Educational Framework for Volunteering on Exchange

SocialErasmus+: *towards an educational Framework for community engagement and volunteering on exchange*

"The Social Responsibility of Higher Education"

"University support for community engagement and volunteering"

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About the project

The **SocialErasmus programme** incorporates all volunteer activities where international students engage with locals to contribute to their local host society. The **SocialErasmus+ project** is an Erasmus+ KA3 Forward-Looking Cooperation grant project to support the development and professionalisation of the SocialErasmus initiative across Europe.

The main aims of the project are:
- Better integrate the international exchange student in the local society by organising volunteer opportunities to ensure an exchange of values takes place between the International students and the local community
- Developing and professionalise the implementation process of the activities by involving more stakeholders such as Higher Education Institutions and local schools in the process.
- Increasing the learning experience of students by engaging with Higher Education Institutions and Non-Formal Education experts to build in elements of Community Service Learning in the curricula and increase the recognition students receive for their volunteering activity.

The SocialErasmus+ project has a focus on **Erasmus in Schools activities**, to ensure also local youth experience internationalisation and intercultural communication in classrooms from a younger age.

The implementation of the SocialErasmus+ project is coordinated by ESN and implemented with the support of the European University Foundation, Youth for Exchange and Understanding, Erasmus Student Network Besancon, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, University of Vienna and the University of Vigo.

Introduction

This publication tackles the Social Impact of a Higher Education Institutions, highlighting internationalisation in education and the impact of non-formal learning methods.

SocialErasmus+ is an Erasmus+ KA3 Forward-Looking Cooperation project that aims at building bridges in society by encouraging Erasmus and other international students to engage in volunteer activities and community engagement during their exchange.

By doing so, the project aims to ensure better integration of exchange students in local communities, increase intercultural awareness and acceptance of foreigners in local communities. We also hope to improve the recognition of voluntary activities in Higher Education.

This publication targets Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and professionals working in the field of internationalisation. It will address why it is important for HEIs to organise and support international students to do voluntary activities and engage with their host community during their exchange. It will also look at which competences are gained by students and address possible methods on how to implement voluntary activities in curricula, or how to recognise students' efforts if the activities introduced are extracurricular ones.

This publication serves as a first exploration to build stronger connections between the Erasmus+ Programme and community service learning methods in order to increase community engagement, and ultimately the integration and feeling of belonging of students during their international mobility period.

We believe that the Erasmus+ Programme holds the potential to offer a European answer to International Service-Learning with a focus on Intercultural learning experiences without falling into the pitfalls of "voluntourism".

Social Responsibility of Higher Education
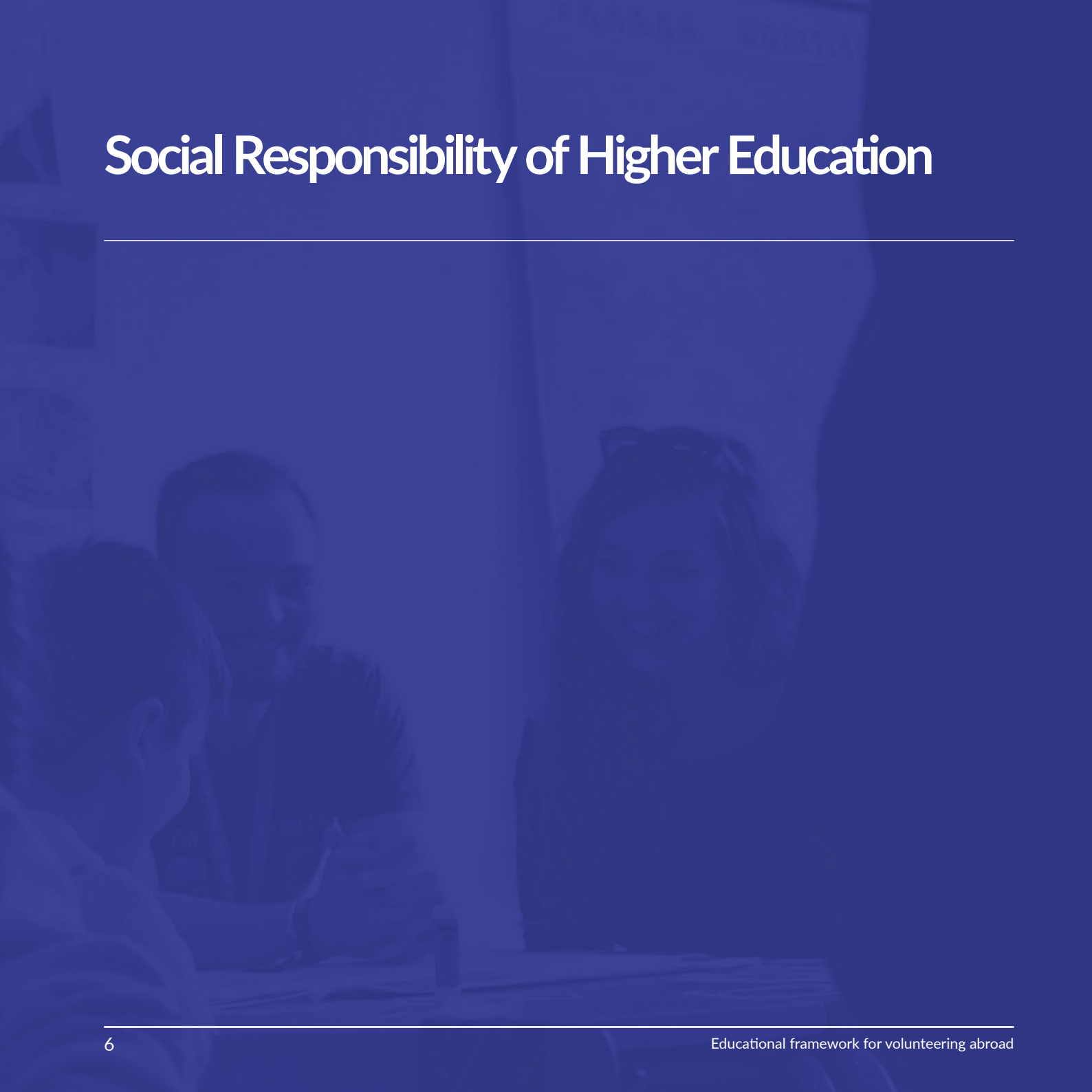
Universities' Third Mission and Social Responsibility

The Council of the European Union recognizes the increasing importance of the social dimension of education, when it identifies "the promotion of equity, social cohesion and active citizenship as one of its four strategic objectives" in this sector (Council of the European Union, 2013, p.1). Being educational institutions with a public responsibility, universities need to consider their social relevance in contemporary complex societies (GUNi, 2017, p. 42); since the end of the twentieth century, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are more and more requested to abandon their former ivory tower status and to establish relevant interactions with society. By stimulating and guiding the utilization of knowledge for the practical concerns of everyday life, they should take a visible role in facing some of the main challenges of our time: for example social inequality, environmental issues, immigration and global citizenship (GUNi, 2017, p.53). In the context of globalisation, particularly, universities must be engaged with their region and contribute to the well-being of the local society as part of their so-called third mission.

Third mission activities, as a complement to universities' first and second mission, teaching and scientific research, comprise themselves three dimensions: knowledge & technology transfer, continuing education and social engagement (E3M, 2010). SocialErasmus situates itself within the latter of these, proposing activities that combine (experiential) education, volunteering and/or community service.

Apart from connecting education more directly to our contemporary world and from simply belonging to their duties as a public institution, social activities like these can also be highly beneficial for the universities themselves: not only will they showcase their academic expertise vis-à-vis the regional community; a closer collaboration with local stakeholders may even enhance the development of new research projects based on the field, and thus strengthen the university's value for the region it is based in.

The following chapter, however, examines the benefits of community engagement on exchange rather from the perspective of the schools and the international students. The argumentation starts at the institutional level, predicting positive effects on the involved educational organisations, and goes on to the individual level of the international students, who not only get the possibility of gaining insight to their host country's cultural and educational practices, but will also be able to develop specific skills and know-how during their voluntary work.

SocialErasmus situates itself within the latter of third mission activities, proposing activities that combine (experiential) education, volunteering and/or community service.

Internationalisation of the classroom: towards a European identity

Cultural diversity in societies has become a reality that still calls for appropriate translation into education systems and curricula. The principle of internationalisation, defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension" into educational practice (Knight, 2004, p.11), is increasingly becoming a fundamental challenge for schools and universities. Community engagement and student volunteering during on exchange, by bringing international students into primary and secondary classrooms, contributes to the international orientation of educational institutions in various ways:

For the sending country:

- By becoming acquainted with the internal procedures of a foreign schooling system, including most probably different teaching methods and a different perception of education in general, a reflection process may be initiated that results in further diversification or internationalisation of the educational culture in their home country
- Consequently, the outgoing student can become a multiplier at home, since he/she may, upon return, encourage local stakeholders (like schools, youth organisations, academic staff, etc.) to implement SocialErasmus in their region as well, or simply by promoting the idea of European identity
- Furthermore, the links established between the

students and their host schools can serve as a springboard towards long term partnerships between educational institutions, teachers, or language learners

For the host country:

- Encounters with international students at school are likely to enhance positive attitudes among pupils not only towards different countries and languages, but also towards the idea of going abroad themselves
- These experiences might, furthermore, foster intercultural learning at an early age, as they help pupils, on the one hand, to create personal sensitivity for their own cultural background and values (Otten, 2000, p.18), and on the other hand, to get in touch with those of a (young) person coming from another country
- With regards to the European context, volunteering on exchange can also give impetus for teachers to follow up on activities that raise pupils' "Europe competence" (see European Elos Network, 2010), stimulate a sense of European identity, or allow them to form a critical opinion on the European integration. This aspect is of increased importance given the series of crises that the European Union has been going through during the past ten years and the rise of Eurosceptic parties in Northern and Eastern Europe (Börzel & Risse, 2018)

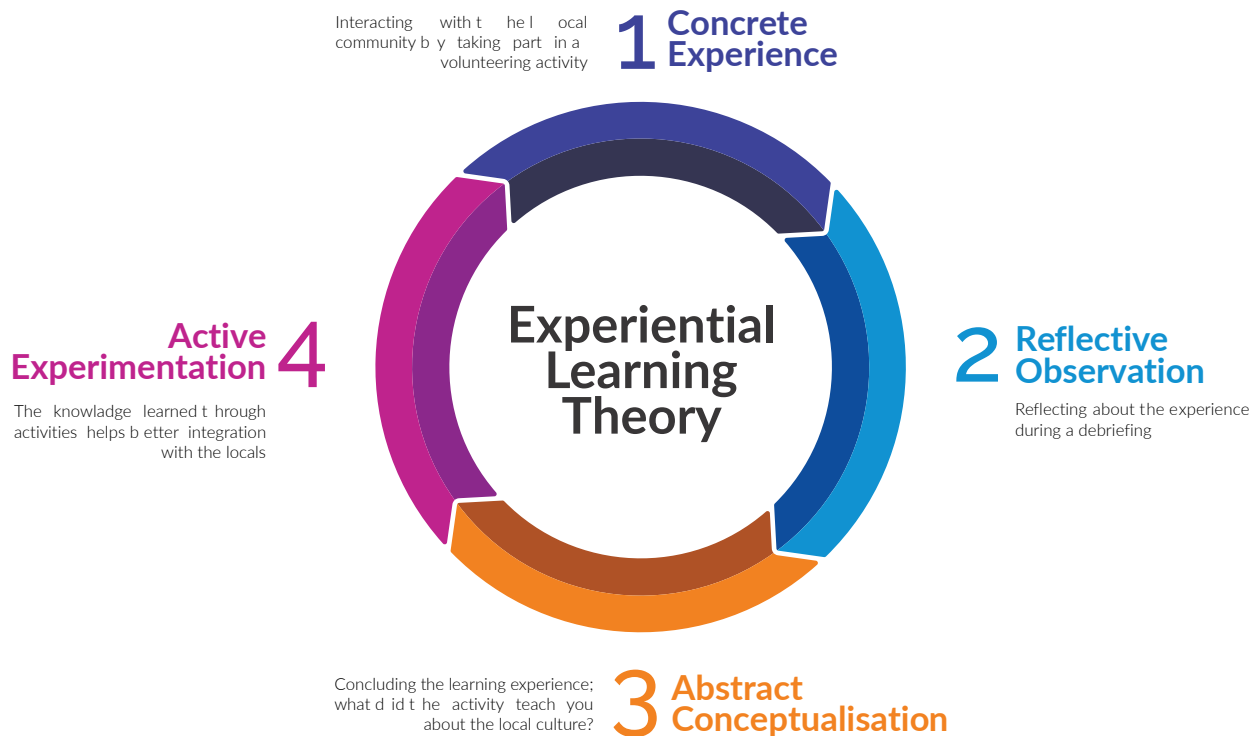# Bringing non-formal learning approaches to HEIs

Since globalization and a knowledge-based economy have become key factors shaping our contemporary world, individuals are required to manage complexity and diversity in their everyday professional, social, and private lives. Education plays a crucial role in this type of society. However, the demands on contemporary education systems have shifted: a study on graduate employability conducted in four European countries (Andrews & Higson, 2008) makes clear that a gap has opened up between the competencies that graduates acquire through formal education and the actual demands of the labour market. Instead of 'know-what', there is now increasing requirement of 'know-how', 'know-why', and 'know-who' kinds of knowledge (Robertson, 2005). For the education field, this means amongst others that "students need to learn how to learn and how to manage their own learning" (OECD, 2000, p.37).

Besides the economic values of these skills, it is important for young people to get prepared to face this world of utmost complexity as responsible, aware, active citizens, especially in times when power and dominance have taken rather opaque and subtle forms of operating. Furthermore, as careers are becoming more irregular and individuals have to cope with frequent alterations throughout their lives, educational institutions must strive to develop global citizens that are adaptable to change and capable of measuring up to the complex reality that surrounds them.

A learning method that seems particularly apt to meet those new challenges, is experiential learning. This is a form of non-formal learning that puts the learner and his or her very own experiences at the core of any learning process. The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), as it was described by Alice and David Kolb (Kolb & Kolb 2013, 2009), defines learning as "a holistic process of adaptation" that involves the individual as a whole and "results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment" (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p.4).

From a constructivist perspective, they consider knowledge being created by grasping and transforming experience, which can be done in various ways. The two modes of grasping experience that the ELT model portrays are Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC). On the other hand, the transformation of experiences into knowledge can be operated through Reflective Observation (RO) or Active Experimentation (AE). Together, they form the so called experiential learning cycle, a kind of ideal learning curve, that is meant to involve a creative tension between all four learning modes:

"Immediate or concrete experiences are the basis for observations and reflections. These reflections are assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn. These implications can be actively tested and serve as guides in creating new experiences." (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p.5)

Interacting with the local community by taking part in a volunteering activity

1 Concrete Experience

Active Experimentation 4

The knowladge learned through activities helps better integration with the locals

Experiential Learning Theory

2 Reflective Observation

Reflecting about the experience during a debriefing

Concluding the learning experience; what did the activity teach you about the local culture?

3 Abstract Conceptualisation

Experiential learning offers a number of advantages over traditional, formal types of learning; most of them apply equally to what we propose with SocialErasmus: first of all, the learning process begins with the learner's experiences and is therefore closely related to his or her perceived reality, which is assumed to add up considerably to motivation. Accordingly, learners are encouraged to express themselves and to apprehend the world around them in a way that suits their personal learning styles. Whereas in formal education, thinking and reflecting are dominant learning modes, experiential learning with its more holistic approach also enables learners with other preferred learning styles to use their potential.

Bell and Scarfino link the concept of experiential learning to the Learning pyramid. Although criticized on the percentages allocated to learning techniques, it gives clear illustration that learning retention is higher when 'Practice by Doing' and actually teaching others scores significantly higher.

By engaging in local communities, working on a topic in a real life setting, the service learning experience offers students opportunities learned in the classroom. Turning theory into practice and teaching others, expects a higher level of understanding of the student to tackle the topic at hand, requiring the student to prepare sufficiently in order not to fail expectations. These learning techniques responds to the nowadays increasing demand of non-cognitive skills and know-how.
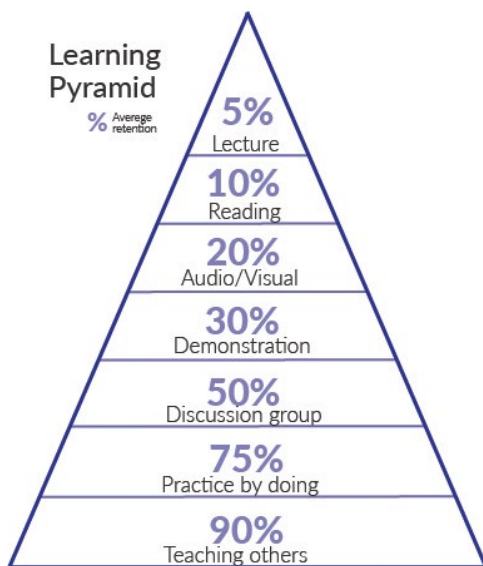
The power of non-cognitive skills

One experiential learning method that turns out to be particularly efficient in promoting social skills, civic engagement, as well as positive attitudes towards oneself and towards school, is Service Learning (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009). The service-learning method refers to a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that engage human and community needs together with structured opportunities for reflection designed to achieve desired learning outcomes (Jacoby, 1996c).

There is a growing body of literature that supports the view that today's socio-economic climate requires individuals to develop not only cognitive but also social and emotional skills, the so-called transversal or soft skills (Davia, Janiak, & Wasmer 2010; Brunello & Schlotter 2011; Iversen & Farber 1996). In contrast to cognitive skills, meaning mental abilities that are used in thinking activities and easily measurable through IQ tests and achievement scores, the term of non-cognitive skills refers to personal attributes such as attitudes, behaviours, motivations, patterns of thought, etc.: things that could as well go by the name of "character traits". In fact, the discussion on non-cognitive skills is continuous and controversial, starting at the terminology itself (Gutman & Schoon, 2013, p.7): whereas the word "traits" suggests some sort of immutability, talking about "skills", on the other hand, implies that these attributes can change or be learned.

A longitudinal study conducted in eleven OECD countries suggests that raising social and emotional skills improves health-related outcomes, reduces anti-social behaviour and helps protect individuals from being victims of aggressive behaviours (OECD, 2015, p.53). Additionally, non-cognitive skills are believed to help 'activate' certain cognitive skills, like for example an increased self-esteem can lead to better learning outcomes.

"Many of the 21st century skills," the OECD states, "such as creativity and critical thinking, have both cognitive and socio-emotional elements" (OECD, 2015, p.36).

Integration and transcultural competence

Integration of international students in the local community is still a challenge. Sigalas (2010) reveals that studying abroad does not necessarily lead to direct interpersonal contact to host country students, which can be put down to the following (p.252-3): On the one hand, local young people tend to have already established social networks and may not see the use of engaging with Erasmus students who will depart after a few months. On the other hand, as the ESNsurvey of 2016 (Josek et al., 2017) confirms, Erasmus students are more likely to develop friendships with other internationals since they are introduced to each other at orientation events during their first weeks abroad or often live together in the same accommodation.

The study conducted by ESN shows furthermore that in many cases, this constitutes a disappointment of expectations: a great majority of the respondents had indeed planned to create more local friendships than they ultimately could (Josek et al., 2017, p. 53).

Community Engagement on exchange however offers the possibility to gain deeper insight not only into the operating processes of the host society through an institution, but also into local values and customs. The greater immersion in everyday life and the wider range of interaction with locals will allow the students to learn the local language more efficiently and to achieve higher cross-cultural awareness and proficiency during their exchange. As they find themselves exposed more intensively to individuals from a distinct cultural and linguistic background, constantly dealing across communicative competences, they are challenged to learn how to use different 'cultural lenses': something you could call a 'transcultural communicative competence' (Takkula, Kangaslahti, & Banks, 2008, p. 89). This is a skill that requires a wide and complex range of knowledge but is nonetheless vital for citizens and workers in an ever more globalized and multicultural society, as it helps to promote tolerance and social cohesion across ethno-cultural boundaries.

Finally, participating in a social activity outside university may totally change the students' perception of their Erasmus time: as they take a direct part in the shaping of this experience, they will feel more actively involved in their exchange instead of, so to speak, 'passively undergoing' it.

Throughout the SocialErasmus+ project, it is our aim to identify the competences international students gain while volunteering on exchange.

TRANSCULTURAL vs. INTERCULTURAL

While the concept of interculturality centrally focuses on differences, similarities, conflicts and exchange between cultural entities perceived as distinct, the term "transcultural" is, on the contrary, based on a more constructivist conception of culture that goes beyond the "own" and the "other": as the prefix "trans" stresses an understanding of mutual penetration and overlapping, this notion underlines the hybrid character of today's globalized societies and the haziness of socio-cultural boundaries, on the macro-level of a community as well as on the micro-level of the individual.

„Cultures today are extremely interconnected and entangled with each other. Lifestyles no longer end at the borders of national cultures. For most of us, multiple cultural connexions are decisive in terms of our cultural formation. We are cultural hybrids." (Welsch, 1999, para. III)

Implementation, Recognition and Validation

Educational Framework for Volunteering on exchange

In the previous chapter, we have expanded on the reasons why a shift in educational learning is needed. "Non-professional" activities such as volunteering can be actively integrated into the student learning process, making their overall higher education experience more dynamic and formative while increasing their participation in society.

Formal education within higher education does not provide all the tools to succeed in modern-day society. In order to enable the student to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes to have a rich and engaged life embedded in society, Higher Education Institutions should rely on associative structures or other organizations and offer new forms of learning focused on community engagement with an educational dimension. Adding experiential learning to the curriculum is an asset for the development of soft skills and competences, for example, teamwork, communication and reflection.

Introducing Non-Formal Education methods into the Higher Education sector does not exclude validation of the gained skills to take place; we can continue to look at the Non-Formal Education field in order to officially validate the gained competences and officially recognise these competences in the transcript of records transferred between host and home university.

The overall aim of validation is to visualise and value the range of knowledge, skills and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where these have been acquired (Cedefop, 2017). An important purpose of the recommendation has been to identify the essential features of validation. It defines validation as "a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard" (Council of the EU, 2012, p. 5).

Going through a guided reflection process that leads to validation of competences enables students to critically assess their learning outside of the classroom and inform their future involvement choices. in addition to providing a means for self-assessment, it also assists students in developing the ability to engage in self-reflection and assessment of an experience and the outcomes achieved through a process, both skills which are relevant post-graduation (Mahal K., 2012).

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), defines four phases of validation:

1. **Identification**

Validation starts with the identification of knowledge, skills and competences acquired. The student becomes aware of prior learning.

2. **Documentation**

Documentation follows the identification stage by providing sufficient evidence of the learning outcomes that were acquired.

3. **Assessment**

In the assessment process, the individual's learning outcome are compared against specific reference points.

4. **Certification**

The final phase where validation is formalised in order to recognize the learning outcomes.

These four stages of validation of non-formal and informal learning can be integrated into learning experiences of students in the higher education sector. According to CEDEFOP, 23 countries of the European Union have started arrangements of validation of non-formal and informal learning; the most commonly used is documentation (96% of the cases) and assessment (93%). Only in 74% of the cases in Higher Education does this lead to official certification (Cedefop, 2017).

In order to reach the goals set forward in the first chapter of this guide, to making these educational methods available for students on exchange, it is important to link these validation processes more strongly to the formal academic recognition processes taking place during an Erasmus+ mobility in different ways.

There are various methods of recognition, each with specific characteristics, conditions and (dis)advantages. Depending on the programme, institution, context and implementation of the activities a form of academic or extracurricular recognition will be preferred. In this paper, we will expand on a range of recognition methods both as an active part of the curriculum or as an extracurricular activity that could be applied.

Recognition process

The Lisbon Recognition Convention, which entered into force in 1999, provides a legal framework for cross-border academic recognition. The process of awarding credit to non-formal or informal learning has four main stages as described in the ECTS User's Guide:

1. **Initial advice and guidance**: what does the process involve for the learner, the credit limits for non-formal/informal learning; what are the costs, roles and responsibilities of learner and tutor/advisor; and different learning pathways to qualification.
2. **Support**: reflective process; understanding learning outcomes; identifying own learning outcomes; evidence gathering and selection.
3. **Recognition/assessment**: assessment of evidence of achievement of learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
4. **Award of credit**: credit awarded through this process is of the same value as credit gained through formal learning.

We remark the strong similarities between the Lisbon Recognition convention that lays the basis for formal academic recognition in Europe that lead the way for international student mobility between countries and the four phases of validation as defined by Cedefop.

In both cases, a strong need for identification and documentation is reflected as a prerequisite in order for an individual assessment of the learning outcomes that have occurred to take place. The formalisation of the learning outcomes takes place by awarding credits to the students. In the case of the Erasmus+ programme, ECTS credits are transferred between the host and the home institution. This leads us to believe a stronger implementation of formal recognition processes of volunteering and community engagement can be included in mobilities. However, the current system to transfer credits focuses solely on the credits obtained through the Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records of the courses followed abroad, limiting the recognition of gained courses to course related learning outcomes.

SocialErasmus+ Results

Throughout the large scale implementation period from September 2018 until June 2019, more then 1.292 SocialErasmus activities took place across Europe where international students volunteered in their local communities, among which 262 visits to local schools.

271 Cities in Europe

31 Countries

1.292
SocialErasmus activities

86.034
People involved

2.526
ESN volunteers

18.574
International students

Volunteering on Exchange

262
Erasmus in Schools visits

10.442
Local school students

438
ESN volunteers

1.324
International students

1 ESN volunteer

coordinates activities,
8 international students volunteer
and engage with 25 locals.

Intercultural understanding
& Transcultural Competence **87%**

84% Intercultural
Communication Skills

Active citizenship
& Social Responsibility **90%**

82% Project & Activity
Management

Erasmus Spirit &
European Citizenship **81%**

**SocialErasmus
Competence Framework**

students were asked which competences they
felt they gained by joining community engaged
activities.

The SocialErasmus competence framework

Identifying learning outcomes of community engagement on exchange

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is important to make a stronger distinction between knowledge and skills gained by students during their degree. Due to the needs of a constantly changing, hyper-connected and globalised society, it becomes apparent that gaining knowledge in itself is not sufficient to answer these complex challenges.

Greater importance is given to the power of non-cognitive skills and attitudes. In order to establish a transversal set of competences that students gain through volunteering on exchange, we followed the competence framework for Youth Work as developed by the Council of Europe, developed in cooperation with the European Commission and the European Youth Forum. This framework defines competences as a combination as three interlinked dimensions of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are used to efficiently and successfully execute a certain activity. Each competence clusters a set of attitudes, skills and knowledge, in order to make up a competence.

Whereas many researchers define competence as the integrated whole of knowledge, skills and attitudes, Baartman & Bruijn suggest that the personal integration of competences is a learning process and competence as a learning outcome (2011). This resonates with the Experiential Learning Theory of Kolb, where students undergo a transformative experience that creates learning, which will lead to behavioural change based on their refined knowledge, skills and attitudes gained through their learning process. When measuring competences, the level of knowledge, skills and attitudes can be assessed as they are applied together to perform a task. Knowledge, skills and attitude should be measured together as they become visible in patterns of action (Baartman & Bruijn, 2011)

Knowledge is information acquired through sensory input: reading, watching, listening, touching, etc. The concept of knowledge refers to familiarity with factual information and theoretical concepts.

Skills refer to having the know-how or the ability to apply said knowledge into practice. Acquiring knowledge requires experiences in order to test out knowledge and learn how to implement them.

The know-how-to-be is relational know-how; how to behave, to find the appropriate behaviour, that is to say, to adopt the behaviours and attitudes expected in a given situation.

In the SocialErasmus Competence Framework, the focus lies on international students developing activities that encourage intercultural dialogue through the organisation of student volunteering and community engagement activities.

A set of 28 questions were defined that tested the gained attitudes, skills and knowledge of international participants of community engagement activities.

This set of questions was the end result of extensive consultation:

- Desk research by the partners of ESN Besancon and University of Vienna
- A consultation process during the 4 multiplier workshops in the SocialErasmus+ project in September 2018 and February 2019
- A consultation of academic professionals active in the field of internationalisation and community engagement and service-learning at the Validation Workshop in July 2018 and at the Steering Committee meetings in October 2018 and February 2019

In order to test the hypothesis that students would experience a change throughout their volunteering experience during their international student mobility, students that took part in SocialErasmus activities in the piloting of the competence framework filled in an evaluation survey. In total 78 respondents filled in the student surveys. Based on these answers, 5 key competences can be connected to volunteering during international student mobility. These 5 key competences are aggregated based on a combination of questions related to attitudes, skills and knowledge that build up each specific competence.

Overall we can see that the majority of the respondents found the questions relevant for them, as on average 8,2% of the participants responded that the question was not applicable for them, with outliers between 3,8% (Q22 - I understand why it is important to volunteer during exchange programmes) and 17,9% (Q8 - I improved my time management skills). It was thus decided to keep all questions in to develop the 5 key competences.
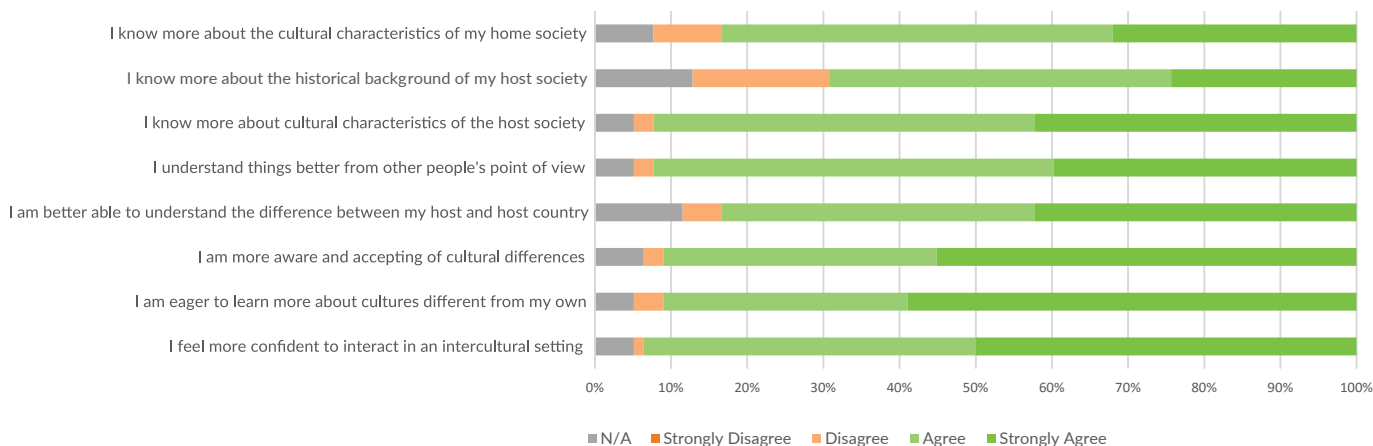
Intercultural Understanding & Transcultural Competence

One of the major objectives of the SocialErasmus project is to increase intercultural understanding. One of the main objectives to having Erasmus students volunteer during their mobility was to ensure that students develop a better intercultural understanding of what happens when two cultures meet and overcome these cultural differences by integrating cultural characteristics in their own cultural identity.

This competence includes the following factors:
- **Knowledge**: cultural characteristics of host and home society, historical background of the host country.
- **Skills**: distinguishing of and empathy for intercultural differences
- **Attitude**: Curiosity and acceptance of different cultures, confidence to interact in intercultural setting

Intercultural Understanding & Transcultural Competence

Chart categories (left to right): I know more about the cultural characteristics of my home society; I know more about the historical background of my host society; I know more about cultural characteristics of the host society; I understand things better from other people's point of view; I am better able to understand the difference between my host and host country; I am more aware and accepting of cultural differences; I am eager to learn more about cultures different from my own; I feel more confident to interact in an intercultural setting

Legend: ■ N/A ■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

More than 87% of the respondents said that their overall Intercultural understanding increased because of the volunteer activities they undertook during their mobility.

93,6% felt more confident to interact in an intercultural setting, indicating that volunteering while on student mobility, takes away some of the barriers to interact with people from different communities. This was closely followed by 92,3% of the respondents stating they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they learned more about the cultural characteristics of their host society while volunteering. This is in contrast with the least popular answer, where 69,2% said that they learned more about the historical background of their host society. 17,9% of respondents even expressed that they disagreed with the fact that they learned more about the historical background

92,3% of respondents also claimed they felt able to better understand topics from another person's perspective, while 91,0% of respondents said that they are more aware and accepting of cultural differences, overall this indicates a gain in empathic skills of participants.

Intercultural Communication

Closely related to the competence of intercultural understanding is the competence of intercultural communication. Intercultural communication refers to the communication that happens when two people from different cultures meet. Intercultural communication competence focuses on ones' adaptability when communicating with people from diverse backgrounds.
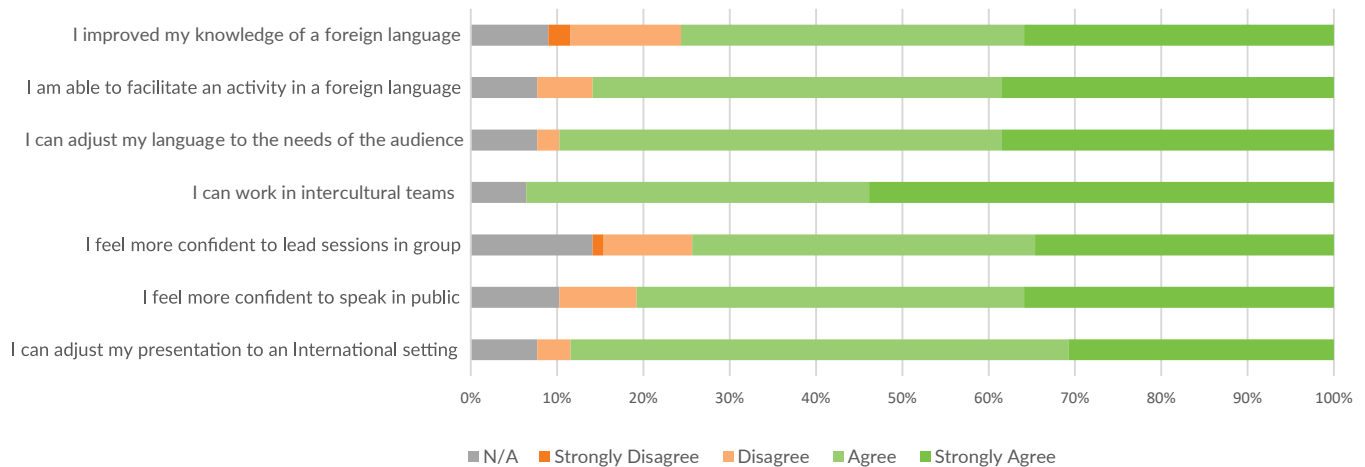
This competence includes the following factors:
- **Knowledge**: knowledge of a foreign language
- **Skills**: adaptability of language, content and communication style to intercultural settings
- **Attitude**: confidence in public speaking and leading sessions in intercultural setting

On average 84,1% agreed (45,8%) or strongly agreed (38,3%) that taking part in volunteer activities during their exchange semester, increased their overall intercultural communication skills. Overall only 6,4% of international students disagreed that their volunteering experience had given them increased intercultural communication skills, while 9,0% of the international students felt the questions were not relevant for them.

It helped 93,6% of the respondents understand that they can work in intercultural teams, with 53,8% of the respondents strongly agreeing to this statement. In 89,7% of the cases, international students indicated that they learned how to adjust their language to the needs of their audience.

Overall confidence to speak in public in an international setting was a positive outcome for 80,8% of respondents (44,9% agreed, while 35,9% strongly agreed) and 74,4% of respondents said they felt more confident to lead group sessions (39,7% agreed, while 34,6% strongly agreed). 14,1% of respondents claimed that the leadership question did not apply to them, indicating that they did not lead a group session during their volunteering activity.

Chart legend: ■ N/A ■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

Categories (top to bottom):
- I improved my knowledge of a foreign language
- I am able to facilitate an activity in a foreign language
- I can adjust my language to the needs of the audience
- I can work in intercultural teams
- I feel more confident to lead sessions in group
- I feel more confident to speak in public
- I can adjust my presentation to an International setting

Active Citizenship and Social Responsibility

Active citizenship is defined as taking up an active role in society by taking part in civic, social and democratic participation when a person feels the need to take on social responsibility in society. In the context of volunteering during an international student mobility, we connect it to the feeling of wanting to contribute to the host society.

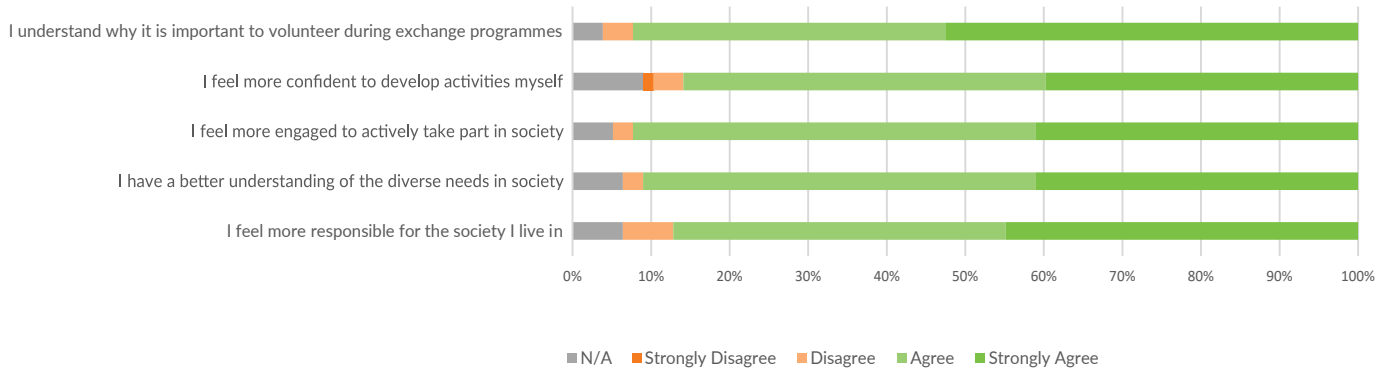This competence includes the following factors:
- **Knowledge**: Knowledge of the diverse needs in society and the importance of volunteering during exchange programmes.
- **Attitude**: a social responsibility to actively taking part in society

Over 89% of respondents said that by volunteering during their international student mobility, they gained a better understanding of Active citizenship. Only 6,2% of respondents claimed the questions related to social responsibility, were not relevant to them. This indicates that the Active Citizenship competence is considered the most relevant. Considering the volunteering aspect to be so central to the activity, this is not surprising. 92,3% of respondents expressed that they understand why volunteering during their student mobility is important, and people feel more engaged to actively take part in society.

This is in line with the results of the ESNsurvey 2019 on active citizenship that found that 52,7% of exchange students volunteer after their return, compared to the European average of 30,7% in the Eurobarometer (Banet et al, 2019). This indicates that international student mobility fosters active citizenship and social responsibility.

Chart legend: ■ N/A ■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

Chart categories (top to bottom):
- I understand why it is important to volunteer during exchange programmes
- I feel more confident to develop activities myself
- I feel more engaged to actively take part in society
- I have a better understanding of the diverse needs in society
- I feel more responsible for the society I live in

Project & Activity Management

One of the key aspects of volunteering and community engagement during their exchange is that students are empowered to take initiative and ownership of the activities that are being planned. The project and activity management competence focuses on the more practical side of activity organisation during the volunteering experience.

This competence includes the following factors:
- **Knowledge**: Knowledge of group dynamics and facilitation techniques
- **Skills**: time management skills, activity development skills, adaptability to different audiences
- **Attitude**: confidence and initiative in developing activities

The 'project and activity management' competence gathers all questions related gained through the organisation and facilitation of volunteer initiatives. 81,7% of participants voiced their agreement with the question if their volunteer mobility helped them improve their project and activity management skills, as overall 31,3% of respondents strongly agreed and 50,4% of respondents agreed.

Time management skills scored the lowest, with only 65,4% of respondents indicating they gained more of these skills, while 16,7% disagreed and 17,9% indicating the question was not applicable for them.

14,1% of respondents also indicated not to agree that they gained group facilitation skills, while 12,8% of respondents claimed this question was not relevant for them. This might indicate that these respondents were not as involved in the activity development and were not empowered enough to take initiative, which let to lower scoring on these characteristics.

Awareness of group dynamics is an important aspect of activity development, which is indicated by the highly-rated knowledge on group dynamics (85,9% agreed or strongly agreed) and adaptability to audiences (88,5% agreed or strongly agreed).

Project Management & Activity Management

Legend: ■ N/A ■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree
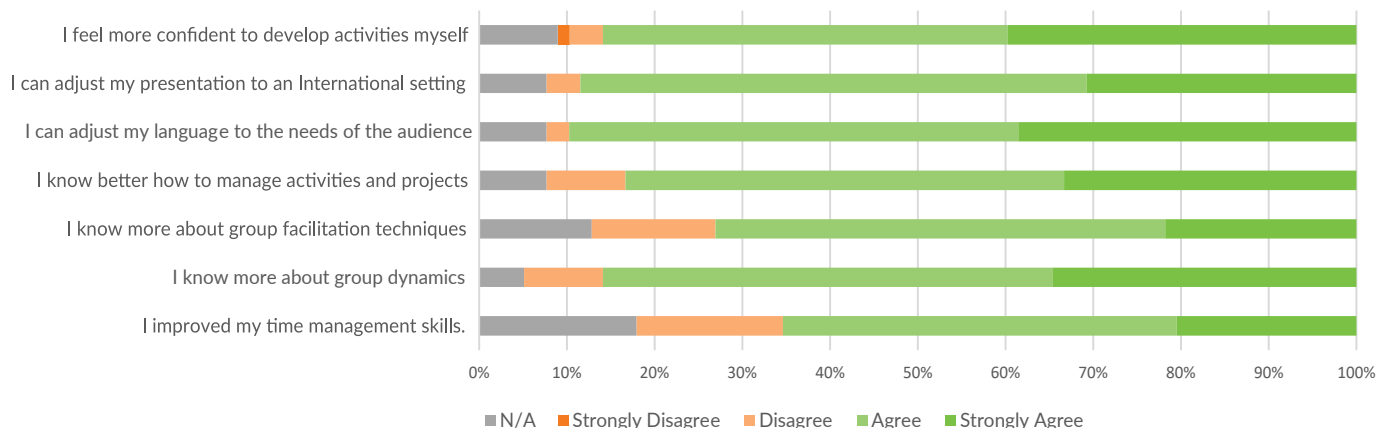
Erasmus Spirit and European Citizenship

Although the Erasmus+ programme is set up with the objective to bring all previously mentioned competences to participants, one of the major key competences is connected to European Citizenship; how connected do students that volunteer during their exchange mobility feel to Europe in general and the Erasmus programme specifically.

This competence includes the following factors:
- **Knowledge**: knowledge on the Erasmus programme and student mobility, knowledge on the social dimension of the Erasmus+ programme.
- **Skills**: understanding the differences between different European nations.
- **Attitude**: a feeling of connection to Europe

Overall 81% of respondents indicated that their Erasmus Spirit and European Citizenship had increased because of the volunteer activities they participated in during their exchange period.

Knowledge of the Erasmus+ programme has increased for 78,2% of the respondents, while 70,5% of respondents indicate their overall knowledge of International students mobility has increased, with 19,2% of respondents disagreeing, it is clear that the overall subject of the activity is not always connected to student mobility.

While 62,82% of respondents are EU natives,73,1% of respondents indicate that they feel more connected to Europe (38,5% strongly agree, 34,6% agree). This result is in line with the results of the ESNsurvey 2019, which found that 80,3% of exchange students identified as a European Citizen, 76,7% of the respondents indicated a double affiliation to both a European Identity as well as a national identity, this is well above the average of 67% of the European average recorded in the Eurobarometer (Banet et al, 2019).

Erasmus Spirit and European Citizenship

N/A　Strongly Disagree　Disagree　Agree　Strongly Agree
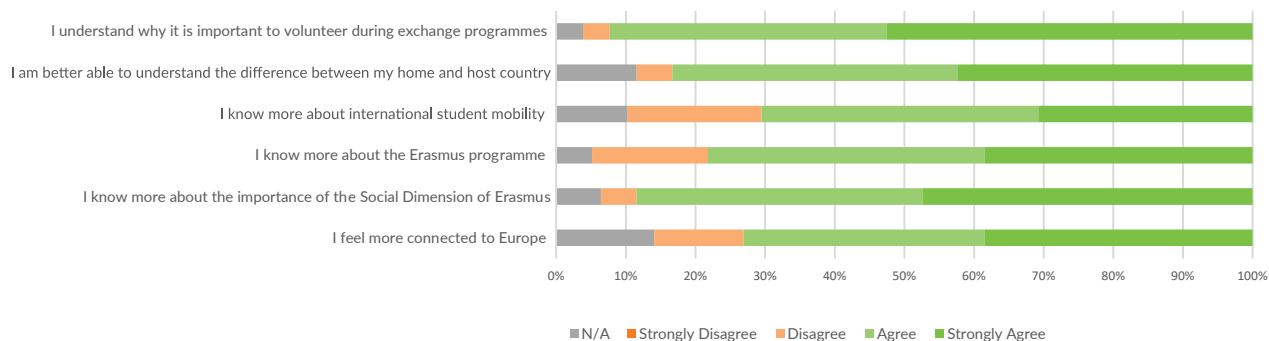
Overall results

The overall satisfaction level of the students with the activity was very high. When asked to give the activity a score from 0-10, no score lower than 6 was registered, the average satisfaction rate is 9,02.
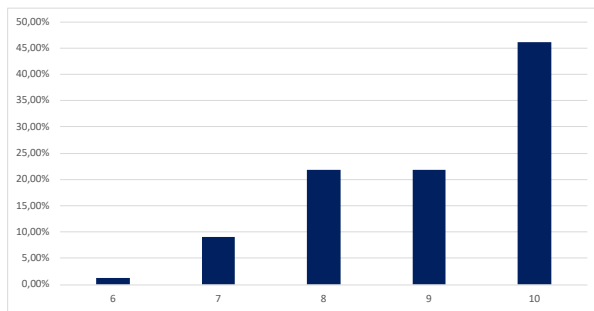
When asked why students volunteered during their exchange, 69% of the students indicated they wanted to interact more with people from the local community, whereas 56% of respondents indicated they wanted to contribute to their host community and increase their own intercultural understanding. This motivation was followed closely by the motivation to exchange ideas and values (55%) and to understand more about the local context (50%). Practising their theoretical knowledge, was the rarest answer, as only 8% of respondents indicated this as part of their motivation to participate. Encouraging European Citizenship in others is only considered as a motivating factor for 23% of respondents, although we will see later that 73% of respondents consider themselves to feel more connected to Europe after their volunteering on exchange experience.
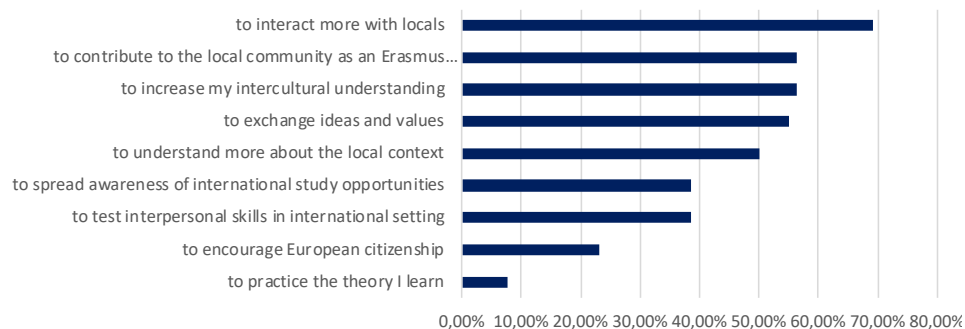

Fig. 1 - Satisfaction level of participants rated between 0 and 10.

Fig 2 - Motivation to participate in the SocialErasmus; volunteering on exchange experience

Community Engagement on exchange embedded in the curriculum

In order to formalise the competences gained through volunteering engagement in the local community, a connection to the Learning Agreement is needed. The Learning Agreement sets out the programme of the studies or the traineeship to be followed abroad and must be approved by the student, the sending institution and the receiving institution, organisation or enterprise before the start of the exchange.

The purpose of a Learning Agreement is to provide a transparent and efficient preparation of the exchange to make sure the student receives recognition for the activities successfully completed abroad. The current Learning Agreement template for studies focuses on the replacement of course units in the sending institution for course units in the receiving institution, limiting the formal academic recognition process to a set of course units.

In order to offer recognition of the learning experience of the student, it is advised to officially embed the activities in the curricula of the student and recognise it officially with ECTS credits during the exchange period. This requires a more elaborate framework to be worked out by the HEI in order to process the four stages of validation throughout a course unit that can be added to the learning agreement.

Formal academic recognition of volunteering in the curriculum as community engagement

When student volunteering in the local community is recognised in formal education methods, the element of volunteering, where students volunteer their time and skills without any specific return, is called into question. The concept of Community service-learning or Community Engaged Learning is introduced as a blend of studying and volunteering.

To illustrate it with an example: If an international student volunteers in a high school classroom, the pupils that are being tutored are seen as the beneficiaries of the activity. While the international student will certainly benefit from the activity, the intent of the volunteering activity is to make a difference in the lives of those that are being supported. This is often considered to be vertical service-learning.

While in a service-learning setting, the international student also gains knowledge by applying the knowledge and skills gained in class, in a real-world setting. The difference between student volunteering and service-learning focuses on two elements:

1. In service-learning, both the student and the beneficiary of the volunteering are considered the beneficiary of the activity. The learning of the students in this experiential education method is put more central.
2. A validation process is usually put in place in order to go through the four phases of validation to reach official recognition of the competences gained by the student.

Service-learning - sometimes referred to as community engaged learning - is an innovative pedagogical approach that integrates meaningful community service or engagement into the curriculum and offers students academic credit for the learning that derives from active engagement within the community and work on a real-world problem (Aramburuzabala P., McIlrath L., et al., 2016). Reflection and experiential learning strategies underpin the learning process and the service is linked to a specific academic discipline.

Service-learning is a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflects on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle R., & Hatcher, 1996). Unlike extracurricular voluntary service, service-learning is a course based service experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentations. Unlike practica and internships, the experiential activity in a service-learning course is not necessarily skills-based within the context of professional education.

Service-learning provides an additional means for reaching educational objectives, and academic credit is obtained by students for community-engaged activities when learning objectives associated with the engagement are identified, documented and assessed. Faculty who use service-learning discover that it brings new life to the classroom, enhances performance on traditional measures of learning, increases student interest in the subject, teaches new problem-solving skills, and makes teaching more enjoyable. In addition, service-learning expands course objectives to include civic education (Bringle R., & Hatcher, 1996).
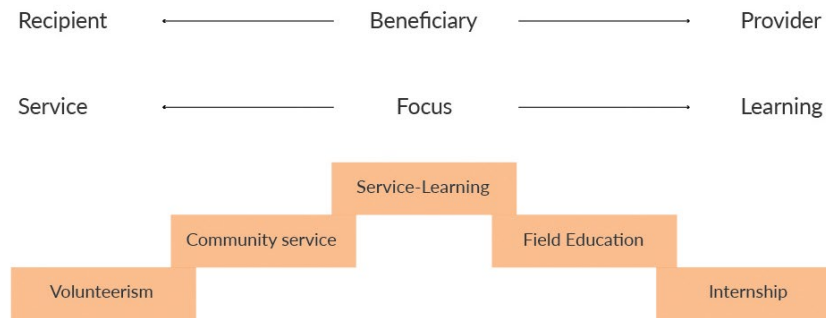
Two forms of Service-Learning can be defined:
- **Direct service-learning**: person-to-person, face-to-face service projects in which the students' service directly impacts individuals who receive the service from the students. Examples include tutoring students, children, adults.

- **Indirect service-learning**: working on broad issues, environmental projects, or community development–projects that have clear benefits to the community or environment, but not necessarily to individually identified people

with whom the students are working. Examples include helping to restore ecosystems in preserve areas.

Community engagement can be integrated in the curriculum in multiple ways: as a stand-alone course unit, an optional trajectory within a course or a transdisciplinary module. Furco's model sketches the balance between different types of engagement depending on the intended beneficiary as well as its focus on service or learning.

Introducing community engagement in the curriculum for international students can be realized by adapting existing courses to be service-oriented or by introducing a new course unit. The Educational Service or department can assist in making changes to the curriculum.

In the following pages four methods are being explained on how to include community engagement in curricula.

Recipient ←————→ Beneficiary ————→ Provider

Service ←————→ Focus ————→ Learning

Service-Learning
Community service   Field Education
Volunteerism   Internship

Vrije Universiteit Brussel offers institutional support for community-engaged learning

Vrije Universiteit Brussel aims at building a high quality, future proof community-based educational offer. Social responsibility and a close connection to the city of Brussels has been integrated in the Strategic plan of the University that runs from 2018-2020. In order to reach this goal the University has launched an Institution-wide project called UNIVER.CITY in order to support for systemic change in the Universities curricula.

UNIVER.CITY wants to embed service-learning into VUB curricula to let our scientific expertise serve societal actors and stakeholders more actively and purposefully throughout our courses. In order to facilitate change in the curricula of Vrije Universiteit Brussel, the central Education department has set up a coordinating team that coordinates a Professional Learning Community where VUB lecturers interested in Community Engaged Research and Learning can follow training, exchange best practices and receive tailor-made support in order to facilitate the development of service-learning modules with attention for the specific characteristics of the different faculties and disciplines in the university. This process allows the central Education department to support and facilitate systemic change and allow lecturers freedom to identify the needs of their disciplines and adapt their courses accordingly.

In the Academic year 2018-2019, 8 course units across were modified and 3 new course units were introduced, from an interdisciplinary research programme that focuses on at risk youth in socially vulnerable situations in the 'Building Bridges' course to a course on 'Community Journalism' that focuses on telling the stories of Brussels' citizens.

Community Service-Learning as a Course

Opening community service-learning courses in the curriculum for international students can be realized by adapting an existing course to be service-oriented or by introducing a new course.

As a first example to include, it would be possible to add a Community Service-Learning centred course in the curriculum of the degree. As a separate course, the learning objectives would be experiential learning-oriented and connect to the general learning objectives of the degree the student is completing. No new theory is introduced to the student during the course, it serves as a method to record retention of previously acquired knowledge, skills and competences.

It can be offered as an elective or compulsory course as a part of the curriculum of a specific discipline, or as a trans- or interdisciplinary course that answers to the overall objectives of the Higher Education Institution.

It can, however, be offered to international exchange students without being included directly in the course curriculum of both institutions as it supports the directive that courses do not have to find a direct match within the curriculum of the host institution but places the learning experience and reaching the learning objectives of the curricula as a central objective.

+   Community service is academically recognised by the host and the home institution
+   Learning objectives can be connected to both degree and institutional priorities
+   Students learn more about their discipline by experiencing real-world conditions

−   Intrinsic motivation of students to have a positive impact on society could be biased, e.g. when the course is not optional
−   Making changes to curricula can be a challenging process for professors

Community Service-Learning as a Course Unit

Community Service-Learning can be added as a module to an already existing course.

A course is generally built out a number of ECTS credits that are awarded to the student upon the successful completion of a number of assignments. In general, each ECTS corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of coursework. A certain number of hours of coursework could be allocated to a course unit or learning module with a community service-learning method. This would allow connecting the experienced-based learning directly to the learning objectives of the course without making many changes to the course build-up.

In case of difficulties for exchange students to participate in a course due to the learning context, instead of organising a reading assignment or paper to replace the course schedule, the student can cover the expected learning outcomes through community engagement experience by testing the learned theories into practice.

+ Community service is academically recognized by host and the home institution
+ Learning objectives connected directly to the learning objectives of the course
+ Adapting teaching method in an already existing course unit is less restrictive
+ Allows the students to learn in a real-world setting

− Intrinsic motivation of students to have a positive impact on society could be biased, e.g. when the course is not optional
− Making changes to curricula can be a challenging process for professors

Internationalisation and community engagement at the Centre of Teacher Education at University of Vienna

In the Centre of Teacher Education at the University of Vienna, Austria, exchange students were allowed to take up service-learning as a module within one of the courses of the Master programme "Teacher Training Programme - Basics of Educational Sciences". Each student participating in the course unit would have to take part in a minimum of 20 hours of voluntary work in schools and take part in 10 hours of homework and participation in preparation and evaluation sessions organised by the Coordinator, M.A. Goldberger.

The service-learning experience reflects the content and eligible aims of the curriculum point "Expanding Social and Personal Competencies and Reflective Practice" for 6 ECTS credits, the activities were consolidated under the course unit "Social and Personal Competencies", and corresponding to 2 ECTS. The course is included in the Learning Agreement of the students with full academic recognition.

Community engagement as an Additional Education Unit

If the previously mentioned options are impossible, it could be possible to offer an Additional Education Unit. The Additional Education Unit is an elective course that provides complementary, interdisciplinary lessons to students (including sports, artistic, cultural, associative or inclusion activities).

The goal is to have this Additional Education Unit recognized with ECTS credits in order for it to be considered part of the curriculum of the student. Credits obtained in an Additional Education Unit are therefore not included in the 60 ECTS per academic year. In this case, the Additional Education Unit increases the number of ECTS the students take up and get recognised at the completion of their degree.

In the case of exchange students, these credits would be mentioned on the Learning Agreement, without replacing credits from a course at the home HEI. the course unit follows a similar structure to the Community service-learning.

The home HEI can decide to fully recognize the course by including the ECTS connected to the entire degree of the student, increasing the full ECTS count of the degree at graduation and/or refer to it in paragraph 6 of the Diploma Supplement that covers additional information such as volunteering activities.

+ Community service is academically recognised.
+ Interdisciplinary approach connected to the institutions' overall learning objectives
+ Allows the students to learn in a real-world setting.
+ Allows the course to remain optional: intrinsic motivation will be the qualifier for students to engage or not.

– Community service-learning is not academically recognised.

SocialErasmus as an Additional Education Unit in Besançon

Erasmus Student Network Besançon and the Université de Franche-Comté have established a collaboration on a good example of the Additional Education Unit to improve the social engagement of International Students. Each semester up to 50 International students select this optional course and will do SocialErasmus activities for a total of 25 hours. The course united is coordinated by the M. Suchet, Project Manager of ESN Besançon under the supervision of Professor C. Bernadot Nicolet at the Center for Applied Linguistics of the Université de Franche-Comté, where the main focus of the course unit is to encourage international students to interact with locals and exercise their French language skills. The course development was funded by project funding from the region of Franche Comte.

At the start of the project, the students are supported in the organisation by local volunteers of ESN Besançon, while they are expected to do finalise the course by implementing activities independently. At the end of the course, students have to do a final presentation and receive a certificate worth 3 ECTS. In the period of 2016 to 2018, more than 150 activities took place, organised by more than 100 students, reaching out to more than 25 local schools and youth organisations and around 1000 locals were reached.

Community engagement as a short-term traineeship or placement

It could be possible to include a short-term traineeship or work placement for students in the curriculum. Depending on the number of credits and the intensity of the activity it could either be considered as a full traineeship for ECTS credits or be considered as part of a course unit where an internship experience could be embedded to connect theory with practice.

Here the difference between Service-Learning and Community Engaged Learning becomes apparent, as it is important that the activities executed are community centred, whether through direct or indirect service-learning.

Similar principles should apply as in community Service-Learning course. An intake meeting between the student and academic is recommended before the start of the placement. A reflection process should be an essential part of the assessment and validation process in order to ensure the learning outcomes were met.

For placements it is strongly recommended to respect the quality internship charter developed by the European Youth Forum (http://qualityinternships.eu/).

+ Easier to implement in the curriculum than Service-learning: a little more flexibility
+ Allows it to remain optional: not everyone in the classroom can carry out exactly the same internship
+ Allows the students to learn in a real-world setting.
+ Allows for a specific approach towards international students

− Reflection and evaluation are less elaborate than in a Service-Learning module
− Intrinsic motivation to take part could be biased, impacting the learning experience

Community engagement as extracurricular activities: volunteering on exchange

While there are a number of advantages to include activities in the curriculum as mentioned in the previous chapter, it can also be a deliberate choice to organise extracurricular activities where students engage with the local community within the framework of student volunteering.

In this case, the international students chose the activity because they are genuinely interested in the integration in the local community and the informal learning process they will undergo.

However, in extra-curricular activities, it is positive and encouraging to foresee a form of recognition to validate the learning taking place in the activity. It could increase the motivation and encourage a reflection process on the activity.

Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement is a document accompanying a higher education diploma, providing a standardised description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies completed by its holder. It is produced by the HEIs according to standards agreed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The Diploma Supplement is also part of the Europass framework transparency tools. The supplement is designed as an aid to help (but not guarantee) recognition – it is neither a CV nor a substitute for the original qualification.

Chapter 6 in the Diploma Supplement template, titled, 'certification of the supplement' allows the HEI's to add additional information regarding acquired skills and competences. In some countries, such as France and Germany, this section is used to mention extracurricular activities and the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired by the student throughout their studies. In other countries, for example in Belgium and the UK, this section is not used to mention extracurricular activities. Instead, in these countries section 6 is used to specify why the student had an adapted curriculum (e.g. exemptions for some courses due to a previously obtained diploma).

A further unification of the Diploma Supplement is recommended in order to facilitate the recognition of acquired skills and competences across Europe in order to improve the skills and qualifications visible and comparable across Europe.

Badges

This system allows to link key competencies and skills to the volunteering/mobility experience, while helping the beneficiary identify the learning process they went through.

Open Digital Badges is a method to validate and recognize non-formal learning where a badge is allocated to a set of competences and attitudes. Open Badges is an open source system based on the Mozilla framework (See also: European Badge Alliance at ebawebsite.net).

HEIs working with Badge Systems could consider volunteer activities on the checklist of a badge that recognizes volunteering skills or work out a badge system specifically for SocialErasmus activities.

Certificates

A certificate can include a number of (extra-curricular) ECTS and can be given in addition to the curricular recognition.

An official document that certifies the volunteer efforts of the students to validate the SocialErasmus+ activities participated in by the student. The certificate should be offered by the coordinator or academic at the hosting HEI that validates the volunteer activities participated in by the student.

There is no quality assurance process for assigning credits to a certificate. It is therefore recommended to include additional information on the activity and the assessment process. This increases the value of the certificate and facilitates the possible recognition of the credits at the home HEI.

Europass

A certificate can include a number of (extra-curricular) ECTS and can be given in addition to the curricular recognition.

Europass allows people to update their CV online through a process that helps them reflect on their different learning experiences and add experiences in their European Skills passport by adding their language passport, europass mobility for mobility experience and diploma and certificate supplement.

The Europass is a European wide instrument to document and recognize learning through non-formal education. It's a template developed by Cedefop, supported by the European Commission.

Linkedin Endorsements

Support by academic, proofs the student has acquired practical skills next to the knowledge provided by the University.

The coordinator of the volunteer activities can give recognition for the skills showcased by the student by offering LinkedIn endorsements. LinkedIn provides an easy and clear structure on how to endorse skills, so it would be relatively easy to implement, while endorsements by University staff members will be regarded highly by students and professionals in their search for employment.

Conclusion

SocialErasmus proposes a context of experiential learning that benefits both the students (on a personal, but also on a professional level) as well as the institutions involved.

Volunteering on exchange proposes a context of experiential learning that benefits both the students , the local community as well as Higher Education Institutions.

For universities, the program offers incentives to develop further connections with the region they are based in. By collaborating with local community organisations they fulfil their third mission and contribute to society by engaging in society. For example by collaborating with local schools, they contribute, as part of their third mission, to one of the most crucial causes of our time: educating young people to find their way in a world marked by constant change and multifold societal challenges.

The community organisations on the other hand, are offered a way to integrate an international dimension into their operation, in order to promote social cohesion across borders and to develop global citizens with a certain understanding of interconnectedness with the rest of the world to their community.

As for the international students, volunteering on exchange copes with the problem of integration of exchange students through frequent interactions with different audiences (local teachers and pupils), the students will achieve a deeper intercultural understanding and transcultural awareness, improve intercultural communication competences, gain a better understanding of their own social responsibility as an active citizen in society, learn to take action and improve their project management skills, all the while getting a stronger connection to the European project.

Overall, the program trains a number transversal skills that are highly demanded in today's working environment and can have positive effects on students' employability. Besides, as it offers the possibility to learn from concrete experience, to initiate reflective processes and to actively test concepts, community engagement and volunteering on exchange can be a way to complement the formal education that students receive at university, while making their Erasmus experience more lively, more relevant, more real, at the same time.

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Tell me, and I will forget, teach me and I might remember, involve me and I learn"

— Benjamin Franklin

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