2011).

As stated above, a transformational process occurs “in which experiences differing in complexity, importance, and intensity trigger comparisons to past experiences which generate a questioning of one’s beliefs and assumptions” (Osland and Bird, 2008 as cited by Clapp-Smith & Wernsing, 2014, p. 662). According to Clapp-Smith and Wernsing (2014), there are certain experiences that function as triggers in this transformational learning process.



These triggers can be clustered into four broad categories: “1) immersing with local customs and people, 2) experiencing the novelty of “normality”, 3) communicating in a new language and 4) finding time for self-reflection” (p. 662).

1) As described in detail through the qualitative study of Clapp-Smith and Wernsing (2014), the interviewed undergraduate management students “described important triggers as interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds. These ranged from brief encounters on the street to after class conversations with international professors to late night dancing with students from other cultures. Within this category, a surprising number of participants described triggers when interacting with host families, including children, likely because the depth of the relationship formed with the host families allowed for more meaningful conversations. (...) The numerous conversations with host families made new perspectives about the differences between the participants’ home cultures and host cultures salient. New contexts expose individuals to new information. This study uncovered that immersion with local customs and people occurred not only from exposure to new contexts, but also by the absence of familiar contexts. Many participants noted their dependence on close friendships at home and a realisation that without them, the participants could find new ways to relate to new people” (p. 668).

2) Concerning the second trigger, “the participants were exposed to a “normal” way of life that was novel to them and unfamiliar. Observing and experiencing normality in another culture made salient participants’ own assumptions about what is normal. Many participants described the first few days in their new surroundings and the unfamiliarity of it as “scary” at first. Participants also highlighted observing the daily routines of people in the new culture. They were as mundane as what people eat for breakfast and how they travel to work, or as profound as realizing the cost of housing, food, owning a car and the impact these costs have on how people live. The novelty of “normality” contradicted implicit stereotypes. Thus, it is a combination of experiences that contribute to the realisation that generalisations are distorted in both directions and makes salient the specific assumptions that a sojourner carries about other cultures” (p. 669).

3) On the third stance, “learning to communicate in a new language played a large role in transforming participants. Language was so pervasive that it is difficult to isolate: it is related to immersing with local people and customs as well as with experiencing the novelty of normality. The transformational triggers involved with the different language encounters initiated an inquiry and greater awareness of the importance language carries in thought, culture and identity. At a surface level, language helped participants integrate into the host culture and served as a symbol of their success (...). At a deeper level, language barriers exposed different ways of thinking as well as similarities. In addition to the internal

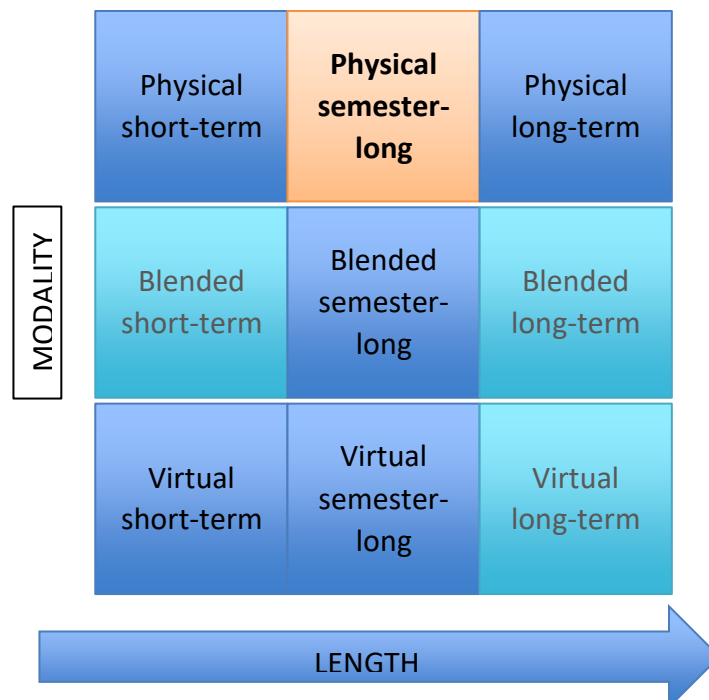
discoveries that language triggered, communicating in a new language interacted with the depth of local immersion and novelty of “normality” experiences. (...) Learning to communicate in the local language triggered knowledge about previously unseen assets, reemphasizing that language as a trigger corresponds to more than one transformation. Communicating in a new language made evident the importance of language in not just communication, but in understanding themselves” (p. 669).

4) Last, but not least, “the international experience created a deep level of reflection. Critical reflection on experience and cultural assumptions is an important part of a transformational learning process and emerged as a major source of trigger events and transformation in frames of reference. In the absence of the familiar, many were forced to look inward, where the only pieces of familiarity resided. Through time in self-reflection, many participants found a greater appreciation of themselves. They understood that with nothing familiar around them, they enjoyed the company of their thoughts. Participants described taking time to write in their journal and relishing these moments of self-reflection. Several noted they are rarely alone at their home institution, yet during this experience, they had spent days by themselves, accomplishing new feats alone. These moments made them realise they are self-sufficient and capable. Self-reflection built participants’ self-awareness and self-efficacy through the realization that participants could overcome language barriers, find their way on unfamiliar transportation systems, and relate to people who are culturally different from them” (p. 670).

International student mobility experiences thus provide a rich environment that creates and supports possible transformational learning processes of the main beneficiaries, who – in our case – are the students. As described above, student mobility enables students to actively immerse into local cultures, experience “normality” of life and maintain constant socialisation with peers (even outside the classrooms) as well as it allows time for self-reflection. Consequently, the identified transformational triggers are highly dependent on the physical modality of the mobility programme. According to our understanding, this strongly argues the importance of undertaking a physical mobility experience for achieving substantial benefits, such as a gain in intercultural competences (Clapp-Smith & Wernsing, 2014). The next chapter is going to discuss the possible benefits of ISM in terms of competence and skills development with special attention to other determining factors of its efficiency, namely the length and the modality factors of ISM in reference to the transformational triggers.

5. Benefits and barriers of international student mobility in terms of competence and skills development

International student mobility programmes offer an intercultural learning setting (Ngân et al., 2018) through increased intercultural contact (Messelink et al., 2015) that “develop students’ global understanding, but also develop a skill set to allow students to succeed in the global marketplace. [These] programs are one way of developing students’ knowledge, skills, and abilities by providing an experiential learning process” (Sjoberg & Shabalina, 2010, p. 46). In order to discuss the competence development potential of the certain ISM types, an analysis framework was prepared. *Figure 3* presents nine different mobility types defined by two dimensions, putting semester-long physical mobility at the core of the analysis (red quadrat). However, literature has been reviewed on the whole spectrum of modality and length, there were, there were no sufficient number of data found for blended short-term, as well as long-term programmes (light blue quadrats). Thus, it is not possible to derive general tendencies base on the literature analysed.



3. Figure - Matrix of international student mobility types in terms of length and modality

As *Figure 3* indicates, the literature analysed in this systematic review has three main dimensions of analysis:

- the benefits of certain mobility types are compared to the performance of *non-mobile student groups*, in which case the benefits of all modality and length options are a subject for comparison with outcomes of non-mobile students;
- the benefits of certain mobility types are compared to the benefits associated with other mobility types on the same continuum or in certain cases, across these dimensions, in which case
 - *short-term or long-term mobility* activities are compared to *semester-long mobilities*;
 - *virtual exchange programmes or blended mobilities* are compared to *physical mobility*; with having
 - multiple articles that compare *short-term virtual exchange programmes* to semester-long physical mobilities; as well as
- the benefits of certain mobility types are *not put into a comparative perspective* on purpose.

The current report is dedicated to being consequent on referring to the above dimensions of comparison during the analysis of the literature. The next sections are going to present a great number of articles to familiarise with the topic of various outcomes of competence development during a mobility experience that are affected by several variables, such as the length or the modality of these programmes. Important to note here that an approximately equal share of the literature reviewed for the current report is written in the European and the American context, thus stemming from slightly different conceptual traditions and build on somewhat different practices of internationalisation. This is particularly striking in the case of short-term mobilities and less relevant for the discussion of semester-long, physical mobilities. Therefore, for the latter case the report uses the literature without significant reference to their national context.

5.1. The case of traditional semester-long, physical student mobility

5.1.1. Semester-long, physical mobility

As discussed previously, international student mobility has several benefits on both individual and organisational level that is hard to separate from the competence and skills development potential of student mobility schemes and practices. As García Esteban and Jahnke (2020) highlight that international student mobility “has been acknowledged not only to broaden personal and intellectual horizons but also to have positive effects on the skills development and employability of undergraduate students. Academics, policymakers and organizations

representing the labour market have presented a broad number of skills-related explorations proposing different frameworks to help develop students' skills" (p. 519).

It is important to note at an early stage of the literature review, there are discrepancies and areas of ambiguity when it comes to distinguishing between skills and competences in the scientific literature. Adopting the theoretical consideration of García Esteban & Jahnke (2020, p.521), the report acknowledges that the terms "skill" and "competence" are very often used as synonyms. While they also state that the term skill refers "to the use of methods or instruments in a particular setting and in relation to defined tasks" (p. 521), the other term "competence" is understood as a much broader notion that is related to the ability "of a person facing new situations and unforeseen challenges" (p. 522).

According to several articles, ISM might provide a tremendous amount of benefits for the participating students. In general, it has an impact on the students' holistic development (Bótas & Huisman, 2013) "as students develop their dispositions of mind (personal attributes) and body as well as their competences and generic skills" (p. 749). Having a thorough and systematic review of all competence areas associated with student mobility would exceed the scope of the current report, however, it might be beneficial to have a brief overview of the key terms highlighted in the literature. In order to support this attempt, 21 articles were reviewed that introduce a wide range of competences and skills developed through ISM with the purpose of generating a frequency analysis of the most referred skills and competences (Bótas & Huisman, 2013; Bracht et al., 2006; Bryła, 2015; Clarke et al., 2009; European Commission, 2014, 2019a; Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; García Esteban & Jahnke, 2020; Greenfield et al., 2012; Hadis, 2005; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Jones, 2013; Kumpikaite & Duoba, 2011; Messelink et al., 2015; Neppel, 2005; Rowan-Kenyon & Niehaus, 2011; Smith & Mitry, 2008; Stebleton et al., 2012; Van Wijk et al., 2008; Williams, 2005). As a result of the review, 241 items were identified in relation to skills and competence areas. The frequency analysis of the items showed that the most often discussed skills and competences are *intercultural skills and competences* (25), *foreign language competences* (20), *problem solving skills and competences* (8), *employability skills* (7) as well as *knowledge of other countries* (6). This frequency is reflected in the analysis section. However, this current systematic approach also involved earlier existing systematic literature reviews in order to better define the scope of this report.

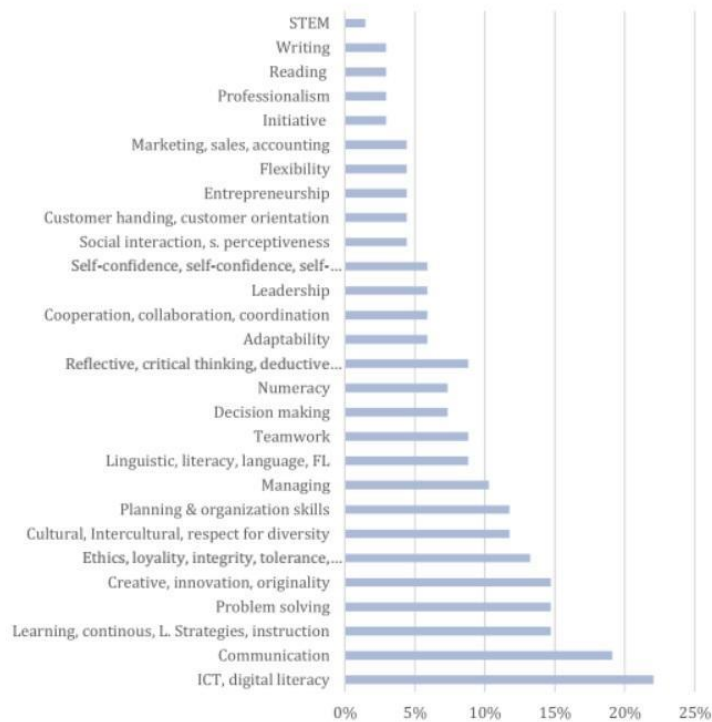
García Esteban and Jahnke (2020) reviewed the major conceptual skills frameworks in the European higher education area (EHEA) relevant in European credit mobility. As stated in the article, the authors identified 32 studies that deal with skill frameworks in European higher education out of which a great proportion of articles focused specifically on certain skills, such as transferable skills and employability. As a result, "merely 16 academic publications offered

a complete depiction of skills frameworks applicable in credit mobility programs. Most current accounts about skills outlines, specifically the ones related to employability, come from grey literature, namely comprehensive records and reports” (García Esteban & Jahnke, 2020, p. 519).

The study found diffuse agreement on a common taxonomy of the skills, however, a general and rather even tendency was mapped out by the policymakers and academia in the following domains: “(1) basic/key/core/global foundation/fundamental skills, (2) cognitive/learning skills, (3) employability/career and life skills/management, (4) transferable skills, (5) transversal skills and (6) other skills, such as personal attributes, instrumental, vocational, organization, interpersonal, digital literacy, methodological” (García Esteban & Jahnke, 2020, p. 526).

After a broad quantitative analysis, “the most relevant skills for (1) European higher education, (2) degree mobility programmes and (3) employees were classified and referenced in *Figure 3* (...). Note that only skills performing over 5.9 per cent have been considered significant in this framework” (García Esteban & Jahnke, 2020, p. 530). As a result, the article identified 14 relevant skills that have a prominent role in association with international student mobility, including *ICT, communication, learning, problem solving, creativeness, ethics, cultural, organization, management, critical thinking, language, teamwork, decision-making and numeracy* (for the distribution of relevance see *Figure 4*). These skills are associated with the aforementioned domains; however, the literature review confirms that there is consensus on the classification of only four skills: ICT, literacy and numeracy, which are considered basic, key or core skills in most researched papers together with problem solving, which is generally regarded as a cognitive skill.





4. Figure - Skills relevant to EHEA credit student mobility (adapted from Garcia Esteban & Jahnke, 2020, p. 529)

In the conclusions section, García Esteban and Jahnke (2020) suggest considering *future skills* which “anticipate that, in order to confront the expanding and prevalent role of technology, graduates will need to focus on developing unique human skills such as effective communication and creative innovation, critical thinking and collective ethical values. Data seem to confirm that a sole degree does not guarantee success, but the maturity of these skills and the commitment to lifelong learning. This can be strengthened by taking part in EHEA credit student mobility that has proved to improve not only basic and linguistic skills but also self-development and respect for several aspects such as diversity and (inter)cultural awareness” (p. 530).

When selecting the areas of competences and abilities to be presented here, the report relied heavily on the findings of our frequency analysis and the qualitative analysis of the final selected papers, and also it has been supported by the results of García Esteban and Jahnke (2020). As a result, certain competence and skill areas were included in the final discussion, including *intercultural competences* – with a strong emphasis on its components, such as *intercultural and cross-cultural skills, intercultural communication competences and skills, intercultural and cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness, as well as global or world-mindedness* – , *foreign language competences* as well as wider categories of *personal and social or professional competences*. These competences are reviewed through the special

aspect of length and modality of mobilities. It is important to note that the competences and skills identified in this systematic review are substantially related to the European Commission’s updated key competences framework 2019 (European Commission, 2019b) as seen in *Figure 5*. The framework assumes the fact that international student mobility programmes have significant potential for the development of key competences as such that are indispensable for successfully functioning in today’s knowledge society and economy.

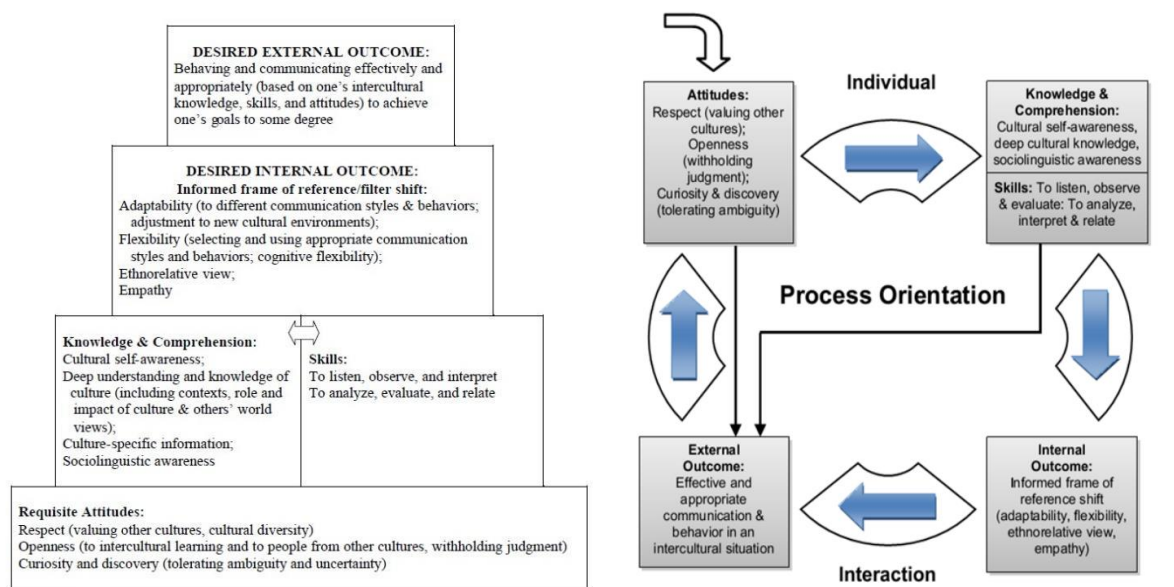


5. Figure - Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (adapted from European Commission, 2019, p. 1)

Intercultural competences

The first competence area that showed a paramount importance in the reviewed literature is referred to as the category of intercultural competences. Nevertheless, it is obvious that there is a multitude of definitions for intercultural competences that needs a brief clarification. According to Brinkman and Wink (2007) ‘intercultural competence’ is sometimes referred to “as ‘intercultural communication competence’ (Arasaratnam, 2005; Byram, 1997; Parmenter, 2003) or ‘global competence’, ‘cross-cultural competence’ or ‘intercultural sensitivity’ (Greenholz, 2005), ‘intercultural effectiveness’ (Stone, 2006) or ‘transnational competence’ (Koehn, 2002). Various authors offer overviews of the elements that intercultural competence or effectiveness should contain (Stone, 2006, p. 343; Deardorff, 2006, p. 249 and 250; Koehn, 2002, p. 110; Arasaratnem, 2005, p. 140). The number of elements range from 3 to 27, whereby the elements of flexibility, adaptability, empathy, respect and communication skills are most frequently mentioned” (p. 2). Clapp-Smith and Wernsing (2014) also highlight that “one challenge in the intercultural competence literature is the breadth of competences. In a review, Mendenhall and Osland (2002) identified over 50 [intercultural] competences that have been proposed in the literature and deemed this quantity too many to be useful” (Osland et al., 2006, p. 209, as cited by Clapp-Smith & Wernsing, 2014, p. 664).

When trying to navigate through the relevant literature, several articles (e.g. Brinkman & Wink, 2007; Nawaz, 2018; Sia, 2014; Tran & Vu, 2017) refer to the intercultural competence framework of Deardorff (2006, 2009), who defines intercultural competence as the “ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2009, p. 246). In her work, Deardorff (2006) refers to Byram (1997) when discussing the nature of intercultural competence that is described as “knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others’ values, beliefs, and behaviours; and relativizing one’s self. Linguistic competence plays a key role” (Byram, 1997, p. 34, cited by Deardorff, 2006, p. 247). This way of conceptualizing intercultural competence is very well explained by the pyramid model of Deardorff, “in which the desired external outcome is described as behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately to achieve one’s goals to some degree. And the components of the desired internal outcome are adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative view and empathy” (Brinkman and Wink, 2007, p. 2). Brinkman and Wink (2007) also emphasize the importance of certain components in the concept, including “the importance of attitude (...), specifically the attitudes of openness, respect (valuing all cultures), and curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity) are viewed as fundamental to intercultural competence” (p. 2). Nawaz (2018) completes Deardorff’s process model with the reference to its cyclical nature in the development phase (Figure 6).



6. Figure - The pyramid and process model of intercultural competence (adapted from Deardorff, 2006, 2009)

As found, the notion of intercultural competence is a multifaceted and widely interpreted concept that is often characterized by and associated with related ideas, such as intercultural

proficiency, global awareness, adeptness at intercultural communication, openness to diverse people, intercultural sensitivity, ability to work effectively in a multicultural environment, tolerance and respect for others (Clarke et al., 2009) as well as cultural awareness, cultural intelligence, global mindedness, cultural sensitivity and empathy, cultural adaptability, language skills or cross-cultural communication skills (Roy et al., 2019). These terms refer to a wide range of possible intercultural outcomes that can be generated by the participation in student mobility programmes (Stebleton et al., 2012).

Applying the transformational learning theory in this regard, Clapp-Smith and Wernsing (2014) state that the development of intercultural competencies during an international mobility experience is triggered by certain types of events (i.e. immersing in local customs, experiencing novelty, learning the local language and finding time for self-reflection). These were defined as transformational triggers earlier in this report (p. 18). With reference to the outcome, it is articulated in several articles (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Clapp-Smith & Wernsing, 2014; Clarke et al., 2009; Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016) that intercultural competence is stimulated by international student mobility activities (i.e. credit mobility and traineeships). Behrnd and Porzelt (2012) note that “intercultural competence is said to be the competence that increases most strongly, more so than general social or personal competence. By living abroad, many meta-disciplinary qualifications which also play a role for intercultural competence develop and thus increase self-assertion, self-initiative, decisiveness, flexibility, and the ability for teamwork” (p. 214).

The latter study notes the importance of cross-border mobility that allows students “to get a closer insight into the host culture and to get to know and understand it better” (p. 222). In that regard, Clarke et al. (2009) refers to relevant studies that further highlight the importance of undertaking a physical mobility experience. As Clarke et al. (2009) states, “the intercultural benefits of student engagement through experiential international encounters lead Schuster and colleagues (1998) to conclude that one really needs to visit a country to understand it” (p. 130, as cited by Clarke et al., 2009, p. 173). At the same time Wortman (2002) proclaims that “by studying outside our society, we can better appreciate the diversity within it” (p. 7, as cited by Clarke et al., 2009, p. 175). These quotes underpin the necessity of physically leaving the home country and culture behind for a certain period of time in order to support the development of intercultural competences.

Behrnd and Porzelt (2012) also reflect on the longitudinal dimension of this current study, stating that “students should be given enough time for studying or completing an internship abroad and should be able to stay a certain amount of time. Students should not be sent just to improve their language skills and to fulfil the necessary tasks at the university or during the internship. They should rather get the chance to have a closer insight into the host culture

and to get to know and understand it better. Sufficient time for building rewarding relationships with members of the host culture and to reflect on the experiences made during the stay in a necessary precondition” (p. 222).

Interestingly, in Salisbury et al. (2013) state that in the US context research on the field “has found that international study improves several dimensions of intercultural competence (...), (t)he finding of [the] study suggests that although students who study abroad make unique gains on an overall measure of intercultural competence, the nature of this gain (...) may appear to challenge the more widely asserted relationship between study abroad and intercultural competence. Although study abroad participation seems to increase a student’s diversity of contact, it appears to have little influence on a student’s relativistic appreciation of cultural differences or comfort with difference. To the degree that the international education community might welcome these findings, these results also suggest caution, concern and a need for additional inquiry. If study abroad only influences diversity of contact but has no effect on growth along other domains, then study abroad by itself may not be as transformative as previously claimed. Alternately, if increasing diversity of contact is a necessary precursor for substantive comfort with difference and relativistic appreciation of cultural difference, then educators cannot discount the potential educational” (p. 14).

In the next section, further skills and competence areas that are associated with intercultural competence are discussed, therefore developed by ISM experiences.

Intercultural communication competence and skills

As discussed earlier, intercultural competence is sometimes referred to as intercultural communication competence (ICC), however, it is also interpreted as a type of intercultural proficiency that supports successful interactions in different cultures through the active use of intercultural communication skills (Clarke et al., 2009; Williams, 2005). As Clouet (2013) highlights, ICC requires “certain attitudes which include curiosity and openness as well as readiness to see other cultures and the speaker’s own without being judgmental” (Byram, 1997, p. 34, as cited by Clouet, 2013, p. 143). Furthermore, he proposes “if culture is embodied in what people do and the way they use their knowledge at a certain time in a certain context, we may wonder if it is truly possible for teachers to facilitate ICC without giving the opportunity to experience ‘other’ cultures first-hand and if the development of intercultural communicative competence should not be best facilitated through active production and reflection that relate to real communication contexts and real life” (p. 143). Consequently, we can propose that the ICC and intercultural communication skills of internationally mobile students are greatly stimulated compared to those who have not been mobile (Williams, 2005). It is also important to highlight that ICC might not be developed as

efficiently when there is no “first-hand cultural experience” that might be associated with both physical mobility and virtually assisted intercultural learning experiences. Concerning this competence area, there has been insufficient research work found discussing the link with semester length.

Intercultural and cross-cultural skills represent the second group of associated skills, with the prior term referring to “the ability of the learners to bring the culture of origin, i.e. the native culture of the learners, and the foreign culture into relation with each other; the ability to be sensitive and use a variety of strategies for contact with those from other cultures; the capacity to fulfil the role of cultural intermediary between one’s own culture and the foreign culture and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstandings and conflict situations; and the ability to overcome stereotyped relationships” (Clouet, 2013, p. 142). On the contrary, cross-cultural skills are loosely defined in the literature of ISM, however, other studies refer to the same concept as above through highlighting the steps of contact making with other cultures, experiencing and analysing these experiences (Cowley & Hanna, 2005). These skills are strongly developed by international student mobility programmes (Carley et al., 2006; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004), however, the nature and the influencing factors of this development process is rarely discussed in detail, neither in terms of modality nor length.

Intercultural sensitivity and awareness

Intercultural sensitivity (Anderson et al., 2006; Gullekson et al., 2011; Kehl & Morris, 2007; Medina–López–Portillo, 2004) and cross-cultural sensitivity (Greenholtz, 2000) also provide a prominent topic to be discussed in relation to student mobility programmes. As Clarke et al. (2009) states, “intercultural sensitivity describes an individual’s response to cultural differences and perspectives of people from other cultures” (p. 175). It is argued by Anderson et al. (2006) that “intercultural sensitivity is crucial to enabling people to live and work with others from different cultural backgrounds” (p. 459), therefore provide a central area for development through ISM (Gullekson et al., 2011). Intercultural sensitivity is well-researched in relation to ISM, e.g. in the studies of Kehl and Morris (2007), as well as Medina–López–Portillo (2004). The latter article notes that we can “distinguish between intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence. While they are not interchangeable terms, they can be understood as two sides of the same coin. Intercultural competence refers to the external behaviours that individuals manifest when operating in a foreign cultural context, where intercultural sensitivity refers to the developmental process that dictates the degree of an individual’s psychological ability to deal with cultural differences. An individual’s intercultural sensitivity is, then, the worldview that establishes the way that he or she experiences or processes cultural differences” (p. 180). The study of Medina–López–Portillo (2004) focuses on the link between the development of intercultural sensitivity and program duration



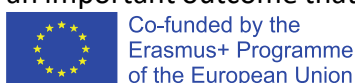
Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

through comparing two US student groups who have participated either in a 7-weeks summer programme or a 16-week semester programme in Mexico. In the article, Medina–López–Portillo (2004) argues “that program duration is a significant variable in students’ abilities to integrate culturally while abroad and that it may be an important predictor of one specific element of intercultural learning, the development of intercultural sensitivity” (p. 180). Referring to the US context, the results “provide support for a hypothesis that duration of study abroad programs plays a key role in the development of intercultural sensitivity of US university students abroad”. Unlike the students in the shorter summer programme, those in the semester-long programme returned to their home university presenting significant development of intercultural sensitivity. “These results suggest that the longer students stay immersed in a target culture, the more they learn and grow, and the more their intercultural sensitivity develops” (p. 191). Therefore, it is obvious that intercultural sensitivity is developed in physical mobility experiences that are implemented during a longer period of time.

The next concepts to be discussed are related to intercultural awareness (DeGraaf et al., 2013; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Messelink et al., 2015) and cultural awareness (Marcotte et al., 2007). In the work of Ingraham and Peterson (2004) it is mentioned that students’ intercultural awareness – referring to the “students’ ability to understand and adapt to cultures other than their own, the second to the students’ increased understanding of their own culture resulting from comparing it to the host culture and from looking at it from the outside” (p. 94) – can be developed through ISM programmes. Messelink et al. (2015) further strengthen this by saying that “expert learners with multiple study or work mobility placement abroad gain higher levels of intercultural awareness” (p. 4), which indicates that border crossing and multiple occasions for intercultural contact-making is of high importance when it comes to developing intercultural awareness.

Global-mindedness, world-mindedness and global competence

Global-mindedness, world-mindedness and global competence represent a following central area of development through ISM. Global mindedness is described as a certain mindset when “an individual feels connected to the global community and to its members” (Roy et al., 2019, p. 1633), or “a worldview in which one sees oneself as connected to the world community and feels a sense of responsibility to its members, (Hett, 1993, p. 89, as cited by Clarke et al., 2009; Kehl & Morris, 2007, p. 174). Clarke et al. (2009) further elaborates on that, stating that the aforementioned “commitment is reflected in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. Five value components of global mindedness have been identified: responsibility, cultural pluralism, efficacy, global-centrism, and interconnectedness” (p. 174). Global mindedness therefore is an important outcome that ISM may produce. The literature review by Roy et al. (2019) states



that several research “investigated the impact of international mobility on global mindedness and concluded that students who studied abroad had higher levels of global mindedness than those who did not” (p. 1633). It is supported by Jacobone and Moro (2015), whose complementary review also validated the acquisition of global-mindedness through ISM programmes. World-mindedness is used interchangeably in the literature (Carley et al., 2006; Gullekson et al., 2011; Shiveley & Misco, 2015), in which case researchers advocate ISM for its potential for the development of students’ world-mindedness compared to non-mobile counterparts.

Global competence (Goetz et al., 2011) is also a significant term to refer to that is defined as “a body of knowledge about the world regions, cultures, and global issues, and the skills and dispositions to engage responsibly and effectively in a global environment” (Longview Report, 2009, p. 7, as cited by Shiveley & Misco, 2015, p. 107). Global competences are important requisites by educational institutions and future employers, thus their development in the context of mobility programmes are essential and successful (Stebleton et al., 2012).

Global mindset is also correlating to the phenomenon discussed here. It is definitely an asset for working and operating efficiently in an international and intercultural learning or working environment, thus representing an important development area during mobility periods (Ngân et al., 2018). As Marcotte et al. (2007), “students who had participated had reached a developmental stage in which a global mindset takes precedence over self-centred preoccupations” (p. 667). Clapp-Smith and Wernsing (2014) also note that “the first one to six months of an international experience has a significant relationship with the development of a global mindset (Clapp-Smith and Javidan, 2010). Interestingly, the same study found international experiences of six months to two years explained no additional variance in global mindset and it was not until participants had international experiences of two years or more that additional variance in the global mindset development was explained (Clapp-Smith and Javidan, 2010). We infer from this research that the initial months of international experiences are formative and important to study. Therefore, we believe the length of stay of our sojourners provides a useful sample for understanding what happens during early experiences that make them developmental” (p. 666). Thus, learning that occurs during the first six months of a physical ISM experience determines the acquisition of a global mindset, meaning that either short-term or semester-long programmes can provide recognisable benefits in this regard.

Speaking of global perspective, Kehl and Morris (2007) states that “results indicated a significant correlation between the length of the international program and global perspective. This study found nursing students who completed programs of sixteen weeks or longer reported greater effects than those who completed programs of four weeks or less”



(p. 72), that underpins the importance of longer periods of time for the development of global perspectives.

Summarising, there is a great variety of intercultural competences and associated skills, attitudes that are developed through physical, semester-long mobility experiences.

Language competences

Understandably, language competences are strongly associated with international student mobility programmes. The gain in a second language acquisition during a physical ISM programme is noteworthy, according to several articles (Carley et al., 2006; DeGraaf et al., 2013; Jacobone & Moro, 2015). Teichler and Janson (2007) also notes that “former Erasmus students and other internationally mobile students felt 3 times as strong in foreign language proficiency than did formerly non-mobile students” (p. 464), thus a significant developmental potential can be attributed to ISM programmes. Furthermore, Jacobone and Moro (2015) stresses that “one of the principal advantages of study abroad is its power to expand the four walls of the traditional language classroom to include the streets and people of any given culture. Out-of-class contact, whether interactive (with host families and friends) or non-interactive (going to the theatre, cinema, listening to music, etc.), plays a critical role in second language acquisition. Likewise, increased non-classroom interaction in the target language is inevitable during a stay abroad and aids the development of world outlooks among the young through studying new cultures and foreign languages, new experiences of living with others and new occasions to explore the world. When engaging in academic study in a foreign culture, the individual is fully immersed within that society and, therefore, encouraged to function as other citizens” (p. 326). These articles therefore strengthen the importance of undertaking a physical mobility experience, but they do not discuss the influencing factors of semester length in detail.

Personal and social competences

Personal and social competences provide the third core area for discussion when it comes to international student mobilities. ISM programmes impact several variables of personal growth (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Marcotte et al., 2007; Sjoberg & Shabalina, 2010), especially on personal development (Gullekson et al., 2011; Kehl & Morris, 2007) and competences, including skills and attitudes as well as behavioural components associated with this competence domain, such as “mindset/awareness, maturity, lifestyle choices, personal skills, sense of adventure and self-confidence, career choices and development, as well as feelings of independence and self-efficacy” (DeGraaf et al., 2013, p. 48). Other areas of personal development, such as confidence (Sachau et al., 2010; Weibl, 2015), interpersonal



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and communication skills, open-mindedness (Weibl, 2015) as well as an increased consciousness of European identity may be experienced as a consequence of ISM programmes (Weibl, 2015). Among several others, it is important to highlight that teamwork skills are also strongly improved by ISM programmes (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; García Esteban & Jahnke, 2020).

At last, according to Kumpikaitė and Duoba (2013), social and civic competences are among the three most prominent types of core competences that are developed through student mobility. Compared to both non-mobile groups of students as well as short-term international programmes' students (less than 3 months), students of semester mobility significantly develop their social and civic competences. In conclusion, personal and social competences are indispensable development areas of ISM programmes, however, literature does not mention explicitly the correlation between these competences and physical modality. Also, the link between this competence area and semester length is less discovered.

Professional competences

Lastly, professional development as a holistic competence area has arisen from the literature reviewed. According to Ingraham and Peterson (2004), "professional development involves the choice of career, the development of awareness of how a student's intended profession may be viewed" (p. 96). Results of the study of DeGraaf et al. (2013) and Marcotte et al. (2007) indicated that a semester-long mobility had a strong impact on the professional development of participating students. As part of the professional development, students "gain a significant amount of academic knowledge and some intellectual maturity" (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004, p. 92) that is supported by different types of knowledge exchange processes and subject-specific learning activities (Ackers, 2010; Standley, 2015). As Teichler and Janson (2007) note, "the temporary study period in another European country undertaken in the framework of Erasmus certainly turns out to be professionally valuable. Both the majority of former Erasmus students and employers believe that internationally experienced students turn out to be superior in many professionally relevant competences than formerly non-mobile students" (p. 493). Bracht et al. (2006) furthermore highlight that "according to the ratings by employers internationally experienced graduates have a higher competence level not only of those competences which can be directly linked to international work tasks but also with respect to academic knowledge and skills, and general competences like adaptability, initiative, assertiveness, decisiveness, persistence, written communication skills, analytical competences, problem-solving ability, planning, coordinating and organising" (p. 104).

In relation to the procedural framework of ISM that builds on the transformational learning theory, Greenfield et al. (2012) draws on the experiential learning theory when examining the



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professional benefits of student mobility. The experiential learning theory “conceptualizes learning as a “process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41 as cited by Greenfield et al., 2012, p. 741). As the authors describe, “the theory suggests that learning occurs as the result of engagement in four, interrelated types of experiences: concrete experiences (involving direct sensory experiences), reflective observation (observing others and thinking about what one has learned), abstract conceptualization (situating one’s thoughts, experiences, actions, and observations within formal theory and empirical research), and active experimentation (testing ideas and behaviours in new situations). Because study abroad explicitly integrates all four types of experiences (e.g., assigned readings for abstract conceptualization, journal writing for reflective observation, service learning for active experimentation, and site visits for concrete experiences), this perspective suggests that students who engage with international issues through guided study abroad might be especially likely to demonstrate gains in professional development” (p. 741).

Professional development therefore is an important area of competence development through ISM that is useful to both economy and society in a later phase of the former participants’ professional career (Rodrigues, 2012). Although the impact of modality and length were not emphasised in terms of physical modality or semester length, there are certain studies that investigated the link between the professional competences and different modalities or length that is to be discussed in Chapter 5.2.

5.2. The case of student mobility with non-traditional length

5.2.1. Short-term mobility

The benefits of semester-long or longer international student mobility programmes are well researched and documented, while the topic of short-term mobility is less explored. In the meantime, non-traditional mobility activities, including short-term mobilities are becoming more and more prominent in practice, therefore providing evidence for in-depth research. As Strange and Gibson (2017) emphasise, “identification of ideal program characteristics has been made more difficult by the lack of studies that examine the potential for short-term programs to have as much impact as traditional long-term programs (e.g. semester long)” (p. 86). In order to fill a niche in this research area, several descriptive articles have been written in the US context that argue the benefits of long-term mobility programmes over shorter term mobilities (Dwyer, 2004), however, this tendency is much less recognisable among the European studies. This might be due to the prevalence of semester-long mobility programmes



and the fact that they are more academically acceptable, since these programmes require greater preparation and seem to produce better outcomes (Strange & Gibson, 2017).

Based on the scope of the studies analysed for the current report, short-term programmes are defined as programmes that last from one week to 3 months, in which case one week can be understood as a 5-days-long workweek as well. These programmes can take a great variety of forms, including summer or winter schools, exchange programmes, international study tours, service-learning trips and summer abroad programmes (Gullekson et al., 2011; Sachau et al., 2010; Schwald, 2012). These programmes can be realised through non-embedded and embedded models, in which case the latter involves “topical, discipline-based courses with an embedded study abroad component, most often at the end of the semester, but also possible during mid-semester. Much academic and practical preparation is completed on the home campus and then the time abroad is spent highlighting cultural and historical sites, attending lectures, and interacting with the local culture” (Gaia, 2015, p. 22). These short-term programmes have several important components, other than the course-related activities, such as visits to companies and other organizations, cultural tours and social gatherings, as well as pre- and post-trip activities (Schwald, 2012).

The growing popularity of short-term programmes over semester or longer mobilities (Schwald, 2012) in both the European and the US higher education scene “appears to be a reflection of financial and resource constraints faced by colleges and universities as well as budget-tightening by students and their families” (Slotkin et al., 2012, p. 163). Short-term programmes are thus attractive to students with limited flexibility and provide them with the possibility to benefit from international and intercultural learning experiences (Mapp, 2012; Slotkin et al., 2012). There are several advantages of short-term programmes over longer ones for students, e.g. these programmes do not require such financial and time investments, while provide an ‘attractive and popular alternative’ to students with diverse backgrounds, different job or family obligations, as well as with special involvement in extracurricular activities without the chance of missing important courses, not obtaining enough credits or even interrupting or postponing the studies (Carley et al., 2006; Gaia, 2015; Schwald, 2012). Furthermore, short-term programmes pose less organisational challenges for students who are hesitant or lack the confidence, preparedness, or even drive to study in another country by providing a safe and familiar environment that engages them in international mobility activities. Also, the participation in these short-term programmes, even in the neighbouring countries, can trigger the will of undertaking a longer mobility period after a short-term mobility experience, thus supports the students’ internationalisation efforts (Gaia, 2015; Messelink et al., 2015; Neppel, 2005; Schwald, 2012). From an academic point of view, short-term programmes are also more typically faculty-led than longer-term ones, therefore faculty

can navigate student activities better and the learning that occurs during these programmes. As a result of this intensive faculty involvement, more focused and purposeful learning can occur than in longer-term programmes (Dwyer, 2004; Mapp, 2012). Also, short-term programmes may be unique in terms of their academic profile as they have the possibility to provide students with an interdisciplinary learning experience more usually than longer programmes can, thus these programmes “provide for more than just a culturally focused trip” (Sjoberg & Shabalina, 2010, p. 47).

Considering the organisational aspects of short-term mobilities, it is important to note that these types of mobility programmes have to have a clear academic content as well as a clear link between the content and the programmes organised while abroad in order to avoid the fault of transforming the mobility into an ‘academic tourism’ experience (Gaia, 2015; Kamdar & Lewis, 2015). However, content-related activities should be in a good balance with possible experiences for personal growth and intercultural understanding that can occur through immersing into the local culture, exploring the new environment independently as well as interacting and socialising with local people (Gaia, 2015; Kamdar & Lewis, 2015). At the same time, studies advise to embed these short-term programmes in the curriculum to support producing better outcomes, therefore students should receive significant preparation before departure and reflection opportunities post-trip that draws on the experiential learning process that occurred during the mobility programme (Gaia, 2015; Kamdar & Lewis, 2015).

Though short-term programmes have several advantages, both students and faculty involved might experience some disadvantages of participation in such programmes as well. As highlighted by Schwald (2012), “a student living for only a very short amount of time in a foreign country, even if he or she is fully integrated into student life, will not be able to immerse himself or herself to such a degree in a different culture as would be the case for students going abroad for one full semester or more” (p. 50). From an academic or administrative point of view, short-term programmes require a relatively high amount of investment in terms of time and energy to achieve positive outcomes because of the short-term character of the mobility, while they require rather little input from the students (Neppel, 2005; Schwald, 2012; Strange & Gibson, 2017). Also, studies argue that short-term programmes require less financial investment and organisation from the participating students, while highlighting credit recognition and organisational problems concerning the integration of such programmes into the courses and curricula (Neppel, 2005; Schwald, 2012; Strange & Gibson, 2017). Other results show that short-term mobility programmes “have the potential of reinforcing prejudices and assumptions with inadequate orientation and cursory involvement in a foreign culture” (Shiveley & Misco, 2015, p. 109), however, well-designed short-term mobilities may be potentially influential for academic and personal growth as well.



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Short-term programmes are questioned in some cases to produce the same cultural and intercultural outcomes because they do not provide adequate time for competence development, especially, for attitude change. At the same time, short-term programmes are unlikely to provide as extensive holistic growth as long-term programs do (Medina–López–Portillo, 2004; Neppel, 2005; Schwald, 2012; Strange & Gibson, 2017).

Summarising, literature suggests that short-term programmes have several advantages and disadvantages, even calling these programmes an ‘affordable alternative’ of semester-long programmes, but it is not evident if short-term programmes can produce similar outcomes as longer ones do. The next section focuses on the benefits of short-term programmes compared to the outcomes of semester-long mobility experiences as well as to control groups’ achievement without mobility.

Starting from the students’ perspective, short-term mobility programmes are valued equally positive by students as longer ones based on their developmental potential (such as language learning and professional development potential) and fun factors as well (such as social engagement occasions, adventure, or opportunities for new personal, social or cultural activities) (Fitzsimmons et al., 2013). In line with the conceptual framework of this report, the analysis of Hallows et al. (2011) that focuses on global business students’ perceived impact of short-term mobility suggests that this type of international mobility “seemed to be a transformational (paradigm-shifting) event for most students” (p. 105), thus enhance student learning. Among the reasons underpinning this conclusion, Hallows et al. (2011) discuss that short-term mobility “encourages students to question their own points of view and interpretations (...) [and] encourages this different way of learning because it focuses upon the issue of why students interpret global business experiences or perspectives the way that they do. It can alter what they can do by shifting their perspectives and interpretations of the world around them. Students are put in novel and unique situations where they can apply new knowledge. This enables them to view the world differently, which produces a feedback loop that changes their actions and ways of interacting with the world” (p. 94). Short-term physical mobilities thus can be seen as transformational events that help students to gain significant benefits (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Kamdar & Lewis, 2015).

Connected to the discussed transformative learning concept, Rowan-Kenyon and Niehaus (2011) discuss in their study how students made meaning of their one-week international mobility experience in the Czech Republic one year after returning home. Based on their findings, it seems obvious that short-term mobility experiences serve effectively as transformational events in cases when participating students “continued to make meaning of this experience and integrate it into their lives during the year following the trip. Findings from the current study indicated that students who had engaged in subsequent learning

experiences continued to find meaning in their experience in the Czech Republic, whereas for the other students, the experience had faded into a distant memory. (...) [Also], crossing boundaries and personalizing the experience helped students to make meaning of their trip as well as helped them to have a new understanding of themselves and others based on the trip experience. (...) As the results of this study show, the extent to which students learn from a short-term study abroad experience may depend more on what those students do after they have returned home than on anything they did while abroad” (p. 224). Therefore, post-trip activities, including follow-up sessions, dissemination of the learning experiences or even further mobility activities seems indispensable parts of producing long-lasting effects through short-term mobilities. The authors furthermore note that even though all students of the case study integrated the personal mobility experience into their lives, the extent to which this integration was successful differed greatly among participants. Some of the former participants “did not move beyond thought to action” (p. 224) that is an essential step for acquiring a true perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991; Rowan-Kenyon & Niehaus, 2011).

As discussed above, short-term student mobility may have a strong potential for enhancing student learning (Rowan-Kenyon & Niehaus, 2011) and a significant impact on the development of the participants’ competences in certain competence areas (Gullekson et al., 2011). Important outcomes of the participation in such programmes may be found in areas like academic, inter- and intra-personal, career and intercultural development (Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Esche, 2018; Gaia, 2015; Rowan-Kenyon & Niehaus, 2011; Shiveley & Misco, 2015; Sjoberg & Shabalina, 2010). In detail, review articles highlight such outcomes of short-term mobility programmes as growth in tolerance of ambiguity, reflective thinking, open-mindedness, self-confidence, empathy, global mindedness and criticality of own country, the acquisition of competences that comfort navigating unfamiliar contexts, enhanced global perspectives, and increased professional, global and cultural competencies (Esche, 2018; Gaia, 2015; Kehl & Morris, 2007; Shiveley & Misco, 2015; Sjoberg & Shabalina, 2010). Short-term mobilities thus widely discussed as potential triggers of student learning resulting in extensive competence development. However, when discussing the depth of this type of competence development, some studies suggest that longer term mobilities (semester or longer programmes) have a greater impact on competence development in general than shorter mobilities do, thus state that the ‘*longer the mobility, the greater its benefits*’ idea holds true (Kehl & Morris, 2007; Medina–López–Portillo, 2004; Shiveley & Misco, 2015).

The current report is thus seeking to explore this phenomenon in detail in the next sections, bearing in mind that the literature on the examined concept and its practice is extremely diverse with numerous publications, therefore it is hardly suitable for systematic processing

given the limitations of the project. Also, the following review relies heavily on the research of American scholars, who examine short-term study abroad programmes in the particular context of the US higher education system and its internationalisation climate, therefore results should be interpreted with caution.

Intercultural competences

The effectiveness of short-term mobility programmes has long been investigated with regard to their competence development potential. The systematic review presented by Roy and colleagues (2019) discussed a great number of empirical studies from 2004 onwards related to the cultural, personal, employment and career outcomes of participation in short-term programmes. One of the most prominent domains of development by mobility are represented by intercultural competences. Even though there is still an intensive attempt to explore this area, some of the most cited studies including the ones by Anderson and colleagues (2006), Chieffo and Griffiths (2004), Dwyer (2004), Kehl and Morris (2007) and Medina–López–Portillo (2004) were written approximately 15 years ago. Even though they might seem outdated, the majority of later studies repeatedly refer to them, underpinning their importance to be reviewed (see Anderson et al., 2006; Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Clarke et al., 2009; Gaia, 2015; Gullekson et al., 2011; Horn & Fry, 2013; Kamdar & Lewis, 2015; Kehl & Morris, 2007; Mapp, 2012; Martinsen, 2011; Messelink et al., 2015; Rowan-Kenyon & Niehaus, 2011; Roy et al., 2019; Sachau et al., 2010; Salisbury et al., 2013; Shiveley & Misco, 2015; Sjoberg & Shabalina, 2010; Stebleton et al., 2012; Strange & Gibson, 2017). Furthermore, the current literature review identified an important source for discussing the transformative capacity of short-term programmes that can be aligned with the theoretical framework of our research.

Discussing the latter article first, Strange and Gibson (2017) investigates the transformative potential of international mobility programmes, applying the theoretical framework by Mezirow (1991) and Clapp-Smith and Wernsing (2014). As one of the main findings of their empirical research, the authors report that “in terms of the influence of program length on cultural and transformative outcomes, where a program was less than 18 days long, a significantly lower chance of achieving transformative learning was found. (...) This study shows that it may be possible for programs in the three to six-week range to have just as great of an impact as those a full semester, or academic year long. The results of this study support the idea that there appears to be little difference in the transformative educational ability of programs based on program length, providing they are more than 18 days in length (...) These results may stimulate discussion suggesting that short-term programs, provided they are more than 18 days long, may have as great of an impact on students as traditional long-term study abroad programs.” (p. 96). Consequently, programme length affects significantly the

efficiency of transformative learning that occurs during international short-term programmes. The results indicate that programmes not exceeding the limit of 18 days are unlikely to prove the same transformative capacity as semester- or long-term programmes would. However, quite surprisingly, programmes between 2,5 – 3 weeks show slightly lower effectiveness only and mobilities lasting for 3 to 6-weeks have the potential to induce such a transformative learning process that has the same impact on students as semester-long or longer programmes have.

Nevertheless, Strange and Gibson (2017) raise the awareness that “where there is appropriate academic preparation, ongoing facilitation, purposeful program design, and adequate opportunity for guided reflection and discussion, short-term study abroad can be successful. Collectively this indicates that a focus on not only length, but also on quality of programming is now necessary. As such the degree to which programs are structured with transformative learning in mind, and incorporate an experiential education approach, can be used as a measure to assess the influence of program type on student learning outcomes” (p. 89-90). Therefore, an innovative, intensive and good pedagogical design that takes into consideration the aspects of sufficient duration is indispensable to support the transformative nature of such programmes. Also, the realisation of the above criteria would make it possible to have as significant impact through short-term programmes as long-term programmes can offer.

Discussing the competence areas developed through participation in short-term programmes, the research of Dwyer (2004) needs to be mentioned. The study investigated the impact of programme duration on several student outcomes, such as intercultural competences, applying a longitudinal approach through collecting data over a course of 50 years. As mentioned in the study, “during this 50-year period full-year programs were typically 32 weeks in length; semester programs were a minimum of 16 weeks long, and summer term programs ranged from six to seven weeks in duration. Of the total sample of 3723 respondents, 32% (1191 students) studied abroad with IES for a full year. Sixty-two percent (2308 students) of the sample studied with IES for a semester and 6% (224 students) studied for a summer term” (p. 155). In the study, the author concluded that “in some categories of factors, summer students were as likely or more likely to achieve sustainable benefit from studying abroad in comparison with semester students. This seems counter-intuitive since one would expect that with declining duration of study abroad a corresponding lessening pattern of impact would result. One explanation is that well-planned, intensive summer programs of at least 6 weeks duration can have a significant impact on student growth across a variety of important outcomes. While it requires very careful educational planning, expert implementation, and significant resources to achieve these outcomes in a



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shorter-term length, the results of this study should encourage study abroad educators and should reinforce the value of short-term programming of at least 6 weeks duration. Whether these results would hold for the increasingly popular 1-5-week programs is unknown” (p. 161).

Summarising some of the main conclusions by Dwyer (2004), short-term programmes that are intensive and well-planned allows faculty to lead the learning process of students better, thus the achievement of the learning goals and the acquisition of the pre-defined competences are more likely to happen in these programmes as a result of a focused learning process, “especially if they exceed the critical six-week mark” (Strange & Gibson, 2017, p. 89). The same research also compared short-term programme outcomes with those of semester-long and long-term mobilities, in which case students have more possibilities to experience cultural immersion, find time for self-reflection and encounter new situations that remove them from their comfort zone. These occasions are also indispensable predictors of a transformative learning process, as suggested by Clapp-Smith and Wernsing (2014). In sum, both comparisons reflect the widespread concept that the longer programmes “had a more significant and longer lasting effect on student participants” (Kehl & Morris, 2007, p. 72), especially when looking at intercultural outcomes. Dwyer (2004) summarises the results by saying that “clearly the greatest gains across all outcome categories are made by full-year students” (p. 161).

Intercultural sensitivity and awareness, global mindedness

Even though the results of the study were already presented above (Chapter 5.1.1. Intercultural competence), it is important to refer once more to one of the most cited studies by Medina–López–Portillo (2004) that serves as a starting point for comparative research in terms of programme duration. The research examined possible changes in the intercultural sensitivity of 28 American students who spent either 7-weeks or a semester in Mexico, indicating that “duration of the programs does indeed significantly impact the development of student intercultural sensitivity. Both quantitative and qualitative data show more development of intercultural sensitivity in the students in the Mexico City program than those in the shorter Taxco program. Interestingly, in both groups, the qualitative data show higher levels of development than that indicated in the quantitative data” (p. 184). Regarding the perceived discrepancy of data coming from the quantitative and qualitative research phases, Medina–López–Portillo (2004) adds that “the difference between the actual and self-perceived scores in both groups is significant. Self-perceived intercultural sensitivity—that is, the score showing an individual student’s personal perceptions of his or her intercultural sensitivity—was always at least one stage higher than the actual score” (p. 186). In terms of the nature of the competences developed, the author further notes that “those in the longer



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Mexico City program returned home showing: 1) significant development of intercultural sensitivity as defined by the IDI, (2) broader vocabulary and examples with which to talk about cultural differences, (3) a deeper understanding of Mexican culture and its people, and (4) a critical—and informed—point of view regarding the United States, its culture, and its international politics. These results suggest that the longer students stay immersed in a target culture, the more they learn and grow, and the more their intercultural sensitivity develops” (p. 191-192). Even though the research provided proof of development during short-term mobilities in comparison with semester-long programmes, the 7-week mobilities could not induce similar results in terms of changes in intercultural sensibility. With referring to the work of Medina–López–Portillo (2004), Strange and Gibson (2017) importantly notes that “regardless of length, students are only seeing the proverbial tip of the iceberg in terms of deep cultural understanding” (p. 89).

Anderson and colleagues (2006) also investigated the intercultural sensitivity development of four-week international mobility programmes in England and Ireland among business students from the US. The results clearly show that non-language-based short-term mobility programmes are efficient actors in mediating intercultural learning that increase intercultural sensitivity of the students significantly, according to the IDI development scale.

The study of Gullekson and colleagues (2011) examined the intercultural growth of 104 business students in a project-based 16-days-long mobility programme focusing on global consulting (GCP). The results show that significant changes were measurable on such variables as ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, intercultural awareness and activities as part of their cross-cultural development in comparison to those students who did not participate in such mobility (Gullekson et al., 2011). However, the authors note that “the above results should be interpreted with caution because these findings also indicate that the students studying abroad reported higher levels of these key variables prior to beginning the project, when compared to the control group who completed the project in the United States. Thus, the changes exhibited by the GCP students appeared only to bring the students to the level of the control group; the changes did not lead to significantly lower levels of ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, or intercultural awareness after studying abroad. This result is surprising given the popular notion that studying abroad leads to intercultural growth or changes intercultural awareness and sensitivity (which it did) that result in more culturally aware and sensitive individuals (which it did not). Further, the results contradict previous research that show intercultural growth in students who study abroad beyond those that do not go abroad (e.g., Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2007; Williams, 2005). So, although we see a growth in study



abroad students, it is not in the pattern hypothesized by proponents of study abroad programs” (p. 102).

Related to the gains in intercultural sensitivity, Martinsen's study (2011) investigates those reasons behind differences in the intercultural growth of 45 American students with one year university-level of Spanish. The students participated in a 6-week-long, language-based mobility programme in Argentina. Based on the findings of the study, “only one of the factors included in this study was a significant predictor of gains in cultural sensitivity: interaction with native speakers. Surprisingly, students' oral skills in Spanish, relationship with the host family and motivation to learn Spanish did not demonstrate a significant relationship with gains in cultural sensitivity” (p. 132). The results of the study therefore suggest that short-term programmes need to be characterised and organised in such a way that allows students enough time for collaborative coursework, as well as meaningful out of class activities – including independently organised activities for students – that trigger the will of communicating and interacting with native speakers. Also, the study recommends that these kinds of short-term programmes “should contain time specifically for students to step away from the target culture and that such time will benefit the development of students' intercultural sensitivity” (p. 133). Referring to the framework of our review, based on Clapp-Smith & Wernsing (2014), these findings highlight the importance of both cultural immersion and sufficient time for self-reflection that can trigger the transformative learning of students. These results could also be read as slight support for organising physical mobility activities that can allow students to experience the triggering events discussed above.

Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) also implemented a large-scale comparative research to assess short-term mobile and non-mobile US students' global awareness. The surveys were shared among participants of 75 short-term programmes (at least 4 weeks in length), representing various academic disciplines and locations, with a total number of 1,792 students. The response rate was 84%, thus 1,509 students from 71 programmes filled in the survey during the 2003 and 2004 winter session. As the results suggest, “in the category of intercultural awareness, significant differences were found for all items except 14, indicating that students in the abroad group were generally more cognizant than their peers at home of varying national and cultural perspectives. Simply put, the students abroad were more apt to recognize that, “the whole world is not like the US,” and “there are other cultures that exist very differently from our own,” as two students wrote as a response to the open-ended question” (p. 170), indicating that even 4-week-long programmes can have a significant impact on global awareness. It is of utmost importance to highlight that “the students' written comments clearly indicate that those who went abroad had much to say about their experience, and that the overwhelming majority of their comments related to out-of-



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classroom learning, both ideological and personal” (p. 173). These feedbacks strongly underpin the importance of intentionally dedicating time for extracurricular activities, socialisation events and flexible free time for shared student experiences that can only occur in case the programme is implemented in a physical modality.

Referring to Dwyer's (2004) previously discussed work, Mapp (2012) summarises that “most research to date has supported that greater change occurs in long-term than in short-term study abroad experiences” (p. 728). Contradicting to that, Mapp's (2012) comparative research investigates the change of intercultural adaptability of 87 undergraduate US students who participated in either 14-days or 9-days faculty-led mobility programmes during between 2005 and 2009. The results, as measured by the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI), suggest that even the 9-day-long programmes can produce certain changes in students' cultural adaptability.

With regard to the development of intercultural knowledge and relevant skills, Schwald (2012) also presents a case study of a 7-day-long summer school programme that involved 21 students from France and Germany. The study builds on the self-evaluation of students through pre- and post-trip surveys, who reported great improvements of their intercultural competences, including interpersonal and communication skills, as well as “gained relevant knowledge about how to deal with people from other national backgrounds and cultures” (p. 49).

The research of Shiveley and Misco (2015) examined the experience of American pre-service teachers who spent 3 weeks in Europe as part of a course “called Comparing US and European Schools”. The students therefore attended panel discussions and lectures, as well as conducted classroom observations and collaborated with peers and teachers. The survey gathered the answers of 148 former students who had taken the course between 2000-2013. According to the results of the study, students showed significant increase in their cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity as a result of their participation in those short-term mobility programmes.

Ingraham and Peterson's work (2004) includes the self-assessment of five general competence categories, including intercultural awareness by American students who participated in short-, semester- or long-term mobility programmes between 1999-2002. For the purpose of the study, a large-scale survey was conducted with the involvement of approximately 2,500 students, as well as faculty observations and a secondary data analysis of the home institution's database. The results of the student survey suggest a great increase in students' intercultural awareness, developed across all mobility programme categories (1) less than three weeks, 2) three to seven weeks, 3) seven to 14 weeks and 4) an academic



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year). However, the depth of this development differs significantly across programmes with various duration, thus “it is evident that the longer the program the stronger the post-program response (...). For personal growth, intercultural awareness and academic performance measures, mean ratings gradually increased as program length increased” (p. 89).

Ismail and colleagues (2006) also look at the subcategory of intercultural competences, namely openness to diversity through comparing responses of participants taking either a 3-week mobility programme or a semester course. The results suggest that the “three-week programs may have a significant effect on increased openness to diversity in students, similar to the effects seen in students who participated in semester-long programs. (...) While it may seem intuitive that international experiences elicit a positive change in a student’s attitude toward working/interacting with diverse cultures, type and/or length of the study abroad programs may have an effect on the magnitude of the change” (p. 15).

Supporting the same results, Gaia (2015) surveyed 136 students of short-term (3-week or less) faculty-led mobility programmes. The research used the Global Perspectives Inventory for a pre- and post-test “indicated that these short-term programs enhanced participants’ understanding and awareness of other cultures and languages, appreciation of the impact of other cultures on the world, and awareness of their own identity” (p. 21).

At last, the research of Kehl and Morris (2007) is one of the most cited studies related to global and world-mindedness. The study builds on the results of a questionnaire adapting the Global Mindedness Scale with the involvement of former students of short-term (less than 8 weeks) and semester-long programmes. For the purpose of the study, the control group consisted of students who had mobility aspirations but did not yet participate in these kinds of programmes. As the results suggest, “statistical analysis indicates insufficient evidence to conclude that significant differences exist in the global-mindedness of students who study abroad for eight weeks or less and those who plan to study abroad in the future” (p. 76). In comparison of no mobility and semester-long mobility experiences, the students fitting to the latter group showed significantly higher global-mindedness scores, while the comparison short-term and semester-long mobility results suggest that those of longer programmes presented greater increase. As the authors suggest, “if colleges and universities have as an objective student growth in global-mindedness, they should promote semester-long programs” (p. 77).

Summarising the results of short-term programmes on intercultural competence development, the results are quite contradicting, however, there are some interesting results presented that support the importance of implementing short-term mobility programmes for



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certain intercultural developments. Some of the articles above suggest that a full-year mobility is more efficient in terms of intercultural competence development, including the enhancement of intercultural awareness as well as promoting semester-long programmes compared to shorter ones for the improvement of intercultural sensibility, therefore stating that longer programmes have more significant and longer lasting effect on student.

However, the articles presented above suggest that less than 8 weeks of length may be enough for the enhancement in global mindedness, while 7, 6, 4 and even 3 weeks are proved to be efficient for improvements in cultural or intercultural sensitivity. 4-week programmes also have potential for intercultural awareness raising, while 3-week-long mobility programmes seem to produce significant increase in cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity, increase openness to diversity and enhanced understanding and awareness of other cultures and languages, appreciation of the impact of other cultures on the world, and awareness of their own identity. Surprisingly, even shorter programmes seem efficient: 16-days-long are proved to support cross-cultural development with such variables of ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, intercultural awareness, 9-days-long mobilities to cultural adaptability, meanwhile there is a weak support that even 1 week of mobility might induce some improvements of intercultural competences.

In terms of the transformative potential of short-term mobility, there is a support that programmes between 2,5 or 3 weeks of length may prove to have slightly lower transformative capacity than semester-long programmes, however, mobilities lasting for 3 to 6-weeks may induce transformative learning processes of the same impact as semester-long or longer programmes have.

Language competences

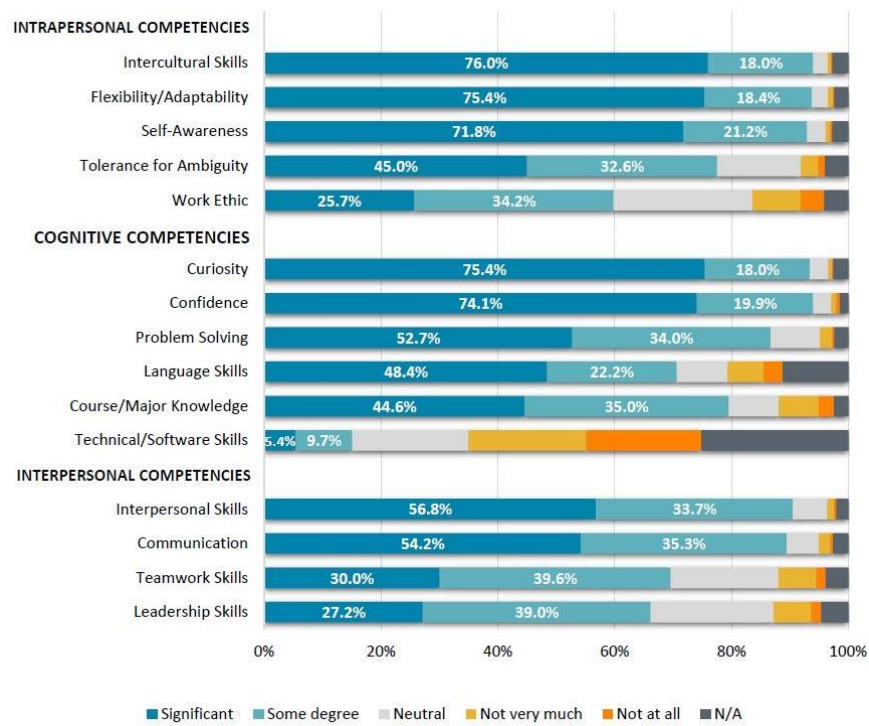
Language competences also represent an important area for development through international mobility programmes. The study of Lara and colleagues (2015) examine the foreign language development of Catalan- and Spanish-speaking students who attended either a 3-month or a 6-month programme. As the study suggests, “when we compare our three-month and six-month groups, the results show that they were already different at pre-test, with the three-month group being more accurate but less fluent. They were, however, similar with respect to complexity. When we compare their performance at post-test, that is, when we delve into the issue of length of stay, our results show that the three-month group makes significant progress in accuracy, where they had already started higher, and also in fluency, where, in contrast, they had started at a lower level than the six-month group, and remain so at post-test” (p. 53). Therefore, the findings suggest that students on shorter

mobility programmes show significant growth and have an advantage over peers on a six-month programme (Johansson, 2020).

On the contrary, the study of Davidson (2010) measured proficiency-referenced learning outcomes of a numerous multi-institutional cohort (n=51,881) of US students who participated in mobilities for 2, 4, and 9 months in Russia between 1995 and 2010. As the authors write, “results indicate that second language (L2) gain across skills is strongly correlated with longer-duration immersion programming” (p. 6), suggesting that the idea of “the longer, the better” in terms of second language acquisition holds true. Even though the current review has identified a number of relevant studies through its first round of selection, most of the studies proved not to be fitting to our conceptual framework, thus the further investigation of the topic seems necessary.

Personal and social competences

Short-term programmes are also proved to be useful means for the development of personal and social competences. The study of Farrugia and Sanger (2017) presents the results of a national alumni survey among former mobility participants as part of the IIE’s Generation Study Abroad® initiative. The sample consisted of more than 4,500 US students with various mobility experiences (short-term programmes with less than 8 weeks, semester- and long-term programmes) between 1999 and 2017. The results of the study indicate that the longer mobility programmes have significantly higher impact on most (11 of 15) of the skills examined, as shown on *Figure 7*. “However, a few skills were unaffected by length, including curiosity, leadership, and work ethic, and the development of teamwork was actually negatively affected by length, suggesting this skill is an area of strength for shorter term programs” (p. 15).



7. Figure - Reported skill development or improvement through study abroad (adapted from Farrugia & Sanger, 2017, p. 12)

The authors furthermore note that the significant improvement of teamwork skills might be a result of the structured and team-oriented character of short-term mobility programmes. Therefore, short-term mobility programmes seem to be efficient means to achieve teamwork-related learning outcomes through supporting collaboration and cooperation of students in groups.

The aforementioned study of Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) examined short term programmes of at least 4 weeks and concluded that personal growth and development on the majority of items was significant. As a result of such short programmes, students indicated significant gains in some areas of personal growth and development such as adaptability, flexibility, patience, responsibility, respect for others, and appreciation for the arts” (p. 173) as well as reported increase in their confidence and motivation to participate in long-term mobilities afterwards.

In line with the previous results, Shiveley and Misco (2015) concluded that personal growth was among the largest areas of change for students in a 3-week-long mobility programme. As a result of their participation in the programme, students reported “more confidence in general (40 of 148) and an increased perception of self-sufficiency. Many expressed a greater confidence to travel on their own to places they did not believe they previously would have

gone to on their own. (...) Confidence is also related to a desire to travel more and make traveling a “life priority” (p. 116). Also, “students (n=73) reported that the course helped them to become more open-minded as teachers. (...) Open-mindedness is a necessary condition for reflective thinking and problem solving, ideas 29 students referenced” (p. 112). Additionally, the results of Mapp (2012) suggest that short-term, faculty-led international mobility programmes can help students build the confidence needed for a long-term experience as well as it raises the level of interest and desire to go for longer mobilities.

Professional competences

Professional and academic competences are extremely underrepresented in the literature on short-term programme outcomes. Among those ones that discuss the topic we can find the work of Dwyer and Peters (2004). The study uses the same sample as presented in the study of Dwyer (2004), interpreting the results of a longitudinal research that examined possible effects of short-term mobility programmes on various student outcomes. As the authors note, even though the main findings of the study support the idea that “more is better”, other results also indicate that at least six week-long programmes can also be enormously successful triggers to produce important academic and career outcomes. Nevertheless, the research does not discuss in detail what the authors mean by those outcomes.

Also, the research of Schwald (2012) presented earlier indicates that students attending the Marketing Weeks also showed a high level of motivation to acquire relevant academic knowledge, which has proved to be successful in this particular case. Course-related knowledge was also among the highest ranked items by former students of 4-week-long mobility programmes, as discussed by Chieffo and Griffiths (2004).

On the contrary, the study of Farrugia and Sanger (2017) presented above indicates that “longer periods of study abroad have a high impact on subsequent job offers and the development of most skills. (...) Among alumni who studied abroad for one academic year, 68 percent reported study abroad contributing to a job offer at some point, compared to just 43 percent of alumni who went abroad for fewer than eight weeks” (p. 6). Consequently, long-term mobilities might be professionally profitable in terms of finding a job compared to short-term programmes.

As the limited number of studies indicate, academic and professional competences are seldom investigated in relation to short-term duration. It is somewhat counter-intuitive, given the fact that short-term mobilities might be great means to support the acquisition of extra-academic knowledge and skills. Therefore, further exploration of the field seems to be an

important asset to understand the great diversity and the unexploited potential of short-term mobility programmes.

5.2.2. Long-term mobility

The term 'long-term mobility' is used quite ambiguously in the literature, because semester-long or longer, even full-year mobilities could also fall into this category. Due to the fact that comparison of competences developed during a short-term stay or a semester abroad took place in the previous chapter as well as due to the diverse nature of the topic of long-term mobilities (including full-year and complete degree mobilities), the current report does not intend to explore this phenomenon in detail. However, as a result of reviewing studies that examine the competence development capacities of short-term and semester-long mobilities previously, there are some results that are worth summarising briefly.

As Behrnd and Porzelt (2012) highlights, "the length of time spent abroad is very important for the intercultural and personal development, as well as for other factors like academic and professional success of the returned student. A full year abroad affected the students more significantly and long-lasting than shorter stays" (p. 214) Roy and colleagues (2019) systematised some of the relevant literature and summarised the findings of three articles up, reporting that "Dedee and Stewart (2003) found that the longer the program duration, the stronger the positive influence of program participation on personal development, intellectual development, knowledge of international and transcultural issues, and development of favorable perceptions of nurses in their role. Similarly, Behrnd and Porzelt (2012) found that longer program duration had a positive impact on various aspects of intercultural competence. In particular, they found that students who spent a longer time abroad on an international mobility program demonstrated higher levels of intercultural competence than those who spent less time abroad. Varela and Gatlin-Watts (2014) also found that longer program duration was positively associated with higher levels of meta-cognitive cultural intelligence amongst students" (p. 1638).

Dwyer (2004) notes that there are "long-held beliefs that studying abroad for a full year has more significant and enduring impact on students [that] were supported by the data of this study" (p. 161). In the study, the author discusses that continued language use, academic attainment measures, intercultural and personal development, and career choices are also among those areas where significant impact is measurable. More importantly, the longitudinal nature of the research allows for the conclusion that the impact gained over a longer period of time can be sustained even for 50 years after the mobility experience. The study furthermore indicates that full-year students experience "increased confidence in their linguistic abilities due to length of exposure and amount of practice" (p. 156), while the longer

stay abroad increased commitment of the participating students to using a foreign language regularly compared to students with semester-long experience. Also, full-year students were found to acquire more confidence and language facility, therefore the authors note that “the greatest gains across all outcome categories are made by full-year students” (p. 156).

Serrano and colleagues (2012) also delivered a longitudinal analysis of the effects of a full-year mobility experience, reporting that this kind of mobility proves to be efficient for foreign language acquisition. As the authors report, “according to the findings from this study, length of stay is an influential variable in terms of the progress that is to be expected for oral and written skills. More time is necessary for measurable progress in written production to occur than for oral production. According to our findings, written development can occur while abroad; however, a substantial amount of time in the L2 country (in this study, two full semesters) is necessary before such development can take place. Our results also suggest that attitudes and types of interaction can influence linguistic improvement to a certain extent” (p. 155). Conclusively, longer mobilities tend to produce significant gains in the domain of foreign language competences. In the research of Horn and Fry (2013), they report that student mobilities are also great means for promoting global citizenship, however, they draw attention to their finding that in order to fully realise civic benefits, certain programme characteristics need to be present, such as long-term duration.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning the study of Neppel (2005) who stresses that full-year students are logically “allotted longer amount of time in which to immerse themselves in the culture, to make lasting cross-cultural personal relationships, and to increase their foreign language proficiency” (p. 18). The author’s study compared the experience of students of short-term mobility with long-term (full-year) mobile students and found that the latter group experienced greater growth 1) in cognitive complexity (defined as intellectual change and growth, and measured as the ability to critically analyse ideas and information, learn on one’s own, and pursue ideas and needed information, the ability to learn more about new ideas and concepts, the ability to see relationships and patterns), 2) in liberal learning (defined as tolerance and open-mindedness about new ideas and concepts), 3) in personal philosophy (defined as growth in self-understanding, the development and refinement of values, and growth in awareness of the diverse array of philosophies and cultures) as well as 4) in interpersonal self-confidence (defined as leadership ability, ability to work as an effective member of a team, and confidence in expressing ideas orally). Also, longer programmes expose students more opportunities for meeting local culture, therefore becoming more immersed in that, while long-term mobility programmes are “significantly more likely to increase their self-awareness, to develop ethics and values, and to grow in appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism” (p. 102).



Summarising the result of both short-term and long-term mobilities, we can conclude that there is a significant disagreement between scholars and a remarkable discrepancy between studies indicating what is the optimal length of international student mobility activities, thus implicitly generates competing paradigms and practices of short-term, semester-long and long-term mobilities. While a great share of studies cast their vote on the side of short-term mobilities for their significant gains across several domains, other research support the idea of promoting longer-term programmes

5.3. The case of student mobility with non-traditional modality

5.3.1. Virtual exchange programmes

The phenomenon of the so-called ‘virtual mobility’ (VM) is widely discussed in the academic and grey literature on international student mobility. The current systematic literature review has identified approximately 50 relevant papers that discover the context, the conceptual considerations, forms and types of virtual mobility activities, as well as the general benefits of implementing VM that will be summarised briefly in this report. Even though there is a great number of relevant papers, there are just very few documents that explore the benefits of participation in virtually organised mobilities in terms of their competence development potential.

In order to discover the complex phenomenon and practice of VM, it is important to review its general pedagogical background. The concept of VM can be understood as a form of online learning that fits into the broader category of distance learning, “which encompasses earlier technologies such as correspondence courses, educational television, and videoconferencing” (Means et al., 2013, p. 3). In this concept, online learning is seen as the “fifth generation” of distance education that takes advantage of the ICT tools, the Internet and the Web in order to support the students’ competence development process (Means et al., 2013). As described by Means and colleagues (2013), “online learning opportunities differ also in terms of the setting where they are accessed (classroom, home, informal), the nature of the content (both the subject area and the type of learning, such as fact, concept, procedure, or strategy), and the technology involved (e.g. audio/video streaming, Internet telephony, podcasting, chat, simulations, videoconferencing, shared graphical whiteboard, screen sharing)” (p. 6). Virtual mobility thus can be seen as a form of online learning that has an integrated international and intercultural component.

Furthermore, virtual mobility is regularly connected to the concept of open education that is an important element of the European higher education policy agenda. As Buchem and colleagues (2018) state, “the key perspectives on open higher education in Europe include (a)



reducing or removing access barriers such as financial, geographical, time and entry requirements barriers, (b) modernising higher education in Europe by means of digital technologies, and (c) bridging non-formal and formal education, by making it easier to recognise learning achievements. Both virtual mobility and open education aim to enhance participation in international knowledge flows, use of digital media, improve teaching and learning, attract and keep talents through internationalisation, but also innovate and build capacity” (p. 353). The will of reinforcing and joining to the implementation of open education brought the Open Virtual Mobility project into life and its concept which “includes open learning and contexts in which the learner and not the institutions take the lead in VM, adding a new and valuable potential for these aims. Open education and open learning mean that the learner is free to follow education anywhere, free of curricular and other institutional constraints, often free of charge or lower fees than through more traditional universities. The implications for institutionalized virtual mobility are however unclear” (Tur et al., 2018, p. 1). Virtual mobility is thus a mean to diversifying the accessible transnational and intercultural learning opportunities, “however, the expectations and rhetoric around virtual mobility initiatives have tended to overestimate its potential to democratise education, as is often the case in the field of educational technologies at large” (Villar-Onrubia & Rajpal, 2016, p. 78).

Also, important to note that when examining specific forms of virtual mobility, such as virtual placements and internships, the pedagogical approach of work-based learning is often applicable that promotes learning through experience and reflection in an authentic context (Op de Beeck, 2011). This process furthermore is seen as a social process in which the student becomes part of a new community, while getting connected to the educational community as well. Thus, the multiple interactions through both channels fuel the knowledge construction and the skills development processes of the virtually mobile students (Op De Beeck & Petegem, 2011). Consequently, virtual mobility shall be understood as a form of open, distance education that offers online learning opportunities, and in certain cases provides students with the possibility to competence development through work-based learning.

Even though virtual mobility might easily find its way in the ‘maze’ of educational concepts, it is unclear and ambiguous in the literature what terms are used to refer to the phenomenon in focus and what we mean by those terms. With reference to the terminological issues, Villar-Onrubia and Rajpal (2016) indicates that “the term ‘virtual mobility’ soon gained ground as a way of describing those cross-border educational interactions that are achieved ‘not through time spent abroad, but through participation in networks facilitated by technology and involving links to students and institutions abroad’ (Sweeney 2014, 9). However, consensus remains elusive with regard to the terminology that scholars, practitioners and policy-makers

use when adapting these kinds of initiatives. For instance, terms such as ‘online intercultural exchange’ (O’Dowd 2007), ‘globally networked learning’ (Starke-Meyerring 2010) or ‘virtual internationalisation’ (Middlemas and Peat 2015) also refer to initiatives that involve some sort of online interaction between students at universities in different countries” (p. 77). Other sources mention the concept of collaborative online international learning (COIL), saying that “ ‘virtual mobility’ is the preferred term in Europe – having been used in documents of the European Commission and other organisations in the continent – while the term ‘collaborative online international learning’ (COIL) has gained popularity in the USA over the last few years” (Villar-Onrubia & Rajpal, 2016, p. 77). Consequently, it is not consistent how literature seeks to name the phenomenon per se. Further exploration of the discussions around the terminology raised a new term recently that emphasises the aspect of active interaction between participants that is in the core of the concept, thus calling it ‘virtual exchange’.

The problem is more complex when the term ‘virtual mobility’ is being analysed in detail, as done by Montes and colleagues (2011), stating that “the two terms, VIRTUAL and MOBILITY, are often misconceived: MOBILITY leads one to think to separation rather than to connectivity, access and community, but, presumably, what makes VM really weak is the term virtual. In some respects, virtual – if compared to physical – recalls a sense of intangibility and volatility, running the risk of conveying such flimsiness to the MOBILITY contents themselves. People are not mobilised in this case; what is mobilised, and therefore transferred, is knowledge, that is what lies at the basis of the knowledge society. VIRTUAL mobility does not simply represent the use of tools and new approaches allowing the transfer of knowledge, we would then simply talk about e-learning and distance learning. These are teaching/learning approaches, while VM just makes use of ICT, and has an inborn political undertone” (p. 3). In the publication of de Wit (2013), he provides a detailed discussion of the concept and its relevant terminological consequences of virtual mobility, saying that “the term ‘virtual mobility’ has emerged from documents from the European Commission as well as from other European entities and institutions of higher education over the past few years. It relates to the increasing attention being paid to forms of mobility other than physical mobility, exchange and-or study abroad. It is connected to a desire to focus on the large majority of students who are not mobile, the ‘internationalisation at home’ movement. In other words: how to make it possible for non-mobile students to develop an international dimension to their teaching and learning. Others see it more as a way to realise international, collaborative experiences. This focus on the mobility dimension of online learning, as expressed in the name of ‘virtual mobility’, in my view ignores the potential of international online learning as an integral part of the internationalisation of university curricula and teaching and learning. The term ‘collaborative online international learning’ combines the



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four essential dimensions of real virtual mobility: it is a collaborative exercise of teachers and students; it makes use of online technology and interaction; it has potential international dimensions; and it is integrated into the learning process” (p. 84-85).

Given the fact that the term ‘virtual mobility’ is conceptually ambiguous and somewhat paradoxical based on the definitions of international student mobility earlier used for this report, while ‘collaborative online international learning’ is used in the US literature, we suggest using the term ‘*virtual exchange*’ in the HLiTL project for depicting the main concept, however, concrete activities done through virtual exchange (e.g. ‘*virtual seminars*’, ‘*virtual placements*’ etc.) should be called by their closely defined names. Even though the term ‘virtual mobility’ is not going to be used in the following discussion, it has a prominent role in the European literature, especially when searching for recent impact studies and project reports, thus it has been used as one of our key search words and will appear in relevant quotes in the next sections.

As stated above, in case of searching for possible definitions of virtual exchange, we were made to use most of the expressions listed above that might refer to the same phenomenon. According to Henderikx and Ubachs (2019) “as education can be organized in face to face, blended and online modes, international collaboration and mobility can also be physical, blended or completely online. In physical mobility, the international learning experience is accompanied with an immersion in another university and country, contributing to personal development, language learning and intercultural competences, living in a different social and cultural context. This combination between an academic experience and an immersion makes physical mobility attractive for students and highly valued by teaching staff, although a minority of students are benefitting from it. In online/virtual mobility, the international learning experience is progressing along online courses and collaborative learning activities, also resulting in intercultural competences and international online communication skills” (p. 14). Virtual exchange thus is a concept and practice that uses online, ICT-based facilities to support student learning. The concept is referred to in one of the most-cited definitions of VM by the Elearningeuropa.info portal (2006) as “the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to obtain the same benefits as one would have with physical mobility but without the need to travel” (adapted by Bijnens et al., 2006; Dauksiene et al., 2010; Montes et al., 2011; Op De Beeck et al., 2007; Poulová et al., 2009; Schreurs & Verjans, 2006; Teresevičienė et al., 2011; Ubachs & Brey, 2009; Vriens et al., 2010). As Vriens and colleagues (2010) notes, “this definition entails the basic assumption that virtual mobility should strive to copy physical mobility as much as possible” (p. 1), thus, can produce the same benefits as physical mobility does. However, this assumption needs to be underpinned with research evidence that is going to be explored in the following sections of the current report.



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Without the intention to discuss all relevant definitions, we highlight some of them that were used repeatedly in the documents reviewed for this report². The definition of the Being Mobile Project states that “virtual mobility is a form of learning which consists of virtual components through a fully ICT supported learning environment that includes cross-border collaboration with people from different backgrounds and cultures working and studying together, having, as its main purpose, the enhancement of intercultural understanding and the exchange of knowledge” (Bijnens et al., 2006, p. 26. adapted by Villar-Onrubia & Rajpal, 2016; Vriens et al., 2010). This ICT-led approach is prominent in the definition of Op de Beeck and his co-authors (2011a; 2011b), who define virtual mobility as „a set of ICT-supported activities that realize or facilitate international, collaborative experiences in a context of teaching and/or learning“ (p. 1), as well as in Vriens and others' work (2010), seeing “virtual mobility as a set of ICT-supported activities that realize cross-border, collaborative experiences in a context of teaching and/or learning. These activities can take place in a fully ICT supported learning environment or as a complement to physical mobility (before, during and after)” (p. 1). Also, Poce and colleagues (2019) adapt the previous definitions and emphasise that “VM activities, supported by curricular, legal and institutional frameworks of participating universities of other higher educational institutes, provide students enrolled in one higher educational institute access to education elsewhere” (p. 141). This definition shows a slight difference from the previous ones, as it highlights the importance of the organisational aspects of virtual exchange opportunities. This approach is reflected in the definition of Ubachs and Brey (2009), stating that “in academic international virtual mobility two or more higher education-institutions agree to offer their students the opportunity to acquire a number of ECTS [European Credit Transfer System] points either at one of the foreign partner universities or through a joint course/assignment of the partners. These ECTS points will then be counted towards the student’s degree at his or her home institution” (p. 203).

Slightly differently, Poulová and colleagues (2009) indicate that “virtual mobility may be defined from another point of view – it is the way of collaboration of people from different backgrounds and cultures, working and studying together where crossing borders is not a necessity anymore. This approach has a special name in the Czech educational environment, it is called interuniversity study” (p. 88). The same ideas reflecting the importance of

² Further definitions can be found in the following papers: Bijnens et al., 2006; Buchem et al., 2018; Dauksiene et al., 2010; De Kraker et al., 2007; Elearningeuropa.info, 2006; Helm & Velden, 2019; Henderikx & Ubachs, 2019; Mehrvarz et al., 2019; Montes et al., 2011; Op De Beeck et al., 2007; Op De Beeck & Petegem, 2011; Poulová et al., 2009; Schreurs & Verjans, 2006; Tereseviciene et al., 2015; Teresevičienė et al., 2011; Ubachs & Brey, 2009; Villar-Onrubia & Rajpal, 2016; Vriens et al., 2011; Vriens, Op De Beeck, et al., 2010; Vriens, Van Petegem, et al., 2010

communication between cultures are discussed in the concept of collaborative online international learning (COIL), noting that “COIL courses are co-equal and team-taught by educators who collaborate to develop a shared syllabus that emphasizes experiential and collaborative student-centered learning. In most cases students are enrolled, charged tuition, and awarded grades only at their home institution. (...) a COIL course engages students in learning course content both through their own unique cultural lens and also by exchanging their cultural and experiential lenses as they move through the learning material together (State University of New York Global Center n.d., p.4, cited by Villar-Onrubia & Rajpal, 2016, p. 77). Another resource indicates that COIL refers to specific activities that use “technology to connect students and staff in different countries and is a rapidly developing format of internationalisation at home. COIL offers students an international learning experience through virtual collaboration. Students in online environments are learning not only the content of the course(s) they are enrolled in, but also how to work as part of an international team. Collaborating across cultures, being open to other ways of knowing, being and doing, and being flexible and adaptable are all skills that students learn about and work to refine in COIL courses, and which are vital to thriving in our globalised society” (Haug, 2017, p. 1).

Even though the definitions of virtual mobility discussed above are well contextualised and used extensively in the literature, they were developed approximately a decade ago, thus do not reflect on the contextual changes, educational innovations and emerging technologies that are present now. Connected to this, Valtins and Muracova (2019) stress that “there are many different definitions for the term virtual mobility starting from mid 90ies, but most of them refer to technology as the mediator between faculty members and counterparts” (p. 222). In order to fill the niche in this regard, there are some definitions used in the literature to be discussed here briefly. According to Aguado Odina and colleagues (2014), “virtual mobility is understood as the possibility of studying an undergraduate or postgraduate degree program at the local, national or international level, in relation to the student’s own studies, utilizing virtual or distance methodology; virtual mobility is also the possibility of studying specific topics or a determinate number of credits or courses” (p. 287). As Šadauskas and colleagues (2017) define, virtual exchange is “a purposeful opportunity which is more flexible and cheaper compared to Erasmus mobility and it also fits the needs of students. Researchers also stress that virtual mobility allows students to learn new academic content, improve their communication, language and intercultural skills” (p. 247), thus implicitly referring to its substitute role for physical mobility activities. Others note that innovative virtual exchange programmes attempt to apply “active learning, project based learning, gamification and collaborative learning elements into virtual mobility models, advancing impact, outcomes and study process itself” (Valtins & Muracova, 2019, p. 226). One of the most recent definitions by Vogel and colleagues (2019) state that “generally speaking, virtual mobility programmes



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are designed and offered by universities specifically for the purpose of organizing online learning experiences for those students who do not use physical mobility opportunities. By means of virtual mobility students can enrich their curricula with courses and other learning activities in higher education in other countries. They can do it online, using digital tools and online systems and yet in intensive interaction with learners from different universities, different cultures and contexts” (p. 20). Last, but not least, Honcharenko and colleagues (2020) refer to “a set of transformational changes or megatrends that are expected to push higher education institutions in high-income countries to open the way to more relevant, accessible and flexible academic programs that offer more career-related experience and economic benefits. Thus, it’s very important to supplement traditional student mobility with innovation in programs and teaching methods, including virtual mobility, which as a form of university interaction has emerged at the intersection of e-learning and international collaboration and allows students to participate in courses and programs of other institutions” (p. 6). These definitions contain references to

It is also worth mentioning the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (EVE) programme when discussing possible definitions. The EVE project description underlines that “Virtual Exchange is different from other forms of online learning: it is technology-enabled and uses the broad reach and scope of new media technologies to bring geographically distant people together. The focus is primarily on people-to-people real-time dialogue in which participants learn from each other, as opposed to content-driven learning. Face to face interactions are facilitated by trained facilitators or educators to ensure they are meaningful and explicitly address the intended learning outcomes of intercultural understanding. The exchange is sustained over time, designed as a pedagogical process. (...) In short, it provides a virtual learning space where young people are encouraged to share experiences, build relationships, and collaborate” (European Commission, 2020b, p. 2). The project thus highlights the importance of synchronous discussions of the participants in order to support the exchange of views, perspectives in the intercultural learning procedure.

As seen from the descriptions above, the listed virtual mobility definitions generally reflect on three clusters of criteria that define virtual exchange programmes: the means by which the virtual connection is established, the organisational aspects that are inevitable for the implementation of the virtual activities as well as the social and cultural aspects that support mutual learning between participants through intercultural communication and collaboration. A lot more definitions are collected systematically by Teresevičienė and colleagues (2011) as part of the TeaCamp project and distinguished between four types of definitions: 1) virtual mobility concept ideas, 2) virtual mobility from mobility perspective, 2) virtual mobility from educational (and mobility) perspective and 4) virtual mobility from other



perspectives. Due to the limitations of the current report, we cannot analyse those definitions in detail, however, it might be important to share the mobility concept that builds on the analysis of those clustered definitions. As Dauksiene and colleagues (2010) stress, “virtual mobility is determined as an activity or a form of learning, research, communication and collaboration, characterised by cooperation of at least 2 higher education institutions, using virtual components through an ICT supported learning environment, including collaboration of people from different background and cultures working and studying together, creating a virtual community, having a clear goal, clearly defined learning outcomes and setting as its main purpose the exchange of knowledge and improvement of intercultural competences as a result of which the participants may obtain ECTS credits and/or its academic recognition will be assumed by the home university” (p. 34). Conclusively, it is evident that virtual exchange concept has a rich background, however, the concept still needs consolidation, including the clear description of the main characteristics and organisational aspects that are to be considered in case of planning and implementing such programmes (Montes et al., 2011).

Even though there is no clear agreement in the literature what characteristics should be considered when organising a virtual exchange programme, based on the reviewed literature the following components can be listed:

- Programme level characteristics:
 - o Activities organised between two or more universities in a multi-campus scheme (Henderikx & Ubachs, 2019; Tereseviciene et al., 2015);
 - o Synchronous or asynchronous communication (Andone et al., 2018; Henderikx & Ubachs, 2019);
 - o Use of internet-connected, web-based, ICT-supported tools for synchronous and asynchronous collaboration and communication, e.g. chat, videoconferencing, web conferencing, audio conferencing, collaborative workspaces, computer mediated conferencing, live streaming, email, online discussion forums, chat, collaborative writing, messaging, eportfolio, wikis, blogs, social media sites etc. that are readily accessible and low cost to participating students (Andone et al., 2018; Bijnens et al., 2006; De Castro et al., 2019; Kayumova, 2016; Montes et al., 2011; Valtins & Muracova, 2019; Vriens, Van Petegem, et al., 2010);
 - o Short-term or long-term delivery (Henderikx & Ubachs, 2019).
- International student groups (Montes et al., 2011):
 - o Virtually crossing borders between regions, countries, cultures and languages, but also between disciplines (Vriens, Van Petegem, et al., 2010);
 - o Student participation in the course while being enrolled and obtaining credit at their own academic institution (De Castro et al., 2019);



- Student evaluation and grading by their own in-country faculty, which allows for learning objectives to be distinct between student groups (De Castro et al., 2019);
 - Student engagement in highly interactive, shared problem-solving exercises and projects with international peers (De Castro et al., 2019);
 - Multicultural exchange (as a key objective to produce added value) (Montes et al., 2011) to gain intercultural experiences (Vriens, Van Petegem, et al., 2010);
 - Collaborative learning (i.e. learning from and with each other) (Vriens, Van Petegem, et al., 2010);
 - Support services and activities (e.g. technical support, orientation day, etc.) (Maček & Ritonija, 2016).
- International faculty collaboration from different academic institutions located in different countries through co creation, co teaching and co-managing an entire or portion of a course over a specified time frame (De Castro et al., 2019; Montes et al., 2011);
 - Joint choice of the subject to be offered through virtual exchange (Montes et al., 2011);
 - Joint curricula design (Montes et al., 2011);
 - Joint production of learning resources (Montes et al., 2011);
 - Joint titles (Montes et al., 2011);
 - Detailed planning and thorough selection of communication tools, teaching and learning activities (Maček & Ritonija, 2016)
 - Variety of international educational and mobility formats/pedagogies (Henderikx & Ubachs, 2019);
 - Strategic use of a wide range of learning tools and technologies (Kayumova, 2016);
 - Involvement of supporting staff, including tutors for enhancement of student performance (Maček & Ritonija, 2016)
 - Close collaboration and mutual confidence relationship between faculty and students (Montes et al., 2011).

When discussing the possible categorisations of virtual exchange programmes, there is no common agreement or generally accepted set of categories of virtual exchange activities (Dauksiene et al., 2010; Poulová et al., 2009). However, there are some attempts in the literature to provide a clear categorisation, as follows:

- Based on the type of activities (Bijnens et al., 2006; Buchem et al., 2018; Dauksiene et al., 2010; Poulová et al., 2009):
 - Virtual courses (as part of a programme) or seminars (series);



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- Virtual study programmes;
- Virtual internships or placements;
- Virtual support activities for physical mobility before, during and after physical mobility.
- Based on the goal of the virtual exchange (Op de Beeck, 2011; Op De Beeck & Petegem, 2011):
 - VE to facilitate or realise an international exchange;
 - VE to facilitate or realise international work placements;
 - VE as a scenario to internationalise a curriculum, (part of) a course, an assignment, a seminar, etc.
- Based on the different forms of activity organisation (Dauksiene et al., 2010):
 - The exchange might range from a single course to a full academic year;
 - Through Virtual Mobility a university can also offer international experience for students and staff through:
 - An international discussion group;
 - An international seminar;
 - An international learning community with regard to a theme of a course or a cluster of courses.
- Other dimensions for categorisation of virtual activities (Dauksiene et al., 2010):
 - By their use of virtualisation:
 - Totally virtual;
 - Partially virtual;
 - Dual;
 - Mixed;
 - Based on the technologies used for the activities;
 - Based on the circumstances in which the virtual mobility activity takes place.

Summarising, virtual exchange is a concept and practice that has its own criteria, own traditions and categorisation attempts; however, these programmes have unexploited potential. In this regard Montes and colleagues (2011) highlights that virtual exchange programmes can be used “(1) to democratise access to international, transdisciplinary and multicultural study experience, now reserved to a relatively small minority of students, contributing thereby to the social cohesion; (2) to produce stable collaboration among teaching and research teams, and their institutions, building on recognised complementarities and specialisations through networking activities; (3) to make the practice of joint titles, at various academic levels (undergraduate, master and doctoral programs) and with diverse modalities (master classes, single subjects, seminars and workshops) a reality, much before a full institutional recognition of academic titles from other countries are in



place; and (4) to link European universities/HEIs among them and with universities/HEIs of other parts of the world” (p. 8). In discussing the importance of virtual exchange activities, Vriens and colleagues (2010) even declares that virtual exchange is “in essence different from physical mobility, although it can be used perfectly as a complement to or alternative for physical mobility” (p. 2). The latter part of the sentence is recurrently appearing as either a statement or a dilemma in several studies that were reviewed for the current report, comparing VE and physical mobility and in certain cases even setting them as somewhat competing notions. Thus, it is worth briefly summarising the main arguments for and against perceiving virtual exchange as a complement and/or an alternative for physical mobility.

A great number of the reviewed articles define virtual exchange as a valuable alternative and a complementary activity for physical mobility as well (Dauksiene et al., 2010; De Kraker et al., 2007; Maček & Ritonija, 2016; Mehrvarz et al., 2019; Op de Beeck, 2011; Op De Beeck et al., 2007; Op De Beeck & Petegem, 2011; Poce et al., 2019; Schreurs & Verjans, 2006; Teresevičienė et al., 2011; Tereseviciene et al., 2015; Ubachs & Brey, 2009; Vriens et al., 2011; Vriens, Op De Beeck, et al., 2010; Vriens, Van Petegem, et al., 2010). From an accessibility point of view, virtual exchange programmes can offer a learning path for students who do not have “the opportunity to participate in exchange programmes for social, financial, or other reasons as it allows them to take part in courses at other universities without having to leave their home university” (Op De Beeck & Petegem, 2011, p. 3). Supporting this approach, Buchem and colleagues (2018) list a number of reasons that prevent students from being mobile, such as socio-cultural background and status, disabilities and chronic diseases, family and parental obligations, financial issues, language proficiency, the availability of and access to information about the mobility period and the recognition of credits obtained. From this perspective, the above authors define the concept of virtual mobility “as a non-discriminatory alternative of mobility” (p. 352). Another argument supporting the alternative nature of VE is that the “new technologies make it possible to support discussion, debate or collaboration at a distance between experts and students from different universities” (Op De Beeck & Petegem, 2011, p. 3) thus highlights the interaction and international experience component of these activities that is also existent in physical mobility and can also be easily implemented through VE.

However, from the perspective of the possible outcomes, the alternative role of VE seems ambiguous and needs further exploration. First of all, it is important to refer back to one of the most quoted definitions of virtual exchange programmes which indicates that the ICT-led mobility activities are suitable options to produce “the same benefits as one would have with physical mobility but without the need to travel” (Elearningeuropa.info, 2006). Even though several research studies use this definition and examine the outcomes of virtual exchange

programmes, they seldom support the argument of the alternative role of VE by providing systematic evidence that would make the outcomes of physical mobility and virtual exchange comparable, despite studies position the two mobility types as conceptually and pragmatically competing and interchangeable. Connected to this, Ubachs and Brey (2009) suggest that virtual exchange programmes have their “very own profile and legitimacy, neither being superior or inferior to physical mobility, but sometimes complementing and reinforcing it” (p. 199), however, the comparison of outcomes on a similar scale seems to be missing from the literature. In agreement with Ubachs and Brey (2009), Henderikx and Ubachs (2019) states that “if an immersion in another culture or language is desirable, students better go for physical mobility. In this sense, virtual mobility doesn’t replace physical mobility. As no stay abroad is required and learning environments/virtual classrooms become technically sophisticated for small and large groups, all students can benefit from virtual mobility. (Also,) none of the forms of mobility is an alternative for replacing the other. Each form is adding to the enrichment of education, offering students the opportunity to learn international competences and skills” (p. 42). This concept is also present in the work of Griggio (2018) who states that “in this eTandem project virtual mobility is not seen as a substitute of physical mobility but rather as a complement of it. As suggested before, the initiative aims to create a bridge that links virtual mobility to physical mobility” (p. 106), thus virtual exchange serves as a catalyst of becoming physically mobile. Aguado Odina and colleagues (2014) furthermore note that “one of the most striking paradoxes that arise when comparing conventional or in-person mobility with its virtual counterpart is the manner in which students enrich their experience. In in-person mobility, it is the journey, the change of place which provides them with a richer learning experience, while in virtual mobility what travels is the knowledge (Weber & Hemming, 2012). Through the students, this knowledge is put to the test in very different social and cultural contexts. That which is taken for a given in one place is not in another; and the students are fully aware of this” (p. 292-293).

Last, but not least, from an internationalisation point of view, virtual exchange can be seen “as the digital expression of internationalisation at home and that the two concepts complemented one another as well as complementing traditional physical mobility. The main benefit is to offer both students and faculty the opportunity to work in an international environment, even if they were unable to take part in physical mobility programmes” (Creelman & Löwe, 2019, p. 16). Virtual exchange is thus a concept and practice that – based on our internationalisation concept used for this study – fits into the ‘internationalisation at home’ strand (along with such activities as the purposeful integration of inward student mobility into the course, as well as knowledge sharing and dissemination of formerly mobile students upon returning home), while physical mobility is fitting into the ‘cross-border education’ concept when referring to the outward mobility of home students. Consequently,



from an internationalisation perspective, physical mobility and virtual exchange may not be seen as competing and interchangeable notions, rather practices that co-existent in the internationalisation agenda.

As mentioned earlier, literature also suggest that virtual exchange serves as a supplement or complement to physical exchange (Dauksiene et al., 2010; European Commission, 2020b; Henderikx & Ubachs, 2019; Maček & Ritonija, 2016; Montes et al., 2011; Op De Beeck et al., 2007; Op De Beeck & Petegem, 2011; Schreurs & Verjans, 2006; Teresevičienė et al., 2011; Vriens, Van Petegem, et al., 2010; Vriens, Op De Beeck, et al., 2010). As Henderikx and Ubachs (2019) emphasise, “although virtual mobility can’t replace the international immersion in physical mobility, course and programme developers have to evaluate for each single course/curriculum if and where blended and online mobility can support and complement physical mobility and where it can lead to an academic experience on its own (next to physical mobility)” (p. 37). They further note that “by the combination of physical, blended and virtual mobility in a curriculum, students have more opportunities for integrating an international learning experience in their portfolio, as they have more opportunities to develop competences as intercultural and linguistic skills, online collaboration, media and digital skills, online teamwork and networking; open mindedness and critical thinking” (p. 37). Based on the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Programme description (European Commission, 2020b), VE programmes aim at expanding the reach and scope of physical exchange programmes, while several studies declare that virtual exchange can be used to enhance physical mobility by supporting orientation and preparation before, complementary course delivery during as well as assessment, follow-up and social networking after the physical component (Dauksiene et al., 2010; Op De Beeck et al., 2007; Op De Beeck & Petegem, 2011; Schreurs & Verjans, 2006). With regards to a specific form of virtual exchange, Vriens and colleagues (2010) states that they “do not argue that a real, physical work placement should be substituted by any virtual form. Rather, it should be recognised that both are different ways of professional learning, each with their own (dis)advantages. Therefore, the argument that virtual mobility cannot (yet) realise the intensity of social interaction or reach the depth of cultural exchange of a real, physical experience should not limit us in taking advantage of the many constructive aspects related to this sort of learning outlined above” (p. 8). The authors therefore advocate the integration of virtual components into the placements delivered through physical mobility. Vriens and colleagues (2010) in another article suggest that in evaluating mobility activities “the human factor always stands out as being one of the most important aspects and the success of activities often depended on whether or not the presence of a coach could be felt. Research has shown that face-to-face contact at some point or on some level is beneficial to the success of the activities, because it builds feelings of responsibility and trust (p. 7).

As it can be seen from the descriptions, “virtual mobility as a complement to physical mobility may be a more rapid form to be engaged by HEIs” (Dauksiene et al., 2010, p. 31), however there is quite a lack of consensus in the literature about the vocabulary concerning virtual mobility/exchange and blended mobility that “leads to reluctance to engage and to imagine solutions outside of the comfort zone of familiar internationalization practices” (Henderikx & Ubachs, 2019, p. 38). Based on the reviews above, the forms of virtual exchanges discussed as complementary activities could easily count as the virtual components of a blended mobility experience, nevertheless, it is not formulated this way in most of the literature. At last, other reasons also hinder the mainstreaming of virtual exchange in the European higher education scene, e.g. the “missing practical examples and applicable scenarios for VM implementations, lack of knowledge and/or experience in recognising and accrediting VM activities, and missing evidence about the effectiveness of VM at different levels (e.g. contribution to physical mobility, intercultural experience, internationalisation)” (Buchem et al., 2018, p. 353). After exploring the main conceptual and implementation issues, the current report is seeking to summarise the main learning outcomes of virtual exchange in the following paragraphs.

Even though it was stated above that from a mobility perspective virtual exchange and physical mobility are complementary, yet independent and legitimate concepts and practices, several literatures compare VE with physical mobility from both mobility and educational perspectives. Therefore, VE can be seen as a particular form of mobility and learning, in which regard we can reflect on the concept of Clapp-Smith and Wernsing (2014) who apply the aforementioned transformational learning theory and the four clusters of triggers that induce such learning during mobility periods. It is important to note that except for (3) the communication in a foreign language, fully virtual exchange activities do not offer possibilities (1) to be involved in a cultural immersion to the same extent one would do if being on a physical mobility, (2) to experience first-hand the everyday life of the host culture, thus not meeting the novelty of “normality”, as well as (3) to be remote and use this time for self-reflection, as is the case for physical mobilities. As a consequence of this analogy, virtual exchange programmes are less likely to provide the same transformational learning environment that is also an important argument to either use virtual exchange as a distinct form of online learning without identifying itself with physical mobility, thus not requiring it to produce the same outcomes as physical mobility does, or interpret it as a complementary activity to physical mobility. However, students participating in virtual exchange programmes benefit from these programmes in several ways; through gaining valuable international, intercultural, linguistic and academic experience (Bijnens et al., 2006; Maček & Ritonija, 2016; Otto, 2018; Teresevičienė et al., 2011; Vriens, Van Petegem, et al., 2010) that supports the development of social, interpersonal, intercultural, multilingual as well as subject-specific,



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academic and technological skills (Bijnens et al., 2006; Fuente et al., 2017; Op De Beeck et al., 2007; Teresevičienė et al., 2011; Tur et al., 2018; Villar-Onrubia & Rajpal, 2016), and the acquisition of knowledge about other cultures and disciplines (Fuente et al., 2017; Maček & Ritonija, 2016; Teresevičienė et al., 2011). Furthermore, participating students get a chance to broaden their cultural, social and political boundaries (Op De Beeck et al., 2007; Teresevičienė et al., 2011), while VE programmes provide students with the opportunity to experience personal development and creates chances for better future employability (Maček & Ritonija, 2016). In connection to VE programmes, Tereseviciene and colleagues (2015) introduces the concept of internationalisation competences by Pawlowski, Holtkamp and Kalb (2010), which refers to a group of “supporting competences to enable individuals to apply their domain knowledge in an international setting. Internationalization competences include intercultural competences in particular, which often can also be seen as an informal learning outcome of mobility, ICT competences, communication competences, collaboration competences and project management competences” (p. 3).

In the field of virtual exchange programme, the current literature review identified two competence frameworks, developed under the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Programme and the Open Virtual Mobility Programme. The former programme indicates the main competence areas to be developed in its objectives, as follows (Helm & Velden, 2019):

- “Encourage intercultural dialogue and increase tolerance through online people-to-people interactions.
- Promote various types of Virtual Exchange as a complement to Erasmus+ physical mobility, allowing more young people to benefit from intercultural and international experience.
- Enhance critical thinking and media literacy, and the use of Internet and social media.
- Foster soft skills development of participants, including the practice of foreign languages and intercultural teamwork, notably to enhance employability.
- Support the objectives of the 2015 Paris Declaration to promote citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.
- Strengthen the youth dimension of the EU neighbouring policy with Southern Mediterranean countries” (p. 4).

The pilot programme sets up a comprehensive competence framework, in which “a number of overarching competencies as well as a subset of related ‘micro-competencies’ have been identified as most relevant in the context of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange badges, listed and defined in the table below” (European Commission, 2020b).

COMPETENCE	SUBSETS OF COMPETENCE	DEFINITION
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<p>Digital competence</p>		<p>Digital Competence is the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes \that are required when using ICT and digital media to perform tasks; solve problems; communicate; manage information; collaborate; create and share content; and build knowledge effectively, efficiently, appropriately, critically, creatively, autonomously, flexibly, ethically, reflectively for work, leisure, participation, learning, socialising, consuming, and empowerment.</p> <p>Source: JRC (2012). Digital Competence in Practice: An Analysis of Frameworks. Most recent reference: DigComp 2.0</p>
<p>Intercultural competence</p>		<p>The capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and worldviews of others, and to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures. It includes recognising power dynamics and the ability to address conflict.</p> <p>Source: OECD (2018). OECD PISA Global Competence Framework</p>
	<p>Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices</p>	<p>Openness is an attitude towards people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself or towards beliefs, world views and practices which differ from one’s own. It involves sensitivity towards, curiosity about and willingness to engage with other people and other perspectives on the world.</p> <p>Source: Council of Europe (2018). Competences for Democratic Culture.</p>
	<p>Plurilingualism</p>	<p>The expansion of an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience) and which leads</p>

		<p>to building up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact.</p> <p>Source: Council of Europe - European Language Portfolio</p>
Transversal skills		<p>Transversal knowledge, skills and competences are relevant to a broad range of occupations and economic sectors. They are often referred to as core skills, basic skills or soft skills, the cornerstone for the personal development of a person.</p> <p>Source: European Skills/Competencies Qualifications and Occupations website (ESCO).</p>
	Cooperation skills	<p>The skills required to participate successfully with others in shared activities, tasks and ventures and to encourage others to cooperate so that group goals may be achieved.</p> <p>Source: Council of Europe (2018). Competences for Democratic Culture.</p>
	Empathy	<p>Empathy is the set of skills required to understand and relate to other people's thoughts, beliefs and feelings, and to see the world from other people's perspectives.</p> <p>Source: Council of Europe (2018). Competences for Democratic Culture</p>
	Knowledge and critical understanding of the self	<p>Knowledge and critical understanding of the self has many different aspects, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. knowledge and understanding of one's own cultural affiliations; 2. knowledge and understanding of one's perspective on the world and of its cognitive, emotional and motivational aspects and biases; 3. knowledge and understanding of the assumptions and preconceptions which underlie one's perspective on the world;

		<p>4. understanding how one’s perspective on the world, and one’s assumptions and preconceptions, are contingent and dependent upon one’s cultural affiliations and experiences, and in turn affect one’s perceptions, judgments and reactions to other people;</p> <p>5. awareness of one’s own emotions, feelings and motivations, especially in contexts involving communication and co-operation with other people;</p> <p>6. knowledge and understanding of the limits of one’s own competence and expertise.</p> <p>Source: Council of Europe (2018). Competences for Democratic Culture</p>
	Self-efficacy	<p>Self-efficacy is an attitude towards the self. It involves a positive belief in one’s own ability to undertake the actions which are required to achieve particular goals. This belief commonly entails the further beliefs that one can understand what is required, can make appropriate judgments, can select appropriate methods for accomplishing tasks, can navigate obstacles successfully, can influence what happens, and can make a difference to the events that affect one’s own and other people’s lives. Thus, self-efficacy is associated with feelings of self-confidence in one’s own abilities.</p> <p>Source: Council of Europe (2018). Competences for Democratic Culture.</p>
	Tolerance of ambiguity	<p>Tolerance of ambiguity is an attitude towards situations which are uncertain and subject to multiple conflicting interpretations. It involves evaluating these kinds of situations positively and dealing with them constructively.</p> <p>Source: Council of Europe (2018). Competences for Democratic Culture.</p>

Leadership skills		Ability to effectively direct, guide and inspire others to accomplish a common goal Source: World Economic Forum - New Vision for Education)
	Virtual Exchange Design skills	The complex blend of organisational, intercultural, pedagogical, digital and interpersonal competencies, attitudes and understanding necessary to design and co-create an appropriate sequence of activities online which foster effective interaction for positive intercultural experiences for learners. The learning design will intentionally take account of the importance of IP, accessibility and inclusivity of the learning environment. Source: own definition
	Virtual Exchange Implementation skills	The complex blend of organisational, intercultural, pedagogical, digital and interpersonal competencies, attitudes and understanding necessary to collaborate effectively with co-teachers and learners in order to sustain effective interaction for positive intercultural experiences for learners. The learning implementation will intentionally take into account the management of online presence and the security of personal data. Source: own definition
	Conflict Transformation skills	The ability to engage in dispute resolution, principled negotiation and mediation in a way that results in a marked, positive change in the nature of the conflict. Source: own definition

Based on the framework presented, an impact assessment of the pilot programme’s first year (2018/2019) was carried out. The first year provided approximately 7450 young European and South-Mediterranean with the opportunity to benefit from a variety of courses with differing content and length. The results summary reports increased self-esteem and confidence of the participants, an increased level of curiosity, better cross-cultural communication skills and a measurable attitude change in the belief in building strong relationships between youth in



Europe and the Southern Mediterranean, thus succeeded in reaching in three out of its four central aims. As the report notes, “an increase in tolerance was not shown through these measures, but this does not necessarily mean it was not present, as is evidenced by the participants agreeing and strongly agreeing in overwhelming numbers that they learned something positive about people from other places and cultures that they did not know before” (Helm & Velden, 2019, p. 20).

Based on the results of the follow-up survey, most students reported a positive impact on their ability to work in a multicultural environment (88%), improved their digital competences (76%) and their teamwork and collaborative problem-solving (76%). It is also important to note 91% of respondents reported learning about other cultures, in which 31+ reported a clear change from their previously held beliefs, and 86% reported intensive knowledge sharing, while 71% answered that they built meaningful relationships with peers from other countries. Participants also reported significant gains in employability skills, English language and intercultural communication skills, digital competences, teamwork and collaborative problem solving as well as specific competences and knowledge which are relevant for different fields (Helm & Velden, 2019). Additionally, results showed notable increase in participants’ media literacy and critical thinking, tolerance and intercultural sensitivity (Helm & Velden, 2019). Consequently, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange programme seems a valuable tool for enhancing intercultural dialogue between young Europeans with several benefits in terms of competence development.

Parallely with the EVE programme, another Erasmus+ KA2 project called Open Virtual Mobility has received considerable attention. The project has an established theoretical foundation and extensive literature reviews apart from toolkits and practical manuals. One of the main deliverables of that project provided a comprehensive competence framework that lists seven clusters of generic skills and transversal competences, as follows (Buchem et al., 2018; Henderikx & Ubachs, 2019; Rajagopal et al., 2020; Tur et al., 2018):

1. Intercultural skills and attitudes: gaining cultural knowledge; understanding cultural perspectives; enhancing own cultural identity; enhancing and demonstrating cultural understanding; applying intercultural awareness in culturally challenging circumstances
2. Networked learning skills: learning to work and cooperate in an international setting with the use of ICT and social platforms; learning about dealing with complex situations; learning about dealing with ambiguity;
3. Active self-regulated learner skills: being able to self-regulate learning process; being able to self-reflection on learning experiences; demonstrating ownership and self-discipline in learning;



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4. Media and digital literature: being proficient in using online learning technologies; being proficient in assessing quality in courses and resources found online; being digitally literate; being proficient in using digital platforms
5. Autonomy-driven learning: demonstrating self-directedness in decision-making on own learning; demonstrating independent learning
6. Interactive and collaborative learning in authentic international environments: enhancing teamwork skills; collaborating with peers from different discipline; collaborating with peers within the context of an international learning experience; interacting with authentic international resources in a foreign language;
7. Open-mindedness: being open-minded and tolerant; demonstrating self-confidence in interaction with peers and teaching staff; showing willingness to improve proficiency in foreign languages.

Furthermore, as Firssova and Rajagopal (2018) mention, “an additional competence area on the knowledge of the concept of Virtual Mobility was added” (p. 15). Additionally, three separate clusters were defined that represent conditions and pre-requisites for the development Open Virtual Mobility (OpenVM), such as the added value of OpenVM (8); the way the study and learning process is organised in OpenVM (9) and OpenVM design characteristics (10) (Rajagopal et al., 2020). The report on the framework also discusses the possibility of assessing the development of these complex learner competences and notes that not all of the identified competence areas can be measured using a quantitative method yet (Rajagopal et al., 2020). Unfortunately, during the literature selection phase (March-April 2020) there were no results available testing the development of these competence areas, however, at the time of the writing of this current report, there are new studies published that might be interesting to review at a later phase of the HLiTL project.

Intercultural competences

Like the main competence development areas identified for physical mobility, intercultural competences also have a central role in the VE learning processes (Vogel et al., 2019). Based on a sample of 249 students who participated in virtual exchange during a 10-year period, Maček and Ritonija (2016) identified intercultural competences as one of the main areas of competence development through virtual exchange. Using again the definition of Deardorff (2009) – stating that intercultural competence is the “ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes” (p. 246) – it seems evident that VE activities can provide an efficient learning environment to produce intercultural outcomes. However, studies highlight that “the intercultural experience through physical mobility differs from this experience through virtual mobility” (Vriens et al., 2011, p. 6). Nevertheless, the evaluation of VE pilot projects by Vriens



and colleagues (2011) clearly shows that the development of intercultural competences through these kinds of activities is possible, supported by clear articulation of these competences and regular reflection on their development by the participating students (Esche, 2018). Online collaborative learning environment and inter- or cross-cultural communication are also important prerequisites of the intercultural competence development process (Kayumova, 2016; Montes et al., 2011). However, Bruhn (2017) notes that “in the virtual space, there is reason to believe that establishing this kind of competence requires approaches that are different from those that can be applied in physical encounters. This is particularly true when communicating via asynchronous textual tools, because visual cues and immediate feedback are lacking” (p. 5). As a result of the active collaboration in such an online educational environment, students experience an intercultural development process “by examining a specific subject or content through a cross-cultural or global lens, working collaboratively to address globally relevant issues, applying communication skills that help build rapport with others from different regions of the world, and exploring self-awareness and appreciation for cultural diversity as opposed to ethnocentrism” (De Castro et al., 2019, p. 1).

Ritonija and colleagues (2016) also presented the outcomes of a series of virtual summer schools organised between 2009 and 2016. The main aim of the summer school was to support participating students to “gain international experiences and competencies from the professional field, utilising the possibilities offered by global communication technologies (...) within the framework of a multicultural and multinational group” (p. 1). Before each session, students were surveyed of which competences they expect to develop, as well as follow-up surveys reflected on their satisfaction with their development in a number of competence areas. The students expected significant gains in the intercultural competence area (32%) and likewise reported high levels of satisfaction with the actual gains in intercultural competencies (6,4 out of 10).

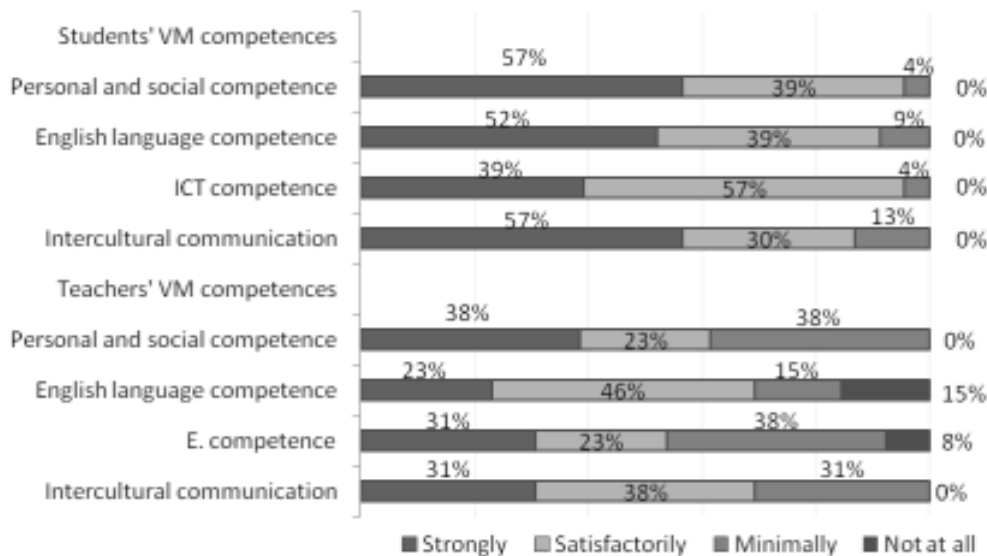
According to these studies, VE activities are efficient means to support intercultural competence development, nevertheless, Ferreira and colleagues' (2018) survey among the participants of a pilot VE programme discusses that “intercultural competence was one of the less developed by the students” (p. 35) compared to such outcomes as digital competence, English language competence, knowledge of virtually studied subject and practical application of the module.

Intercultural and cross-cultural communication competence

Fitting into the cluster of intercultural competences, intercultural and cross-cultural communication competences are also central areas of development through VE. In the survey



of Tereseviciene and colleagues (2015) 57% of students who spent a whole semester attending virtual mobility classes reported that their intercultural communication competence (ICC) was strongly developed along with other personal and social competences (Figure 8). In the discussion, the authors note that even though ICCs “were improved both by students and their teachers, but as students spent more time learning than teachers delivering, so the students’ virtual mobility competence improvement was greater than that of the teachers” (p. 13).



8. Figure - Improvement of student virtual mobility competences (improved categories in percentages) (adapted from Tereseviciene et al., 2015, p. 12)

In line with the findings above, Haug (2017) implemented a survey with 84 student respondents about the experiences of virtual exchange and acquired employability skills. In the survey, students reported that cross-cultural communication skills were improved most by participating in a virtual project, followed by such skills like “critical thinking, problem solving and collaborating across cultures in a shared second place. (p. 2).

Intercultural sensitivity and awareness

Intercultural sensitivity and awareness are also key areas that are targeted by VE activities. Anderson and colleagues (2006) provide a brief summary of possible ways of development of intercultural sensitivity, highlighting that “there is some support for the belief that increases in intercultural sensitivity can be achieved through education and training, without the need for foreign travel [cf. Altschuler, Sussman, & Kachur, 2003; Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 1999; Paige, 1993; Pruegger & Rogers, 1994]. There is also caution expressed that traveling abroad does not ensure greater cultural sensitivity” (p. 459). Conclusively, virtual exchange

programmes can also produce such a learning environment that is stimulating for the enhancement of intercultural sensitivity. Also, in the aforementioned research of Haug (2017), cultural awareness and sensitivity by working in a virtual team were reported to be developed most according to 68% of the responses. Other studies suggest that virtual exchange programmes develop intercultural awareness (Griggio, 2018), as well as “students’ awareness of the world around them and deepen their understanding of themselves, their culture and the culture of others” (Esche, 2018, p. 13).

To sum up, one of the main concerns emerging from literature is that the depth of competence development is not discussed in detail in the reviewed articles, neither given sufficient evidence regarding the intercultural learning capacities of virtual exchange and physical mobility for thorough comparison. Based on this review, the current report acknowledges that virtual exchange has promising potential of producing intercultural competence outcomes, especially, when compared to no mobility experience. However, the depth of this development, as well as its efficiency compared to physical mobility needs broader scientific exploration. This conclusion furthermore questions the validity of those articles that suggest that virtual exchange can be an alternative of physical mobility, but without using comparative data that would support this statement.

Language competences

As in the case of physical mobility, language competences also represent a prominent area of possible developments through VE. As Tereseviciene and colleagues' work (2015) indicates, English language competences are significantly developed by virtual exchange activities taken during a whole semester. According to Griggio (2018), students participating in VE improve linguistically as “they develop informal lexicon, grammar and written and oral skills both in English/Italian/French used as *linguae francae* and in their target language” (p. 107). Maček and Ritonija (2016) furthermore stresses that English language competences are strongly expected as well as proved to be developed during VE activities, based on the response of 249 former participants from the period 2005-2015. The research of Ritonija and colleagues (2016) asked students about their expectation regarding the possible areas of competence development through a virtual summer school. Students answered that they expected improvement of communication competences (32%). Similar to the case of intercultural competences, in the follow-up survey students reported great satisfaction with the actual development of communication competencies (6,4 out of 10). Honcharenko and co-authors (2020) also report the development of so-called speech competence that include “the ability to listen and understand, speak, read and write” as well as an increase in the students’ motivation to learn foreign languages as a result of the virtual exchange experience. Despite

the data provided above, there is still scarce evidence on the language development potential of VE programmes, thus the field needs further exploration in the future.

Personal and social competences

Personal and social competences are also seldom investigated in the context of virtual exchange programmes, however, they represent one of the most improved competence categories for VE students during a semester course (Tereseviciene et al., 2015). Critical thinking, problem-solving and collaboration skills were ranked second when approximately 100 students were asked about the main skills areas improved by participating in a virtual project (Haug, 2017). As part of the aforementioned research by Ritonija and colleagues (2016), students participating in virtual summer schools also reported significant improvements in competences necessary for participation in international teams (6,2 out of 10) that were gained through intriguing teamwork experiences in the virtual summer school's multicultural environment. Additionally, competences for collaboration were reported to be present through the project-based learning approach applied in the virtual summer school that also involved work with new media. Honcharenko and colleagues' work (2020) also mentions teamwork, collaboration and organisational competences as being developed through activities from one-to-two individual interactions to broad team collaboration under the scope of the Erasmus + MILETUS project. The same competence group was referred to by Vogel and colleagues (2019) through naming networking skills and competences for efficient task division as important outcomes of virtual exchange programmes.

Even though the current report identifies ICT competences as a part of the professional competence domain, the skills developed using ICT qualify to fit into the cluster of social competences. In this case, it is important to refer to the investigation of Griggio (2018) that states that by participating in a virtual exchange students became more competent in certain social skills such as commenting, sharing and interacting online that are essential to practice teamwork in an international and intercultural environment. Accordingly, communication and collaboration through online interfaces support building better and (possibly) more ethical virtual interaction between students that contributes to the acquisition of digital competences, digital literacy with an advanced level of 'netiquette'.

Professional competences

Digital or ICT competences represent one of the main competence areas within the professional competence domain as introduced above. As Griggio (2018) says, "technologically speaking, students learn how to use Moodle and Facebook, how to search and retrieve information from the web, how to use the net and social networks in a more

responsible way defending their web reputation” (p. 107) during VE activities. ICT competences also appear in the previously analysed research by Tereseviciene and co-authors (2015), where ICT competences are seen as the least improved ones compared to other competence areas. In their research, Mehrvarz and colleagues (2019) showed that digital skills of students were improved by the Internet use, mobile technologies and other available applications. In the research of Montes and colleagues (2011), VE programmes are compared to physical mobility, in which case the former type has the advantage of benefitting students through an intense familiarisation with ICT. Honcharenko and colleagues (2020) also report extensive competence development through the use of ICT in communicative situations.

Last, but not least, subject-specific, academic outcomes may also be prominent when exploring the potential of VE; however, none of the documents having been analysed for this review provided empirical data in this regard. This is quite unexpected given the fact that VE programmes lack the possibility of first-hand cultural immersion and out-of-class socialisation activities, thus academic content becomes implicitly prominent within VE programmes.

5.3.2. Blended mobility

The term ‘blended mobility’ is quite moderately used in the literature, even though several times virtual exchange programmes accompany other physical mobility activities, thus forming a blended learning experience for mobile students. However, some of the review studies provide a definition for this practice. As Henderikx and Ubachs (2019), “blended mobility is a deliberate combination of both physical and online mobility, based on educational design. This can go in two directions: a predominant physical mobility course, supported by online mobility, or a predominant online course supported by physical mobility (e.g. at the start or the end of a one-year online project or seminar). In this case, the advantages of a (short or long) immersion are combined with the advantages of a flexible implementation of mobility, capturing both the benefits of physical and virtual mobility” (p. 14). Op De Beeck and Petegem (2011) highlights that “when aspects of virtual and physical mobility are being combined in order to maximise the advantages of both, it is defined as blended mobility” (p. 2). It is also important to note that according to Griggio (2018), the virtual component of blended mobility experiences serve as a catalyst for physical mobility and prepare students for the upcoming physical mobility experience by facilitating friendships, contacts and supporting social networking. Henderikx and Ubachs (2019) furthermore refer to the European policy context and projects when discussing the possible ways of implementing blended mobility actions, saying that both KA1 individual mobilities and KA2 (Strategic Partnerships, Capacity Building, Knowledge Alliances, Erasmus Mundus



Joint Masters) initiatives could benefit from implementing projects with an emphasis on blended types of mobility, as it would allow the testing of “new activities combining short-term physical mobility with a longer-term virtual exchanges period, to cater for needs of students which cannot or do not want to go for long-term mobility abroad” (p. 7).

In the meantime, Welzer and colleagues (2018) share some concerns with regard to the implementation of blended mobility, stating that “in the case of physical mobility for a full semester, they [students] have to cope with different language, culture, way of life, food, daily communication for example. However, while students are physically present, they are able to cope with this on the basis of observing their new cultural environment, they can ask home students and other people for help, but when students communicate virtually, they have less possibilities to recognise the before mentioned differences. They can still ask others, but they cannot observe the cultural environment of others, or only with a very limited view. In addition, if they are physically present for just a short time – for example, one or two weeks, the intercultural perspective can be quite a challenge for them, not only because of the short visit in another culture(s) (two-weeks physical mobility can be connected to two different locations and cultures), but especially because, at the same time, they also have to cope with the many different cultures of other students involved in the same project (learning). They are also faced with different cultures of their teammates during the virtual period, and this is a special challenge as well. Because of that, we have to prepare students on blended mobility even more carefully than for the long-term physical mobility” (p. 217). Also, with regard to the cultural aspects of blended mobility, Schreurs and Verjans (2006) advise to create classes that take into account the fundamental differences between the various actors of the participating countries, thus create a blended mobility course “with both local as international aspects, make the course in English but give the students e.g. the possibility to debate in their local language, (...as) cultural aspects demand the most tolerance and a very deep understanding” (p. 13). The latter approach of using local language in virtual exchange and blended mobility is underrepresented in the literature, as language competence development is one of the central areas where digitally supported mobility activities can have a significant impact. It is also underlined by Welzer and colleagues (2018) who indicates that during blended mobility activities “participants have to communicate in different languages, or at least in a language which is for most of them not their mother tongue. Namely, English is usually the language of most of the tools, as well as lingua franca for the communication” (p. 2).

Consequently, blended mobility shares some of the concerns discussed in relation to short-term physical mobility and virtual exchange programmes as well, thus during the planning and implementation of such programmes, it might be fruitful to look at the main principles

and advises regarding those mobility types. Intercultural preparation of blended mobile students before, continuous mentoring for efficient self-reflection during and structured follow-up activities after the entire mobility experience seems to be essential for the successful implementation of such blended programmes. The importance of intercultural preparation is also seen in the evaluation report of two blended mobility projects by Welzer and colleagues (2018) which suggests to “introduce into blended learning and mobility some intercultural preparation to enable participants to be aware of differences and reasons why sometimes there are some obstacles in communication and activities” (p. 8).

With reference to the educational perspectives and possible impacts of blended mobility, it is important to note that “blended mobility combines physical mobility and the blended learning approach. In a blended mobility setting the students can get international experience without spending a full semester abroad. Typically, the students will participate in a project (learning) for several months, communicate virtually, and are abroad for a shorter period (for example, two weeks). Blended mobility has many positive impacts on students and their careers. With blended mobility, we foster internationalization of education, promote students’ employability through non-formal learning not requiring curricula changes, promote international experience of undergraduate students and boost the provision of professional skills, support collaborative learning and critical thinking. By participating in the blended mobility, students also have to cope with the intercultural perspective” (Welzer et al., 2018, p. 217).

Silvana De Rosa and Picone (2007) present a remarkable best practice of blended mobility through the introduction of the European PhD on Social Representations and Communication programme that has a structured, highly innovative didactic system that combines open distance learning with individual and collective physical mobility. As the authors demonstrate, this joint doctorate programme “provides structured international mobility of both research trainees and teaching staff at the individual and collective levels. Individual research trainees are required to relocate abroad for at least six months to work in two different European countries and two different research centres at host institutions with which their tutors are associated and from whom they receive individual tutoring and co-tutoring for their research work. Collective mobility involves all research trainees enrolled in the program and tutors from all the partner universities and is achieved during intensive stages, like the International Summer Schools, or the face-to-face sessions of International Lab meetings (intensive 10-day winter and spring sessions)” (p. 5). As a result of these diverse mobility opportunities, PhD students “are involved in an interlocking system of virtual and physical mobility that allows for considerable flexibility in catering to students’ research needs while at the same time guaranteeing individual tutoring and interactive learning. They are offered a broader range

of international expertise for their research than would be possible at the national level” (p. 5)

Connected to the blended delivery of the mobility programmes, Means and colleagues (2013) mention that “blended approaches do not eliminate the need for a face-to-face instructor and usually do not yield cost savings as purely online offerings do” (p. 5) which suggests that physical relocation of students and teachers are also possible ways of implementing the face-to-face contact. However, Pavla and colleagues (2015) proposes a flipped approach stating that the physical component should be “ensured by mobility of the teacher rather than the students, thus reducing expenses and minimizing tensions in students arising from frequent commuting or prolonged stays at partner universities” (p. 1252). Even though from a cost efficiency and organisational point of view the latter recommendation makes sense, from a pedagogical perspective the physical ‘non-mobility’ of students might hinder the intercultural learning potential of these blended mobility programmes compared to scenarios when students are mobile. Also, it would question the legitimacy of calling these programmes blended mobility activities and not virtual exchanges with visiting scholars. In the former case, blended mobility would at least partially fit into the ‘cross-border education’ approach, while through the practice of this flipped approach it would be placed more on the ‘internationalisation at home’ extreme of the scale of the internationalisation practices. Nevertheless, the possibility of applying such a flipped approach and the assessment of its efficiency shall be further investigated.

Blended mobility is thus a mobility format that is strongly associated with the concept and practice of blended learning. Briefly discussing blended learning, Welzer and colleagues (2018) notes that there is not one generally accepted definition, however, “in general, the concept of blended learning is used to combine online and direct (face-to-face) learning. Online learning beyond the classroom is complementary to traditional classroom instruction. The lack of consensus on the definition of blended learning has led to some misunderstandings and difficulties in research on its effectiveness and suitability. The debate on the most appropriate definition is still ongoing” (p. 2). In the same article, the authors define blended learning “as a combination of everything available, from face-to-face learning at home and abroad, working in a virtual environment, using tools and platforms as well as participating in various communication and organizational situations” (p. 2). In another study of the same authors, it is noted that “online learning outside of the classroom completes class taught in a traditional classroom. Blended learning is also used in professional development and training settings” (Welzer, Družovec, Escudeiro, & Hölbl, 2018, p. 2). If talking about blended learning occasions integrated into a transnational blended mobility experience, Pavla and colleagues (2015) suggest that “the courses are prepared in cooperation between

universities participating in the project using the resources and expertise of both affiliated and sub-contracted professionals. Due to structural flexibility, the courses can be tailored for any audience and modified, combined or reused according to instant needs of the educational institutions” (p. 1252).

Further explaining the educational background of blended mobility, blended learning is “expected to be an enhancement of face-to-face instruction. Many would consider blended learning applications that produce learning outcomes that are merely equivalent to (not better than) those resulting from face-to-face instruction without the enhancement a waste of time and money because the addition does not improve student outcomes” (Means et al., 2013, p. 8). However, it might not be the case when the online component aims at connecting students and teachers across borders, nations and cultures, thus adding an international and intercultural layer to the blended experience. When the base of comparison differs, Means and colleagues (2013) state that “effects were larger when a blended rather than a purely online condition was compared with face-to-face instruction; when the online pedagogy was expository or collaborative rather than independent in nature; and when the curricular materials and instruction varied between the online and face-to-face conditions. This pattern of significant moderator variables is consistent with the interpretation that the advantage of online conditions in these recent studies stems from aspects of the treatment conditions other than the use of the Internet for delivery per se. (...) From a practical standpoint, however, a major reason for using blended learning approaches is to increase the amount of time that students spend engaging with the instructional materials. The meta-analysis findings do not support simply putting an existing course online, but they do support redesigning instruction to incorporate additional learning opportunities online while retaining elements of face-to-face instruction. The positive findings with respect to blended learning approaches documented in the meta-analysis provide justification for the investment in the development of blended courses” (p. 36).

As mentioned earlier, there is scarce evidence available regarding the competence development potential of blended mobility, therefore this chapter is not going to be divided into subchapters. The blended mobility experience can benefit students in several ways, such as providing students an “experience in communicating in virtual reality with people from different countries, gaining intercultural experience, improving their language competences, creating networks, etc.” (Griggio, 2018, p. 92). Also, the same study states that blended mobility activities within the eTandem programme facilitate students’ personal and professional growth to become flexible, multilingual and act comfortably in multicultural settings. Parrott and Jones (2018) also present a blended mobility programme when students “worked in teams using a mix of the digital environment and a short study tour in a host



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country (physical travel) on a common global challenge. The example shows that effective use of the online learning environment supported by digital communication tools could provide students with a global learning opportunity” (p. 179). Among others, the investigation reports several gains in different domains, such as “greater understanding of intercultural differences, increased sophistication in the use of digital communication tools, and increased skills for cultural communication are all evidenced. Research into the extent of these skills’ development is the subject of postgraduate research of one of the authors” (p. 179). The programme implemented in four consecutive cycles furthermore “increased student understanding of the challenges of working in globally located teams, and increased skills in using digital communications technology to communicate effectively on authentic global business issues” (p. 179).

Blended mobility programmes are thus important means to improve student outcomes through diversifying the palette of eligible mobility opportunities. However, a clearer distinction between purely virtual exchange actions and blended mobility activities seems essential for investigating and comparing the competence development results for further improvement of these mobility practices.

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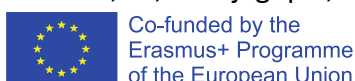
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7. List of figures

1. Figure - Prisma-P protocol (Moher et al., 2015; Shamseer et al., 2015 adapted for our use)	7
2. Figure - Student mobility conceptual framework (adapted from Rodrigues, 2012, p. 7) ...	15
3. Figure - Matrix of international student mobility types with regard to length and modality	20
4. Figure - Skills relevant to EHEA credit student mobility (adapted from Garcia Esteban & Jahnke, 2020, p. 529)	24
5. Figure - Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (adapted from European Commission, 2019, p. 1)	25
6. Figure - The pyramid and process model of intercultural competence (adapted from Deardorff, 2006, 2009)	26
7. Figure - Reported skill development or improvement through study abroad (adapted from Farrugia & Sanger, 2017, p. 12)	48
8. Figure - Improvement of student virtual mobility competences (improved categories in percentages) (adapted from Tereseviciene et al., 2015, p. 12).....	74

